



Women as a Decision Maker for Farm and Family: A Case of Lalitpur District of Nepal

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Women significantly influence household budgeting, child care, and educational decisions
- 57% women jointly participate with men in major farm decision

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ABSTRACT

Women play a vital role in agricultural production and household management in Nepal, yet their participation in decision-making often remains limited. Objective of this study was to examine the extent and nature of women's involvement in farm and family decisions in Godawari Municipality, Lalitpur District. A cross-sectional mixed-methods design was applied using survey data from 115 households and semi-structured interviews were one during June-July of 2025. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data supported interpretation. Majority of women participate jointly i.e., 38% in crop selection, 47% for fertilizer use and >50% for irrigation use. Women also influence household decisions concerning budgeting, child care, and education. Training ($r=0.67$), family member support ($r=0.72$) and women involvement in community organization ($r=0.32$) were found to be positively and significantly associated with women participation in farm decisions. Despite increased awareness and access to training, women continue to face barriers such as unequal land ownership, cultural norms, and limited access to credit. Their participation nonetheless contributes positively to household economic conditions and empowerment. The findings highlight the importance of promoting gender-responsive agricultural policies and community-based initiatives that enhance women's leadership and equitable decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, women make up almost half of the agricultural labour force, but they rarely share equal control over the land and resources they depend on (FAO, 2010). In recent years, migration of men to cities and foreign jobs has left more women managing farms on their own. This growing pattern, sometimes called the feminization of agriculture, has changed the daily rhythm of rural life (Momsen, 2011). Women handle sowing to marketing along with household chores and childcare. Despite these responsibilities, decision-making power often remains concentrated

in men's hands. Deep-rooted traditions, illiteracy, and limited ownership of land make it difficult for women to influence how money is spent, what crops are planted, or how the harvest is used (Agarwal et al., 2003). As a result, even though women's work sustains rural families and contributes significantly to the national economy, their role is still viewed as "supportive" rather than central.

In Nepal, where more than two-thirds of the population relies on agriculture, women's contributions are immense. They handle most fieldwork planting, weeding, harvesting, and storing crops

while men typically plough fields or manage marketing. According to FAO (2019), nearly 74% of economically active Nepali women are engaged in agriculture and their participation in agricultural workforce is almost twice the South Asian average, yet very few own the land they work on and only four % old formal position in planning. The problem is that their work does not translate into decision-making power. Whether it's deciding what crops to plant, when to sell, or how to use the income, these choices are often made by men. Even within families, men tend to control major financial decisions while women focus on daily expenses and caregiving. The extent of women involvement was maximum in operations like transplanting, weeding, harvesting and storing (Nain & Kumar, 2010). This imbalance not only limits women's empowerment but can also reduce productivity and innovation in farming. Women are involved in making agricultural decisions, farms are often more efficient, families are healthier, and children's education improves (Thapa, 2013). Singh et al. (2014) discussed women's collective roles in moving away from viewing farming strictly as a traditional way of life and transitioning it into a commercialized, profitable agribusiness. Further, building entrepreneurial capabilities among rural women may facilitate direct forward-marketing linkages (Singh et al., 2016). However, in many rural communities, women still struggle against social norms that treat them as secondary decision-makers. Illiteracy, cultural restrictions, and limited access to credit or training programs make it harder for them to take leadership roles. This shows a clear gap between participation and power; women contribute the most but decide the least. Bridging this gap is essential for genuine gender equality and sustainable development. Although existing literature highlights low decision-making power among rural women due to socio-cultural constraints and lower educational level, minimal research addresses urban and valley contexts in Nepal. Thus, this study addresses two main questions; Do gender roles in decision-making vary significantly by geographical region (rural vs. urban), what other key factors influence these gender dynamics?

METHODOLOGY

This study used a cross-sectional mixed-methods design that combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Timalsina et al., 2026). The numerical data was collected through surveys and also explored people's thoughts and experiences through open-ended questions. Using both methods provided a fuller picture of women's roles in decision-making rather than relying on numbers alone. The study was carried out between June and July 2025 when most households were busy with seasonal agricultural work. This timing helped the researcher observe decision-making during an active farming period, when choices about crops, labour, and spending was most visible.

The research took place in Godawari Municipality of Lalitpur District, located in Bagmati Province, Nepal. The municipality was chosen because it represents a mix of traditional farming communities and rapidly modernizing areas close to Kathmandu Valley. It is made up of several former village development committees such as Badikhel, Godamchaur, and Chapagaun. According to the 2021 national census, Godawari has a population of around 78,000 people, covering an area of about 96 square kilometres. Most

residents rely on small-scale farming for income, cultivating vegetables, cereals, and fruits. Brahmin/Chhetri and Newar are the dominant ethnic groups, though Janajati and Magar communities also live in the area. The literacy rate (about 86%) is higher than the national average, which made communication and data collection easier.

The study focused on women engaged in both household and farming activities. Households cultivating more than ten kathas (H" 0.33 hectares) of land were chosen purposively to obtain sampling frame. A total of 115 women were selected using a random sampling approach by using Slovin's Formula ($n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$, where N is population size). This method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to reach participants who were actively involved in farming while still maintaining randomness within that group. Respondents came from all 14 wards of the municipality, ensuring diversity in ethnicity, age, and economic status.

Primary data were collected directly from respondents through face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire. Each interview lasted about 30 to 45 minutes, depending on how much the participant wished to share. Conducting personal interviews helped build trust and allowed participants to express their experiences in their own words. To ensure data reliability, the questionnaire was pre-tested with ten women from a nearby ward who were not included in the final sample. Their feedback helped refine unclear questions and adjust wording to match local understanding. The consistency of responses across similar questions was later checked during data entry. Triangulation between quantitative results and qualitative insights helped strengthen validity. For example, numerical data showing high female participation in crop decisions were cross-checked with women's own explanations of how those decisions were actually made at home.

The digital application 'mWater' Surveyor was used to record responses. This tool automatically stored data on a secure online server, minimizing human error in data entry. Secondary data such as population statistics, local development plans, and previous studies on gender and agriculture were obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), municipality offices, and academic journals.

After data collection, responses were exported from mWater into Microsoft Excel 2016 for cleaning and tabulation. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 to calculate frequencies, percentages, and averages. These descriptive statistics helped show how decision-making patterns differed across variables such as age, education, and income. Graphs and tables were created to present results clearly, while quotes and summaries from open-ended responses were used to give deeper insight into women's personal experiences. Inferential statistics such as chi-square test, and correlation analysis were performed to show relationship among variables and their significance testing.

RESULTS

Women's participation in farm decision-making

One of the central findings is that decision-making in farms is gradually becoming more balanced. About 47% of all key

agricultural decisions were made jointly by men and women, while 39% were made solely by women and 14% by men. This is a major shift compared to earlier decades when men almost exclusively decided what to plant, when to sell, or how to use income. The trend toward shared decision-making reflects changes in education, migration, and women's participation in community organizations. Women now make significant decisions about crop selection, fertilizer use, pest management, irrigation, harvesting, and marketing. For instance, more than half of the respondents (52%) said they independently decided what crops to grow each season (Table 1). This independence is linked to practical experience women often spend more time in the fields and know what grows best in local conditions. Chi-square test for independence was conducted to examine whether women's participation in agricultural decision-making varied significantly across different types of household and farm decisions. This indicates that the distribution of power (whether decisions are made by women alone, jointly, or by men alone) depends significantly on the specific agricultural task at hand.

Budgeting and financial involvement

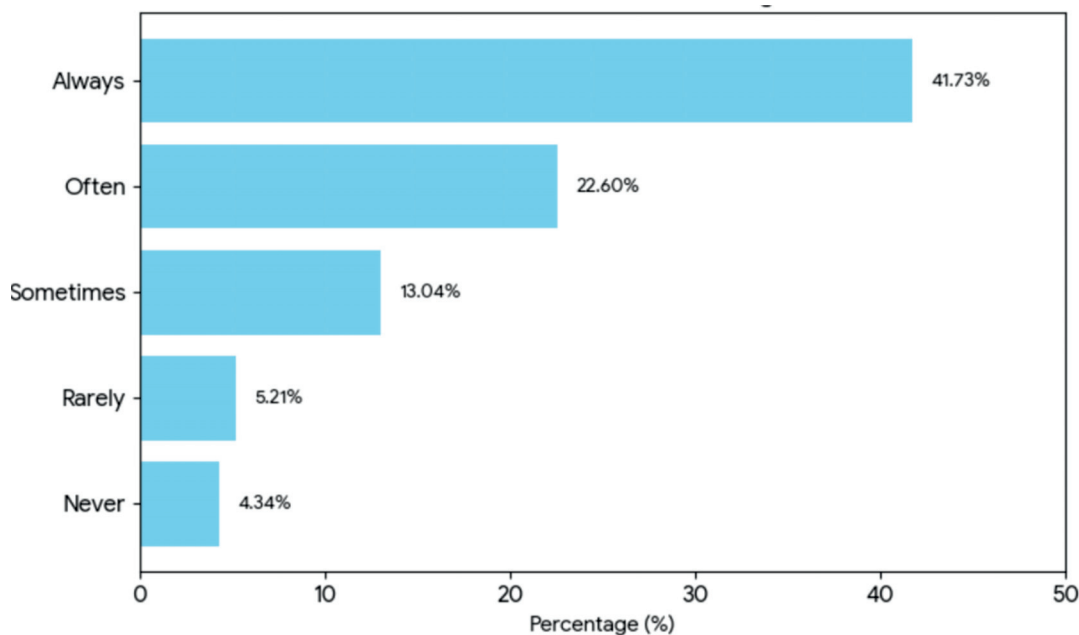
A large majority of women (nearly 80%) said they were actively involved in discussing the agricultural budget with their partners as shown in Figure 1. Only a small share (less than 10%)

Table 1. Women's participation in agricultural decision-making

Type of Decision	Women Alone (%)	Jointly with Men (%)	Men Alone (%)	Chi-square test DF=10
Crop selection	52.2	38.3	9.5	P=0.042*
Fertilizer use	41.7	47.0	11.3	
Irrigation management	33.0	55.7	11.3	
Pest control	45.2	43.5	11.3	
Marketing and sales	37.4	46.1	16.5	
Use of agricultural income	29.6	54.8	15.6	

Note. "Jointly" indicates shared discussion and agreement between spouses or family members.

Figure 1. Women involvement in financial decision



reported rarely or never being part of such discussions. This shows that women are not only labourers but also contributors to financial and planning decisions. However, full control over agricultural income remains limited. While women participate in discussions, major financial transactions such as purchasing land or large farm equipment are often finalized by men. Majority of respondent from Chapagaun explained: "We know how much we earn from vegetables and milk, but when it comes to buying fertilizer or selling land, our husband makes the final decision." Such experiences highlight the need to go beyond participation and focus on genuine decision power, where women's opinions translate into outcomes.

Access to training and extension services

About 68% of respondents had attended at least one agricultural training or extension program, mostly organized by local cooperatives or NGOs (Figure 2). Training participation helped women gain technical skills in composting, vegetable farming, and livestock care. Those who attended training reported higher confidence and were more likely to make independent decisions. Yet, access was not equal for everyone. Women with young children or those from marginalized ethnic groups were less likely to participate, mainly because of time constraints and household responsibilities.

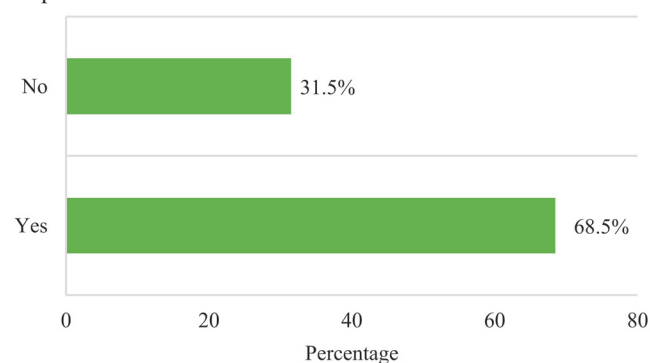


Figure 2. Respondent involved in training

Women's role in family and household decision-making

In addition to farm work, women carry most of the responsibility at home cooking, cleaning, child care, and managing daily needs. The study found that women played an active role in nearly all household decisions, though the level of independence varied by type of decision. For everyday matters such as meal planning, schooling, and children's health care, women had strong decision-making power. Around 58% said they were the main decision-makers for child care, and 42% said they jointly made financial decisions about education with their partners. When it came to larger issues, like constructing or repairing a house or making long-term investments, decisions were usually made jointly. This trend toward shared decision-making indicates that mutual respect and cooperation are increasing within families. About 64% of respondents regularly discussed the household budget with their partners, showing that financial transparency is becoming more common as shown in Figure 3. This is a positive sign of evolving gender dynamics in rural families. However, not all decisions are equal. Many women admitted that when it comes to land

registration or inheritance, men still hold authority. This reflects the slow pace of change in property rights and the need for legal reforms to ensure equal ownership opportunities for women.

Women's daily workload

The study revealed that women work long hours across multiple roles. On average, they spend about 4 hours a day on household chores, 3 hours on farming, 2 hours caring for livestock, and 2 hours on off-farm or income-generating activities Figure 4. This adds up to 11 hours of work per day, often without any formal recognition or pay. Men, on the other hand, spend more time on income-generating work but less on domestic tasks. The double burden balancing productive and reproductive roles remains a key barrier to empowerment. Despite this heavy workload, many women expressed pride in their ability to manage everything. Majority of participant shared: "Sometimes we feel tired, but when we see our children studying and the farm doing well, we feel strong." This sense of pride and resilience shows that empowerment is not only about formal power but also about self-worth and confidence.

Figure 3. Role of women in household decision making

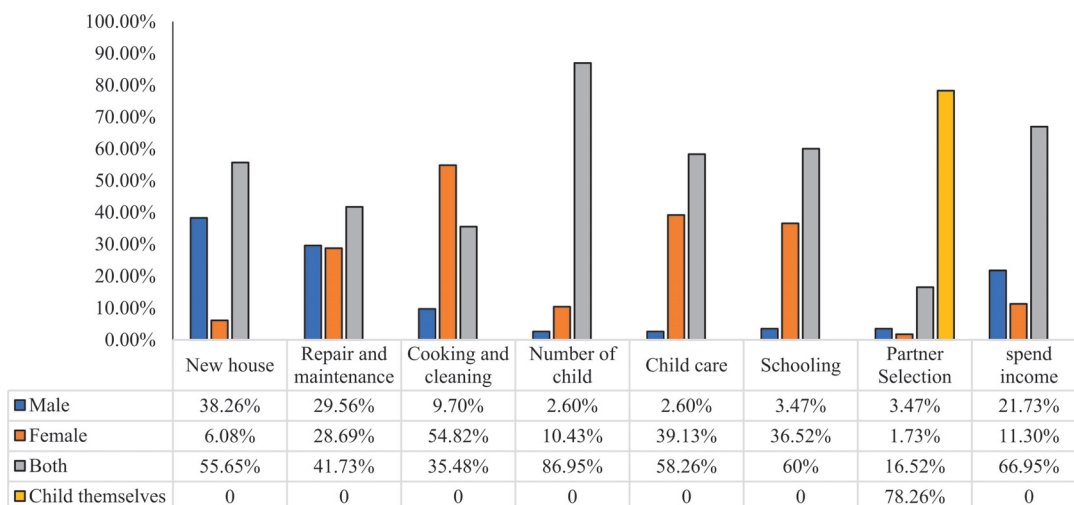
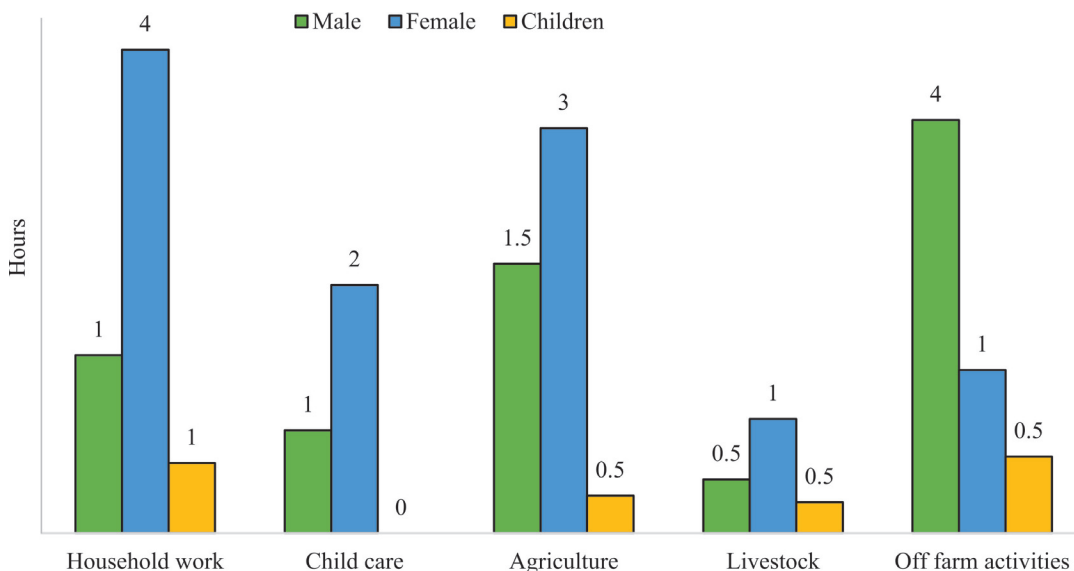


Figure 4. Women's daily average workload in hour (Source: Household Survey, 2024)



Perceived impacts of women's involvement

A significant 58% of respondents reported that their household's economic situation improved after they began participating more actively in decisions. Another 26% said they saw moderate improvement, while only 15% reported no change (Table 2). Most women attributed these positive outcomes to better planning and budgeting. When women were involved, families tended to save more and diversify income sources. For example, some women started side businesses such as poultry, vegetable nurseries, or handicrafts with small profits reinvested into farming. A Chi-square goodness-of-fit test revealed that this distribution was statistically significantly different from equal proportions $\chi^2 = 33.67^{**}$, $p < 0.001$, indicating a strong, positive perceived economic trend.

Table 2. Impact on household's economic situation due to involvement of women in decision-making

Impact on household's economic situation	Percentage	Score	Test statistics
Significantly improved	58.26	3	$\chi^2=33.67^{**}$ $p<.001$
Improved	26.08	2	
No change	15.67	1	
Total	100		

Chi-square goodness-of-fit test evaluated against an equal proportion model across all response categories (df = 2 Median = 3, Interquartile Range (IQR) = 1.00 (Score range

Correlation between major factors with decision maker

Women's role in household decision-making was associated with access to training and extension services ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$), family support ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$), and membership in community organizations ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.05$). Conversely, women's daily workload showed a significant negative correlation with decision-making role ($r = -0.42$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that heavier workloads may limit women's participation in household decisions as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson correlation between major factors that determine women decision maker

Variables	Pearson correlation (r) women as decision maker
Women daily work load	-0.42*
Training and Extension Service	0.67**
Support from family members	0.72**
Women membership to community organization	0.32*

Perceptions, opportunities, and challenges perception of importance

Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents said that women's involvement in decision-making is "very important," while another 23% said it is "important." Only a small fraction (11%) remained neutral (Table 4). This strong consensus reflects growing awareness among women about their rights and the value of shared

Table 4. Perception regarding importance of women involvement in decision making

Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Very important	75	65.21
Important	27	23.47
Neutral	13	11.30
Total	115	100

participation. Education and access to information have played key roles in shaping these attitudes.

Opportunities for women

The study identified several opportunities that help women strengthen their roles and were associated with women involvement in decision power. Support from family and community (43%), Membership in cooperatives or women's groups (39%), and Access to training and financial loans (around 30%) were major opportunities. Participation in cooperatives, in particular, gave women both a social network and an economic platform to share ideas and access credit. These local organizations serve as safe spaces where women learn leadership and negotiation skills.

Challenges

Even with progress, challenges persist. The most common issue mentioned was lack of access to land ownership (49%). Without land titles, women cannot use property as collateral for loans or gain official recognition as farmers. Other major barriers included cultural norms (20%), limited education or training (11%), and lack of resources (10%). Some also faced resistance from male partners (9%), especially in families where men viewed decision-making as a sign of authority (Table 5).

Table 5. Major challenges faced by women in decision-making (multiple responses)

Challenge	Percentage
Lack of land ownership	49.0
Cultural and social norms	20.0
Limited education/training	11.0
Lack of resources (credit, inputs)	10.4
Resistance from male family members	9.6

DISCUSSION

In Nepal majority of farm household and farm decision was governance by male. At present time this paradigm shifted towards female or jointly decision pattern. The shift is part of a broader "quiet transformation" where women's knowledge is increasingly valued in agricultural households. These findings are consistent with Chayal and Dhaka (2010) and Ghosh et al. (2021), who reported similar trends in India and other parts of South Asia. Education status, family type, age groups, training facility, women involvement in social organization are the factors associated with decision making. In context of Nepal social norms and gender roles strongly shape these dynamics, with women's participation in decision-making process. For example, married daughters not being

considered coparceners for parental property and women having limited influence in household decision-making (Ghimire et al., 2024). Alvi et al. (2021) suggested that creating flexible training schedules and childcare support can make programs more inclusive. These findings echo global evidence that women's empowerment enhances household well-being and community resilience (Annan et al., 2020). Empowered women tend to prioritize children's education and nutrition, creating a ripple effect of long-term development benefits. Maurya et al. (2026) reported that social networks and group involvement are important factors increasing women participation as well as decision making process. Despite of progressive improvement on women involvement on farm decision making there are lots of factors that hinder such improvements. Dhakal and Mishra (2022) reported that gender inequality in access to assets remains one of the main obstacles to women's empowerment in Nepal. Suradkar et al. (2013) also reported multiple repones for challenges such as poor economic status of family, no knowledge about improved facility, perplexity of time for farm and home activities, higher time consumption for household work, lack of confidence required to take decision, dominance of male member in family etc.

In Nepal, land is a valuable asset that represents not only economic security but also social status and political power (Rai et al., 2020). Although women have traditionally had limited access to land ownership, the introduction of the Joint Land Ownership (JLO) policy in 2011 has significantly improved women's access to land, leading to notable social and economic benefits, especially for those living in rural communities. Government and local authorities should encourage land registration in both spouses' names. This would give women legal recognition as farmers, allow them to access credit, and increase their decision-making power within households. Financial literacy programs can help women manage savings and investment more effectively. 100% respondent of Vegetable farmers of Chitwan Nepal agreed that financial support, credit, inputs subsidies significantly increased women participation in farm decision making (Shrestha et al., 2025).

Training programs should be scheduled at convenient times and locations for women, with childcare facilities where possible. Local extension workers need to adopt participatory methods that value women's existing knowledge and build technical skills in areas like soil management, irrigation, and entrepreneurship. Shrestha et al. (2015) also reported that training significantly boost the women participation in vegetable farming in Chitwan Nepal. Kumar and Nain (2013) and Pateriya et al. (2026) also reported that training only increased women involvement in farm decision making it's also minimize crop loss or maximize the profit.

Cooperatives provide a vital platform for collective learning, savings, and microcredit. Support for these groups through seed funding, capacity-building, and networking can amplify women's voices in community development. Maurya et al. (2026) reported that social networks and group involvement are important factors increasing women participation as well as decision making process. The social capital formation is enhanced in the society with participation in SHGs, which consequently reduces the vulnerability of women folk and develop wellbeing in the society (Das et al., 2018). Shrestha et al. (2025) also reported that support

from family, relatives and spouse promote the women involvement in decision making. Lasting change depends not only on empowering women but also on reshaping men's attitudes. Community awareness campaigns should highlight the shared benefits of joint decision-making and shared domestic responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Women are no longer seen only as "helpers" in agriculture; they are cultivators, planners, and decision-makers whose choices directly influence household well-being. Most respondents reported taking part in decisions about crop selection, fertilizer use, livestock care, and household budgeting. Many of these decisions are now made jointly between men and women, showing that family dynamics are slowly becoming more cooperative. Education, training, and the formation of women's groups have all played key roles in building this confidence. In conclusion women's empowerment in rural Nepal is a process, not an event. It grows through education, awareness, and daily negotiation within families. Each small decision a woman makes whether choosing a crop, joining a cooperative, or budgeting for her children's education adds to her sense of agency. Over time, these micro-level changes can lead to large-scale social transformation.

DECLARATIONS

Ethics approval and informed consent: Before starting each interview, the researcher clearly explained the purpose of the study and asked for verbal consent. Participants were informed that their answers would remain confidential and would be used only for academic purposes. They were free to skip any question or stop the interview at any time. No personal identifiers were included in the final dataset. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines set by the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science (IAAS), Tribhuvan University.

Conflict of interest: The research was carried out without any financial or commercial ties that might be seen as a potential conflict of interest, according to the authors. The authors affirm that they carefully examined, amended and edited the content as necessary when preparing this work. The final content of this publication is entirely the authors' responsibility.

Data availability statement: Data is available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author via email.

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