

Women's empowerment in high value cash crop activities in the rural hills of Nepal

by

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DEDICATION

To my father, Shree Shibi Balayar, mother Shrimati Dhauli Devi Balayar and my two younger sisters who never had the opportunity to experience formal schooling.

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ABSTRACT

Women in many smallholder communities in developing countries often face various types of cultural restrictions. In recent years, high value cash crop activities (HVCCA) are viewed as opportunities for women to travel to markets, improve household income, exercise more freedom and actively participate in training programs. HVCCA can also enhance women's household decision making and empowerment. However, women's empowerment is complex and multidimensional requiring context specific analysis. Hence, this study characterized factors enabling and inhibiting women's household decision making and empowerment in HVCCA in two mid-hill districts of Nepal's Far Western region. Sixteen couples involved in HVCCA (vegetables) were interviewed in July 2017, along with seventeen government and development officials working in HVCCA. Additionally, six focus group discussions were conducted with women's organizations in participants' communities, at districts and national level.

Using NVivo, this study found that almost all wives are trusted for joint decisions. They travel to markets, keep income and make expenditures. Some still have difficulty overcoming traditional belief systems that restrict women's activities. Support from husbands, extended family members, community members, women's groups, government agencies and development organizations are crucial. This study concludes that women's active engagement in HVCCA significantly contributes to their increased decision making and empowerment. However, future research including women not involved in HVCCA and other factors that are not examined in this study is imperative to determine the full role of HVCCA in women's empowerment. Understanding micro-level decision making processes in HVCCA has significance for furthering women's empowerment.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is context specific and multidimensional (Hanmer and Klugman 2016). Scholars share views that decision-making, women's agency, and empowerment are all deeply interconnected and inseparable (Alkire et al. 2013; Gammage, Kabeer, and van der Meulen Rodgers 2016; Mishra and Sam 2016; Phan 2016). Many approaches have been used to measure women's empowerment across the globe. Examining women's participation in household decision-making processes is one of the approaches used to analyze women's empowerment (Arestoff and Djemai 2016). Understanding micro level decision making processes at household level in smallholder communities are important to further rural women's agency and empowerment. Household decision making processes in developing countries are influenced by people's immediate societal norms, rules and perceptions (Lambrecht 2016). Hence, these dynamics require careful investigation and analysis, especially where women play crucial roles in smallholder agricultural activities, but their roles are often subjugated and undervalued.

Women are a major force in agriculture in developing countries (IFPRI 2012). It is believed that strengthening women's roles in agricultural activities increases overall agricultural productivity and women's empowerment, and reduces poverty (Doss 2018). Many governments and development agencies design their programs and policies to enhance women's decision-making roles in household agriculture activities (FAO, IFAD, and WFP 2015). In recent years, there has been an insightful discourse on women's empowerment and engagement in agriculture (Alkire et al. 2013; Feed the Future 2011; IFPRI 2016; Joshi, Dash, and Gangwar 2016). The agricultural sector in many developing countries is yet to

perform to its full potential (Melesse 2015), in large part due to severe constraints on women's access to productive resources and decision making (Baba et al. 2015; Enete and Amusa 2010; Quaye et al. 2016). Although women's contributions in agriculture are significant (World Bank 2009), they are often perceived as less valuable (Mishra and Sam 2016) and largely barred from engaging in income generating cash crop activities (Hill and Vigneri 2014).

Restrictions on women's decision making in agriculture are founded in cultural orientations and traditions in patriarchal systems that portray men as superior to women (Amin, Becker & Bayes 1998; Sikod 2017; Baba et al. 2015; Joshi, Dash & Gangwar 2016). Jayachandran (2015) argues that cultural practices such as patrilocality continue to marginalize women's roles in agriculture. Further, many women farmers have little formal education, limited access to productive resources, and weak involvement in important agricultural decision making processes (Ferris et al. 2014; FAO 2011; Mishra and Sam 2016; Quisumbing et al. 2015; Rao 2017).

Women's engagement in high-value cash crop activities (HVCCA) with vegetables and fruits are seen as a means of enhancing rural household economic wellbeing and women's overall empowerment (Chant 2016; Hill and Vigneri 2014; Zakaria 2016). Zakaria (2016) argues that "identifying the determinants of women farmers' participation in cash crop production is imperative, not just because it differs from the production of other crops, but because the former holds a significant potential to improve farming households' economic well-being (3)." Additionally, engaging women in HVCCA is essential because they generally spend earned income on household food consumption and other basic needs (Chant 2016; Dioula et al. 2013). Further, understanding and addressing women's low degree

of participation and decision making in smallholder communities and maximizing income derived from HVCCA is crucial to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (IFPRI 2016; Zakaria 2016). Reducing hunger and poverty, empowering women and achieving gender equality are among the top priority of SDGs, and meeting these goals may significantly contribute to overall social development and human well-being (United Nations 2015).

Problem Statement

Limitations on women's participation in household farm decision making are widespread in developing countries (Alkire et al. 2013; Baba et al. 2015; Doss et al. 2011; Loscocco and Bird 2012). Important decisions pertaining to HVCCA are generally made by men, with women having only minor roles (Baba et al. 2015; de Brauw 2015; Ferris et al. 2014; Hoque and Itohara 2008; Malapit et al. 2015). Male dominated power relations and control over productive assets are the main factors determining the nature and extent of women's participation in cash crop activities (Zakaria 2016). Although income in women's control almost always is devoted to their families' overall wellbeing (Villamor et al. 2014), cash crop activities in developing countries are mostly controlled by male farmers (Oduol et al. 2017). Even if women engage in cash crop activities, their ability to travel to markets is limited by pervasive cultural norms and practices. They are often left with no option but to sell their produce closer to home (Doss 2018). Further, compared to their male counterparts, women often do not receive better prices for their produce (Doss 2018). Women in developing countries typically lack start-up money to initiate agricultural entrepreneurship such as cash crop activities (Hill and Vigneri 2014; Behrman, Julia, et al. 2012). Doss (2018) argues that program interventions that focused on women's productivity in agriculture have

failed to address the issues of women's work drudgery and its consequences. She suggests that women in developing countries are preoccupied with an array of household chores—nursing young children, fetching water from great distances and collecting firewood (48).

Lack of education and skill development training negatively impact women's role in important decision making in cash crop production and marketing (Akotey and Adjasi 2016; Ferris et al. 2014; Mishra and Sam 2016; Behrman, Julia, et al. 2012). Perceived attitudes and beliefs that women have limited knowledge about cash crop production and marketing and, therefore, their roles, should be subordinated to their husbands is hindering women's active participation and increased decision-making role in such activities (Enete and Amusa 2010). Researchers have found that widespread negative socio-cultural beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes significantly constrain women's ability to make important household decisions (Ferris et al. 2014; Quaye et al. 2016; World Bank 2009). For example, women are perceived as caregivers whereas men are portrayed as families' breadwinners (Basu 2006; Kafle 2015; Mayoux 2001; World Bank 2009) and are expected to take leadership roles in all household decision making processes (Quaye et al. 2016). ActionAid International (2011) suggests that culturally perceived and defined rights and responsibilities of men and women and the current global economic model fail to recognize women as equal partners in households' farming strategies in many developing countries.

Scholars cite lack of agency and empowerment as being among the main factors in women's inability to negotiate increased decision-making roles in their families and to fully utilize resources available (Chant 2016; Kabeer 2005). Kabeer (2005) refers to 'agency' as the ability to make strategic choices in life. Women's inability to challenge persisting

stereotypes and male dominance in developing countries are also associated with poor agency and empowerment (Arestoff & Djemai 2016).

In recent years, there have been significant positive changes in women's participation in and benefits from farm support programs: community-based education, technical training, and credit (Sikod 2017; Collett and Gale 2009; Haile, Bock, and Folmer 2012; Behrman, Julia, et al. 2012; Zakaria 2016). In addition, farmer groups, particularly women-led organizations, have contributed to networking, supporting systems for women farmers, and market access (Doss and Bockius-suwyn 2012; Gyau et al. 2014; International 2013; Joshi et al. 2016; Watson 2008; World Bank 2009). These activities have contributed to women's enhanced decision-making power in agricultural activities and improved economic status (Sikod 2017; Joshi et al. 2016). However, most initiatives aimed at enhancing women's decision making roles in agriculture are focused only on women and do not include men (Enete and Amusa 2010; Hill and Vigneri 2014). Evidence suggests that gender policies which exclusively target women can easily fail to achieve their intended goals. In some cases, programs and policies designed to promote women only have been shown to have adverse effects on their well-being and to have increased domestic violence (Sikod 2017; Ferris et al. 2014; Joshi et al. 2016; Joshi, Maharjan Lall, and Piya 2012). This suggests that any program intended to help women farmers and enhance their decision-making roles at the household must elicit full support from male household members, particularly their husbands (Collett and Gale 2009).

Designing and implementing programs that help men to fully understand the importance of women's involvement in groups and training activities is crucial to changing attitudes towards women's relative freedom in decision making (Collett and Gale 2009;

Rubin et al. 2009). Moreover, recognizing women's knowledge, access to resources, access to business networks outside of their communities, market options and the types of support needed to enable them to take risks in new ventures are equally important (Collett and Gale 2009; Maass Wolfenson 2013).

Despite numerous research projects and development programs focused on women's access to productive assets and microcredit programs, Okali (2011:10) argues that "none or very little of this work has seriously attempted to strengthen the decision-making roles of women or addressed attitudes and beliefs at the level of households and beyond." Zakaria (2016) argues that there is little work being done to understand socio-cultural barriers hindering smallholder women's participation in household agricultural decision-making.

The Purpose

Women's restricted participation in decision-making in income generating activities in developing countries is widely viewed as a lost opportunity to improve household income, food security and rural livelihoods in general. More importantly such restrictions can seriously peril women's empowerment initiatives. While efforts by social scientists to understand issues surrounding women's roles in HVCCA are valuable, a critical review of the literature indicates that there is considerable value in further examination. Hence, the purpose of this study is to *characterize* the barriers to women's empowerment in decision making in HVCCA (production and marketing) among smallholder households and their strategies – individual and collective—to overcome such barriers. The study will also examine community influence on women's decision-making processes in the household, women's emerging roles and negotiation efforts, and husbands' responses to the challenges that their wives face in achieving shared decision making in cash crop activities.

Research Questions

To examine smallholder couples' decision making in HVCCA from household and community level perspectives, wives' and husbands' strategies (individually and jointly), and roles of women's groups and extension programs on women's empowerment, I formulated the following research questions:

1. What are the key enabling or inhibiting factors in women's empowerment in decision making regarding production and marketing of high value cash crops?
2. What are the specific attitudes of women and men in smallholder farm families regarding women's involvement in high value cash crop production and marketing?
3. How do women negotiate emerging roles in high value cash crop production and marketing in relation to their spouses and other family members? in relation to their community members and institutions? in relation to agents and organizations outside their community?
4. How do husbands of smallholder women farmers respond to their wives' initiatives to achieve shared decision making in efforts to succeed in high value cash crop activities? in relation to their community members and institutions? in relation to agents and organizations outside their community?

Implications

Enhancing rural women's decision-making roles in agricultural activities is not limited to improved livelihoods and family wellbeing, but it is a moral social obligation and basic human rights (United Nations 2015). Understanding context-specific pathways to shared decision making involving husbands and wives and women's participation in high-value cash crop activities in smallholder farming households (less than 1 hectare) in developing countries can provide crucial insights for improving household income and addressing pressing food security needs. Additionally, these context specific research activities can further strengthen efforts already made by various actors and further help to

achieve rural women's agency and empowerment. As the World Bank (2009) noted, many development practitioners and agencies have failed to understand women's actual problems in agriculture. This research will address some key research gaps identified in the literature review. The broader implications of this research may contribute to improved agricultural development policies and programs in developing countries.

Conceptual and Operational Definitions

“Clear conceptual definitions are essential for scientific progress and provide a concrete set of steps that researchers can follow to improve their conceptual definitions” (Podsakoff, Mackenzie & Podsakoff, 2016). These key concepts identified below are essential parameters and will help to focus and limit among intended research groups.

Smallholder Farmers: farmers with less than one hectare of cultivable land.

High-Value Cash Crop Activities (HVCCA): producing and selling fresh vegetables to generate cash incomes to address household livelihood needs.

Rural Household: typically comprised of co-resident husband, wife, their children, and extended family members (this could include parents, brothers, sisters and in-laws).

Women Empowerment: rural women's ability to freely engage in a variety of HVCCA. This involves travelling to markets, selling vegetables, travelling outside of the district, attending capacity enhancement trainings, and household level decision making with their husbands and other family members.

Community Institutions: formally and informally organized men's and women's social groups, religious organizations, administrative entities, etc. that may indirectly or directly influence smallholder couples' decision-making processes.

Belief Systems: cultural norms about wives' and husbands' behavior within the home, on the farm, in the community and outside of the community.

Attitudes: how a husband views his wife's increased role in HVCCA and the wife's own views regarding her changing role in decision making processes. Additional elements are articulated perspectives from members of the local community.

Self-Confidence: couples' trust in their ability to fulfill their individual and joint roles and succeed in HVCCA.

Sense of Self-efficacy: wife's perception of her ability to resist traditional attitudes and husband's perception of his ability to overcome negative cultural practices and engage in all forms of HVCCA decision making roles.

Decision-Making Roles: engagement by each spouse in planning and allocating resources to HVCCA production and marketing. These include the following: (1) articulation of goals for farming activities (produce food, earn some income, etc.); (2) crop and variety selection; (3) allocation of household labor (prepare fields, planting, add fertilizer/manure, weed, spray, harvest, process, store); (4) expenditures (purchase of quality seed, fertilizer/manure, insecticide/herbicide, hired labor, etc.); (5) irrigation management; (6) market assessment and selling harvested crops (how much to keep vs. sell? sell when? how? where? price?); and (7) use of income (food, education, other household priorities, agriculture, etc.).

Shared Decisions: women's ability to informally 'negotiate' their roles in decision making regarding the full range of activities in production and marketing of high-value cash crops with their husbands. Husbands' willingness to include their wives in important decision-making roles. Shared decisions concern the extent to which wife is involved in making decisions regarding the seven types of agricultural activities described above. Shared

decision making may reflect (a) husband only, (b) husband mostly, (c) husband and wife equally, (d) wife mostly, or (e) wife only. Husband's role refers to actions to support his wife's decision-making process in HVCCA. Some key indicators are husband listening to his wife's questions and suggestions regarding crop production and marketing, allowing her travel outside village to market, and protecting her from any social harassment driven by negative reaction to her non-traditional role.

Decision Imitation: couples learn from peers, extended family members and relatives who are already sharing decision making, engaged in HVCCA, earning income and improving overall household wellbeing.

Emotional Support: encouragement from extended family members and community members to resist or ignore restrictive cultural practices and any social backlash regarding shared decision making and women's engagement in HVCCA.

Extended Family Attitudes: attitudes expressed by mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law which provide support for or are critical of couples' shared decision making and engagement in HVCCA.

Community Attitudes: community members' attitudes towards women's engagement in HVCCA and their husbands' behavior and support for their wives.

Internal Support: statements from or actions by farmers groups, women's groups, cooperatives and community elders that facilitate couples' engagement in HVCCA.

External Support: government agencies and development organizations actions and resources which enhance women's empowerment and their increased decision-making roles in HVCCA.

Policy Interventions: national policies and programs that support women's equal access to resources and opportunities to engage in HVCCA.

Dissertation Overview

Chapter 1 details the study background, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, research potential implications and definitions of key concepts used in the dissertation. Chapter 2 provides a critical review of literature on women's decision-making roles and processes in smallholder households' HVCCA, men's roles in enhancing their wives' roles in those activities, women's agency and empowerment and the role of external agencies such as women's group and other formal and informal institutions in the community. Chapter 3 describes the research methods and procedures such as epistemological standpoint, philosophical assumption, research design, data collection procedures, data analysis, researcher's positionality, and research limitations. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present major findings of the study organized and detailed in major themes and sub-themes. Chapter 7 details discussion and analysis of the findings and includes conclusion and future research. The chapter also discusses the findings in relation to theories.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research concerns women's empowerment in decision-making roles in high-value cash crop production and marketing (HVCCPM), and men and women's attitudes towards women's changing roles in cash crop activities at the household and community levels. The study examines how women negotiate for their increased roles and details how decision-making processes about high value cash crops activities (HVCCA) involving wife and husband are evolving. Such changes are considered in the context of a prevailing patriarchal socio-cultural system that devalues women's roles in income generating activities which influences individual and household level decision-making processes. In the following sections, I present concise summaries and critical assessment of the relevant literature to situate the study within a larger context of relevant theory, research, and practice. I identify key constructs for understanding women's decision making and empowerment in HVCCPM. My purpose is to provide a foundation and rationale for conducting the research.

Women in Agriculture in Developing Countries

Women in developing countries play a crucial role in agricultural activities. Governments and development actors view women's empowerment in agriculture as precondition for agricultural growth and increased productivity yet women farmers continue to confront many obstacles that are not faced by men (Alwang, Larochelle, and Barrera 2017). In recent years, governments and development agencies around the world have prioritized and scaled-up their investments in enhancing women's role in small-scale agricultural activities. There is a genuine belief that investing in women's agricultural activities will lead to household food security and overall wellbeing. However, "women in developing countries are not recognized as farmers by their own families or communities,

and definitely not by governments or donors” (Action Aid International 2011:3). In fact, the ‘smallholder farmers’ in developing countries are widely perceived as men (Oxfam International 2013:15). The literature suggests that deeply rooted belief systems and cultural practices, perceived and defined rights and responsibilities of men and women and the current global economic model continue to fail to recognize women as equal human beings and farmers (Action Aid International 2011).

Although the majority of the smallholder farmers in developing countries are women (Action Aid International 2011), existing research indicates that women do not have access and control over resources and income (Akter et al. 2017; Doss 2018). Further, in surveys conducted in developing countries, women’s work is undercounted, their contribution to household income is undervalued and their decision making roles are underappreciated (Twyman, Useche, and Deere 2015). These situations persist because governments and donors are centered on women’s roles and responsibilities but not “on their rights as women farmers” (Action Aid International 2011:4). In fact, focusing more on responsibilities alone and cumulative expectations from women can be counterproductive to women (Action Aid International 2011). Women in developing countries are already working longer hours than men (Sikod 2017).

Doss (2018) argues “the literature offers little insight into the key question—which is, simply put, where are the returns to development investments highest? Nor does it provide much insight into the narrower questions of how to increase agricultural productivity and ensure that women are able to benefit from these gains” (37). She further argues that program interventions focused on increasing women’s agricultural productivity and women’s empowerment have paid little attention to women’s other household work drudgery, for

example, fetching tap water, collecting firewood and child rearing (48). She suggests these activities are impacting women's daily time schedule needed to engage in agricultural productivity (Doss 2018). She believes that given access to similar resources, women can be equally productive as men farmers (46).

In addition, Ransom and Bain (2011:69) claim that “the lack of resources devoted to women/gender issues suggests that women are still viewed as appendages of male relatives and not key economic agents, such as farmers, wage and non-wage farm workers, marketers, and entrepreneurs.” Further, women's poverty situation and their representation in the agriculture sector is also falsely presented. For example, Doss et al. (2017) challenge the widespread claims that 70 percent of the world's poor are women, women produce 60 to 80 percent of the world's food, women own 1 percent of the world's land and women are better stewards of the environment as unhelpful myths (69). They view the claim that women produce most of the food as reflecting and emphasizing the important roles that women farmers play in agriculture, justifying the need for targeted program interventions. Additionally, they argue “narratives that characterize women as either victims or saviors sideline the need to understand women's preferences and priorities. ‘Victim’ myths assume that it is obvious what women need; ‘savior’ myths assume that women want to and can solve all the problems” (Doss et al. 2017:73).

High-Value Cash Crops and Women Producers

High-value cash crops include vegetables, fruits, herbs, flowers and aromatic plants (Abro 2012; Hewett 2013). Globally, there has been growing recognition of the importance of women's role in cash crop activities (Hill and Vigneri 2014). However, unlike men, most women in developing countries do not have access to the full range of productive assets and

lucrative markets; this has negatively impacted women's engagement in cash crop production and marketing (Hill and Vigneri 2014; Behrman, Julia, et al. 2012). Research also documents that most smallholder women farmers in developing countries do not have start-up money to initiate agricultural entrepreneurship activities. When women lack formal employment and collateral, they face extreme difficulties accessing credit from banks and other microfinance institutions (World Bank 2009). Moreover, "cultural beliefs and norms including the gender-biased traditions have constrained the participation of women in various activities in some parts of Asia and Africa" (Villamor et al. 2014:131). In developing countries, cash crop activities are often led by men while women manage crops for consumption (Oduol et al. 2017; Villamor et al. 2014). However, research suggests women are more efficient in meeting income targets than men (Villamor et al. 2014) and spend money on meeting household food consumption and other basic needs (Chant 2016; Dioula et al. 2013).

Further, Doss (2018) suggests that there are some systematic gender differences in the prices received by men and women for the same output. Since other household responsibilities and socio-cultural norms limit women's ability to travel to markets, they overwhelmingly sell their produce closer to their homes at lower prices (Doss 2018; Oduol et al. 2017). She also indicates "social structures may make it more difficult for women to bargain effectively with male traders for higher prices" (Doss 2018:42).

Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes

All societies have belief systems which shape ideas about appropriate roles and responsibilities for men and women. "Beliefs guide men's and women's socialization processes and shape general patterns of behavior, for example, it is often expected for girls and boys to learn about different aspects of agricultural production and marketing practices"

(Rubin et al. 2009: 21). “Implementation of full gender equality requires a profound shift in individual attitudes and behaviors, which will ultimately transform the underlying structure of social and economic institutions, making them more welcoming to women” (Farré 2011: 36). Widely prevailing perceptions that men are the breadwinner of the family limits women’s engagement in agricultural production and marketing (Rubin et al. 2009). Beliefs regarding women lacking appropriate farming knowledge and capabilities and that they should play subordinate roles to their husbands or male family members hinder their full-fledged decision making and participation from cash crop activities (Enete and Amusa 2010). Rubin et al. (2009) argue that appropriate roles for men and women, women’s entrepreneurship and leadership capabilities, women’s travel alone in different places at different times, and women’s participation in public forums can be influenced by existing beliefs and attitudes in the communities which have positive or negative impacts on agricultural activities.

The introduction of affirmative action laws and wider recognition of women as producers and traders was found to be helpful in reducing discriminatory cultural attitudes and practices against women (World Bank 2009). The study conducted by the World Bank (2009) found that sensitizing at community and household level about the importance of gender and human rights issues helped change false perceptions about women’s roles and status in community and household level. Despite many prevailing negative beliefs and attitudes, some women have achieved great success in agriculture production and marketing in developing countries. Women who have become successful entrepreneurs have strong support from their husbands. Collett and Gale (2009) note that there are some cases in which husbands consider their wives to be better negotiators than themselves in the markets to sell

their products and make more profits. Socio-cultural norms that restrict women's behavior can vary from country to country. People's religious belief systems can be very restricting in women's free market activities (Akter et al. 2017). A study conducted in four Southeast Asian countries (Thailand, Philippines, Myanmar, and Indonesia) supports the argument. For example, in Indonesia where majority of the people practice Islam, families put more restrictions on women's mobility (Akter et al. 2017).

Land, Credit and Women's Decision-Making Power

Many cultures around the world discourage women's ownership of family assets such as land and other productive resources (Behrman, Julia, et al. 2012). Women also seriously lack access to credit and have little decision-making power over it (Alkire et al. 2013). Research conducted in Africa reveals that providing land rights to women increases their farm decision-making power (Doss, Grown, and Deere 2008). Research further indicates that women who have more access to and ownership of land and other productive assets may have more bargaining power in decision making in the family, however, such situations may trigger conflict between husbands and wives (Behrman, Julia, et al. 2012).

The study also revealed that extended village level credit programs increase women's economic status, strengthen social networks, increase mobility and improve decision-making ability in families (Akotey and Adjasi 2016; Goetz and Gupta 1996; Haile et al. 2012; Behrman, Julia, et al. 2012; Watson 2008). Furthermore, women's engagement in credit support programs provides better opportunities and reasons for them to travel outside of the home which, over time, contributes to their increased 'voice' in family decision making (Hossain and Jaim 2011). However, some studies focused on the effectiveness of microfinance programs indicate that there is little impact of such activities on women's

household decision making (Ansari, Munir, and Gregg 2012). In Bangladesh, nearly fifteen percent of households in which women were enrolled in credit programs resulted in marital conflicts. Such conflicts may have started as women began to challenge their husbands regarding the traditional division of labor and decision-making arrangements in the household (Haile et al. 2012). Bradshaw (2013) argues while access to economic resources are important to enhance women's decision-making power, it is important to emphasize their social relations and self-confidence building processes. Further, without addressing the issues of social norms and self-perceptions it would be difficult to enhance women's household decision-making power (Bradshaw 2013).

Income and Women's Position in the Family

Wealth status is also another major determinant of women's roles in farm management decision-making; richer women are more involved than their poorer counterparts (Baba et al. 2015). Women's independent economic activities, for example, being able to spend money on food and clothing for the family and being able to save some money, increases their bargaining power in household decision-making (Haile et al. 2012). Sikod (2017) also suggests that "a woman's ability to bargain in the household is usually augmented by the increase in her income, which leads to greater equity in the dispensation of household resources" (63). However, a study conducted in Vietnam suggests that although women engage in various types of day-to-day agricultural enterprises and generate income, the decisions are always made by their husbands or male members of the household (Rubin et al. 2009). Mason and Smith (2003) similarly noted that women's higher attainment in economic activities does not necessarily contribute to their increased role in family decision-making. Deshmukh-Ranadive (2003) also confirms this notion and argues that sometimes

such income generating programs may contribute to increased tensions within households. She further argues that change in women's personal ability does not necessarily alter hierarchies and structures present at household and community levels.

A study conducted in Nicaragua also reveals "women's earnings do not bring an automatic or commensurate increase in their bargaining power, and gender ideologies may be more important than income in some cases" (Bradshaw 2013:83). Moreover, focusing on income alone puts more emphasis on economic inequalities and ignores unequal power relationships at household and community levels (Bradshaw 2013). Further, Bradshaw (2013) suggests that less tangible factors such social norms and social capital may also play crucial roles in defining women's position in the household. However, she also acknowledges that in Nicaragua women who are engaged in income generating activities are more likely to report that they make most of the household decisions compared to women who do not have earnings.

Women's Groups and Strengthening Women Producers Decision-Making

Women in developing countries continue to face limitations in engaging in women's group activities (Alkire et al. 2013). "Women small-scale farmers face gender-specific as well as more general barriers to engaging in markets" (Oxfam International 2013:11). Well-functioning rural cooperatives and farmers' organizations are key to empower small agricultural producers, and women farmers (FAO-CFS 2013). Enhancing women farmers' group networks and organizations helps women to promote their cash crop activities and generate business opportunities (Watson 2008). Results from the World Bank's research found that women's participation in local producer associations enables them to overcome "cultural restrictions on their mobility and to expand their social and economic networks"

(World Bank 2009). Oxfam's (2013:11) experience in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that "collective actions in agriculture have the advantage of improving the position of small-scale farmers in markets including the delivery of inputs and training, economies of scale and increased bargaining power." There are also substantial differences in terms of the net value of marketed production. For example, women belonging to groups earn 68 percent more from total sales than non-members in Tanzania, and 81 percent more than non-members in Mali and Ethiopia (Oxfam 2013). However, Doss and Bokius-Suwyn (2012) warn that while women's groups are very helpful in providing necessary support and connecting individual women farmers to wider networks and markets, they may also marginalize the most vulnerable women farmers because such group mechanisms are often controlled by financially well-off women (World Bank 2009).

Women's Agency and Empowerment

The term women empowerment was first coined by the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace held in Beijing in 1995 (Phan 2016). Since then, governments, development agencies and scholars have defined women's empowerment in their own terminologies. Empowering women is important not only for women's development but for the overall development of the society (Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender. 2002; Robeyns 2016). Women's empowerment has significant positive impact on agricultural productivity (Alkire et al. 2013; Sraboni et al. 2014) and household food security in developing countries (Sraboni et al. 2014). Further, lower risks of malnutrition among children, equal access to education for daughters and property inheritance are positively associated with women's equal status in the households (Phan 2016).

There is a consensus among researchers that investing in women's capacity building programs and agency strengthening is essential for them to fully utilize available resources and paves the path to empowerment (Chant 2016; Kabeer 2005). Although recent achievements in women's overall socio-economic progress and empowerment have been noticed as remarkable (UN Women 2016; United Nations 2015), researchers around the world argue that development programs have tended to view recognition of women's roles as the solution to world poverty rather than understanding and supporting practical ways to achieve their actual empowerment as a process (Chant 2016; Cornwall and Rivas 2015; Verhart et al. 2015). This has slowed progress in improving women's status and decision-making roles in families (Doss 2018; Doss et al. 2017).

Women's empowerment is a complex, context specific, dynamic process that it is hard to measure and compare (Hanmer and Klugman 2016; Richardson 2018). Socio-cultural orientations may significantly impact the degree of women's empowerment. Malhotra et al. (2002) conceptualize women's empowerment as agency exhibited when women express strategic choices in life and control resources that affect their everyday life (Malhotra et al. 2002:9). However, she also warns that women's empowerment does not necessarily mean that all the positive changes in women's lives should or can be initiated by women alone. She argues that broader policy interventions and structural changes are needed to enhance women's meaningful access to productive resources. Malhotra et al. (2002) see the household and interfamilial relations as central causes of women's disempowerment and recognize the need for appropriately targeted interventions. Kabeer (1999) endorses systematic change in institutions that currently support patriarchal structures. While some authors see having autonomy as empowerment (Anwar, Shoib, and Javed 2013; Jayachandran 2015; Jesmin

and Cready 2014), others view empowerment as a process which may be achieved through interdependence (Chant 2016; Cornwall and Edwards 2010; Hossain, Simula, and Halme 2016; Kabeer 1999; Malhotra et al. 2002).

Batliwala (1994) emphasizes explicit recognition of ideologies that legitimize male domination. She further argues that women's consciousness and strength of solidarity serve as keys to empowerment and their strengthened decision-making ability. However, she also emphasizes that empowerment is a self-driven process and argues that external agencies can only add new ideas and information. Kabeer's (2005:13) central locus of women's empowerment is the ability to make strategic life choices. She argues "the concept of empowerment can be explored through three closely interrelated dimensions: agency, resources, and achievements." Kabeer (2005) further states that "agency represents the processes by which choices are made and put into effect whereas resources are the medium through which agency is exercised, and achievements refer to the outcomes of agency" (13). Scholars may have used different terminologies to define women's empowerment and agency, but they all agree that while measuring women's empowerment it is essential to pay attention to cultural and geographical contexts (Phan 2016).

Woman's Agency in Negotiating Increased Shared Decision Making

Studies indicate that women's decision-making power at household level is one of the strongest indicators of her empowerment (Alwang et al. 2017; Becker, Fonseca-Becker, and Schenck-Yglesias 2006). But women continue to face exclusion from decision-making processes at household, community and national levels (Behrman, Julia, et al. 2012). Scholars emphasize strengthening women's agency for her increased decision-making role (Kabeer 1999; Solava and Alkire 2016). Women's agency is defined in a variety of ways. In

general, women's agency represents her ability to express ideas without fear, have a sense of freedom and freely exercise her capabilities (Cornwall and Rivas 2015; Hays 2016; Kabeer 1999; Solava and Alkire 2016). According to the World Bank (2012), a woman can fully and freely exercise her agency when she has better access to income, is able to fully practice her rights, can overcome pervasive social norms and is involved in collective agency (150-151). "Women's ability to influence their environment goes beyond formal political channels, which can be limited by social norms and beliefs regarding gender roles and institutional structures" (World Bank 2012:151). The World Bank (2012) suggests that "women can influence their environments through their participation in informal associations and through collective action, but their success depends in part on their individual ability to make effective choices" (151).

The concept of 'negotiation here refers to a process in which a woman gradually and continually engages with another (e.g., her husband) to increase her roles in important household matters. A study conducted about safe sex negotiation with their husbands in Bangladesh reveals that younger women are better able to discuss such issues than older women (Jesmin and Cready 2014). The same study also revealed that economically vulnerable and illiterate women are less successful even if they know their husbands have sexually transmitted infections (668). In Cameroon, the "ability of women to negotiate decisions that affect fertility depends in part on their access to independent income, and the choices that are created through literacy, numeracy, and formal education" (Sikod 2017:69). In Tanzania, compared to younger women, older women have better negotiating power for accessing productive household assets (Oxfam 2013).

Becker et al. (2006) conducted a study in Guatemala and noted that wives having secondary education or above have better chances of more decision-making power compared to their counterparts. When wives are not educated at all, most of the decisions are made by husbands (Becker et al. 2006). However, “when neither partner is educated and when both partners are educated, women’s reported participation in decisions is higher, while it is significantly lower in couples in which only one has schooling” (2321). Their study also found that wives generally tend to under-report their decision-making power (2322). Although, they warn that under-reporting might be attributed to husbands over-reporting their household decision-making authority. Further, “in couples with both partners educated and in couples in which women work for pay, both partners were significantly more likely to report that both of them participate in the final decisions than was the case in couples without education or in which the wife did not work for pay” (Becker et al. 2006:2322). Their research clearly indicates that education and women’s earning status are among the key determinants of their decision-making power within the household (Becker et al. 2006).

Women’s age and experience are also important factors when it comes to their decision-making power in the household (Bertocchi, Brunetti, and Torricelli 2014). Additionally, the study conducted in the Philippines suggests that “the presence of a wife’s parent/s in the household has a significant effect on her chances to be part of decision-making on minor issues while the presence of her parent/s-in-law increases her chances to decide on financial matters” (Bayudan-Dacuycuy 2013:650). Alwang et al. (2017) found in Ecuador that decision making in agricultural activities vary by type of respondents. Their study suggests “men are more likely to claim sole responsibility for decisions, farm management, and sales; women are more likely to claim responsibility or that decisions are

jointly made (Alwang et al. 2017:127). Sikod (2017) suggests that women's access to education and continued awareness initiatives regarding inequalities that women face in many domains are reshaping the decision-making processes at the household level. Sikod (2017) further suggests that as men witness women becoming more empowered and experience their authority weakening, sometime these decision-making processes become conflictual. In some households, women successfully manage to implement their decisions through negotiations, but others may experience confrontation (Sikod 2017:62).

Women Empowerment Initiatives

From the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) first held in 1947 in New York to the Fourth World Conference on Women which adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, women's issues continued to draw global attention for more policy and program inclusiveness. The CSW is the global intergovernmental body which is committed to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The CSW played an instrumental role in including women's rights in major human rights and inclusiveness endeavors such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Political Rights of Women and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (National Gender and Equality Commission 2014; UN Women 2016). The inception of UN Women in 2011 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that address challenges that women face across the globe are evidence of continued commitment to advancing women's empowerment (UN Women 2016; UNDP 2015). Women's empowerment issues were equally considered and advocated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For example, MDG3 was specifically focused on gender equality and women's empowerment (United Nations 2015).

However, feminists in the Global South have first introduced the concept of the women empowerment approach which initially was viewed as too radical by governments and development agencies, hence received little support (Calvès 2009). According to Calvès (2009), by the 1990s the word ‘empowerment’ was internalized by feminist NGOs and became an integral part of discourse on women in development (VI). The major multilateral development partners such as the United Nations agencies, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Union, Asian Development Bank, and African Development Bank address gender equality and women’s empowerment programs through literacy, micro lending, increasing commercial agricultural productivity and investing in girls’ education, etc. (UN Women 2017; UN Women 2018). Bilateral development organizations, for example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Department of International Development (DFID) have prioritized programs that strengthen capacity of rural women farmers (DFID 2018; USAID 2017). In recent years, these agencies have supported programs on cash crop activities among women (DFID 2013; SPRING 2014). Currently, a plethora of women’s’ empowerment initiatives operate through governments, INGOs and NGOs in developing countries, yet many women continue to suffer social and economic powerlessness in all walks of life (Cornwall and Rivas 2015; Hossain and Jaim 2011; Mishra and Sam 2016).

Emphasis on Men’s Inclusion for Shared Decisions

Research indicates that development programs which engage men and women’s groups, formal and non-formal, in the community can stimulate women’s enhanced roles. Male family members can act as economic empowerment ‘gatekeepers’ for women by giving them access to capital, information, and networks that would otherwise remain out of their

reach because of context-specific gender barriers (International Labour Organization 2014). Farré (2011) suggests that it is important to consider men's attitudes and behaviors towards women in gender-related policies and programs because they hold tremendous power over various aspects of women's lives. She further (2011) argues that "in patriarchal societies promoting gender equality is impossible without the consent, mindset, and involvement of the male population" (29).

The most effective ways to overcome prevailing attitudes and behaviors against women and bring inclusive decision making is to engage men and women together (World Bank 2009). Targeting programs only for women often has negative impacts on women's household decision making (Sikod 2017; Joshi et al. 2016). Goetz and Gupta (1996) argue that changing men's perceptions of women's worth is a challenging task and needs careful consideration; they warn that any programs which aim to enhance women's access to resources should not restrain men. They further suggest that the ideal situation would be to bring men and women together where they are able to exercise mutual decision making for the well-being of their family. A study conducted by DFID in India reveals that shared responsibility for decision making, resources mobilization, and implementation maximizes the chances of sustained success (Ashford and Patkar 2001). However, it's well documented in Scarborough et al. (2017) that changing men's attitudes, implementing women empowerment programs and reducing asset gaps between men and women are incredibly challenging.

Ransom and Bain (2011) argue "agricultural development policies have long failed to recognize gender-based patterns—the roles and functions performed by both men and women—and instead assumed male dominance in agricultural communities" (49). Ransom

and Bain's argument is further supported by Doss (2018). She argues most researchers have failed to understand the joint organizational basis of family farming systems in developing countries. She further suggests studies often focus on comparing farms managed by men and women, ignoring their joint efforts (Doss 2018). Doss et al. (2017) argue that undermining cultural practices and helping women operate independently of their families, communities, and institutions actually harms their relationships. Such dynamics may trigger conflicts in families and backlash against women (Doss et al. 2017). Further, Doss (2018) emphasizes the importance of understanding men's contribution, joint efforts, and ongoing negotiations in the households (Doss 2018). She suggests that since men and women have different access to inputs, information and markets, they may have different choices for growing crops. She further states "these choices may be made jointly, as part of a household strategy, or they may be made separately with little discussion or co-operation. Decisions as to what to grow (and how to grow it) may reflect profit-maximizing strategies or they may be driven by social and cultural norms" (Doss 2018:41).

Measuring Women's Empowerment

In an effort to conceptualize and measure women's empowerment, development agencies and scholars around the world have developed and applied many empirical and theoretical frameworks. In 1995, as part of its Human Development Report, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) introduced the Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). These two indices were aimed at raising awareness of gender inequality and women's empowerment (UNDP 1995). While these frameworks have been widely acknowledged for measuring economic dimensions of women's empowerment, critics argue that the indices fall short on including non-economic

dimensions of decision-making power at the household level (Cueva Beteta 2006). Further, these indices solely rely on existing international data, thus fail to produce country specific analysis (Phan 2016). The indicator choices proposed in GDI and GEM are not suitable for developing countries (Schüler 2006). Consequently, the UNDP in 2010 introduced Gender Inequality Index (GII). The GII measures inequality between men and women (Phan 2016). However, GII covers mostly economic aspects and focuses on richer countries, lacking data from developing countries (Phan 2016:362).

Women's Empowerment Matrix (WEM) introduced by Charmes and Wieringa (2003) measures more dimensions of women's empowerment. WEM includes physical, socio-cultural, religious, political, legal and economic spheres which provides opportunity to measure women's empowerment at individual, household, community, state, regional and global levels (Charmes and Wieringa 2003). However, Cueva Beteta (2006) argues "incorporating all these spheres into the GEM is not only difficult because available statistical information is scarce and usually unreliable, but also because their inclusion would make the GEM lose focus in terms of its measurement of gender equality on decision-making power" (223-224). Hence, Cueva Beteta suggests that only household and physical autonomy dimensions should be included in the GEM. Cueva Beteta proposed the Gender Empowerment Enabling Environment (GEEE) index which includes attitude questions about gender aspects from the World Value Survey; however, the concept was never empirically tested (Phan 2016:362).

In the recent past, Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) is commonly used by many development actors. WEIA uses detailed questionnaires to collect data but it also incorporates some qualitative research tools. WEAI is based on the Alkire-

Foster methodology which measures women's empowerment in five domains: (1) decisions about agricultural production, (2) access to and decision-making power about productive resources, (3) control of use of income, (4) leadership in the community, and (5) time allocation at household and community levels (Alkire et al. 2013). As a subindex, WEAI also includes the Gender Parity Index (GPI) which measures gender parity. The GPI is useful in characterizing disparities between men and women at household level and suggests ways to address shortcomings so that women can achieve the same level of empowerment (Alkire et al. 2013). "GPI is a relative inequality measure that reflects the inequality in 5DE profiles between the primary adult male and female in each household. The aggregate WEAI uses the mean GPI value of dual-adult households" (Alkire et al. 2013:17). However, the critics of WEAI argue that "it examines responses by gender with an eye on consistency; it does not examine differences by survey protocol – all members are interviewed. It also fails to provide insights regarding how individual and enumerator attributes affect findings. The proxy response literature rarely examines consistency of responses to clearly subjective questions" (Alwang, Larochelle, and Barrera 2017:119). Further, "WEAI focuses on agriculture production but not on everyday life aspects of women (119)." Another drawback is that it is impossible to see the pattern of the level of empowerment across individual woman since their empowered status is relative to their own household standing, not standardized across the sample of women (Phan 2016:362).

Despite many tools and techniques presented, measuring women's empowerment remains challenging (Richardson 2018). Understanding socio-economic and cultural context are always important while measuring women's empowerment (Richardson 2018). The Gender and Agriculture Research Network of the Consultative Group of International

Agricultural Research (CGIAR) institutions has recommended measuring women's control over productive resources, their decision making power over household income and use of time, and their decision making power in groups and collective organizations (Akter et al. 2017).

Women's Empowerment Initiatives Nepal

Mahila Samiti (Women's Committee) formed in 1917 was the first organization established to struggle for women's rights and empowerment in Nepal (Pradhan 1979:5). Women's movements before 1950 were not limited to awareness and empowerment but also political freedom from the *Rana*¹ oligarchy. The *Ranas* were oppressive, and organized movements were severely punished (Mojumdar 1975). The regime viewed education and awareness as a threat to their survival and schools were introduced only for children from *Rana* families (Nath Sharma 1990). Those who initiated various types of women's groups were the wives of then influential political leaders who were fighting against the *Rana* regime (Pradhan 1979:26). Despite an oppressive regime and prevalent cultural norms and barriers, those women made extraordinary efforts; for example, they campaigned for girls' access to education, against child marriage and for women's voting rights (Pradhan 1979).

After the *Ranas* were removed from power in 1951, King Tribhuvan formed a powerful 35-member National Assembly². The Assembly was comprised of men only. Emulating Gandhi's non-violent techniques, women successfully protested the King's actions. Consequently, in 1954 the Assembly was extended to 113 members and included 4 women. This was considered as one of the biggest milestones in women's struggle for equal rights and opportunities in Nepal (Pradhan 1979). Efforts continued to unite women's

¹ Fiercely autocratic *Ranas* ruled 104 years (1846-1951) in Nepal.

² King Tribhuvan appointed a powerful Advising Assembly to sit until the Constituent Assembly was elected.

organizations under one umbrella organization. As a result, in 1960 the All Nepal Women's Organization came into existence and was legally recognized as a 'class' organization under the newly introduced *Panchayat*³ system (Reejal 1981; Pradhan, 1979: 8). The 1962 constitution guaranteed voting rights for women and pledged to end many forms of discriminatory practices against women (Reejal 1981; Bennet and Singh 1979). However, as the prevailing socio-cultural norms were still not favorable for women to freely engage in awareness and empowerment campaigns (Acharya and Bennet 1980; Bennet 1979), only a few educated women were involved in organized activities which were mostly limited to Kathmandu valley, the capital city (Pradhan 1979: 101). To address some of the prevailing socio-cultural practices that negatively affected women, the government introduced the urban centered Socio-Cultural Center for Women (SCCW). The center was aimed at providing opportunities for confidence building among women and to reach women from various ethnic backgrounds, raise awareness of women's issues, and share ideas and experiences on regular basis (Pradhan 1979).

The 1975 constitutional amendment was designed to ensure women's participation at all levels. A major provision ensured women's representation in political processes in the village, town, and district *Panchayats* (Reejal 1981: 91). In 1976, the government initiated many programs for example, Women's Services Co-ordination Committee, Mother's Club, Business and Professional Women's Club, Socio-Cultural Center for Women and Equal Access to Education for Women under the Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs Training Center under the Ministry of Home and Panchayat (Reejal 1981). However, Reejal

³ In 1960, King Mahendra dismissed the democratically elected government and introduced a party-less *Panchayat* system. In 1990, the popular democratic uprising overthrew the *Panchayat* system and multiparty democracy that accepted constitutional democracy was restored.

(1981) argues that despite many legal provisions to include women in mainstream nation building processes and guarantee their rights, the prevailing socioeconomic institutions maintained inequality between men and women (93). Bennet and Singh (1979) also asserted that laws were not enough to overcome socio-cultural based discrimination and achieve desired outcomes in enhancing women's progressive agendas (8).

Women's movements have fostered empowerment following restoration of democracy in 1990. The multiparty democratic system provided a conducive environment and encouraged non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nepal (Karkee and Comfort 2016). Such opportunities allowed women activists to establish NGOs that reach women beyond the cities and towns. The changing political system also guaranteed that international aid agencies could freely operate their programs specifically designed to improve women's socioeconomic and political situation in Nepal.

The recently promulgated constitution of Nepal (September 2015) guarantees 33 percent representation for women in parliament (Constitution of Nepal 2015). Reservation quotas are also made for women in all forms of government employment services (Prasai 2016). The formation of the Women's Ministry and the National Women's Commission are among the strong indications that Nepal is making good progress in addressing women's priority issues. During the recently held elections, approximately 14,000 women were elected to various offices at the local, state and national levels, constituting 41 percent of all elected representatives in the country (Election Commission 2015). The government of Nepal continues to encourage and partner with NGOs and international bilateral and multilateral organizations (e.g., various agencies of the United Nations, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, international NGOs and diplomatic missions) to address women's issues

in Nepal (MoAD 2016). Women's resource access and activities in agriculture, cash crop promotion and enhancement of rural household income are among the main priorities of the Government of Nepal and donor organizations. It is increasingly realized that supporting women to be economically successful is a vital component in women's empowerment (MoAD 2016).

As an active member of the United Nations and ardent supporter, Nepal has pledged that any international treaty of convention to which Nepal is a party will become reflected in national law (Forum for Women 2006). Critics argue that Nepal failed to fulfill its commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by not providing equal citizenship rights to women and their offspring (Nowack 2015). Deeply rooted socio-cultural values and norms are blamed as the basis of persistent discrimination against women (Kafle 2015). Hence it is important that women's empowerment issues in Nepal are seen and discussed from the view point of cultural context.

Cultural Context and Women's Status in Nepal

Lynn Bennet, who has conducted extensive anthropological research on women's status in Nepal, views women's status in terms of affinal and consanguineal relationships⁴. She suggests that women as members of an affinal family face severe controls in the households whereas women in a consanguineal relationship have relatively more freedom to express their views and more respect in their natal families due to their superior ritual purity. For example, sisters and daughters are worshiped by their brothers and parents during many Hindu rituals. Hence, "Hindu women cannot be understood in isolation from Hindu culture—

⁴ See details on affinal and consanguineal relationships of women in Bennet, Lynn. 1983. *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters Social and Symbolic Roles of High-Caste Women in Nepal*. New York, Columbia University Press.

that ‘system of meanings’ which is so important in defining how women perceive the world and their proper place in it, and how they are perceived by others” (Bennet 1983: vii). Bennet reveals that “the greater concern with maintaining control over the sexuality of affinal women is clearly related to the fact that they become members of its next generation” (xi). She argues that “the affinal woman, involved as she is in her reproductive roles, is linked with sexuality and pollution” (xi). The pollution she is referring here is not only to menstruation and during childbirth but polluting her body by engaging in sexual intercourse with men other than her husband. By sleeping with other men, women are viewed as undermining the purity of the male family clans.

Bennet’s argument is further supported by Galvin (2005) as she argues that “men may have sexual relationships with lower-caste women, but any offspring will be of a lower caste than the father. In these cases, the male retains his caste. But if a woman has unratified sex with a lower-caste man, she loses her caste status and can no longer produce ratified members for higher-caste lineages. Her sexuality is perceived as a threat to caste and patriline” (45). Galvin further argues that “although sexual intercourse between castes occurs, both within and outside the ratifying marriage umbrella, caste protection from unratified shared elements is of primary concern to high-caste groups. Even beyond the preoccupation with affinal concerns, women who have caste-compromised children threaten a family’s whole social fabric” (Galvin 2005:46). Therefore, strict rules governing her behavior in her family of marriage are justified as a means of controlling her sexuality (Bennett 1983: xi). Manu, the ancient Hindu lawmaker, in his book *Manusmriti*, outlined in detail how women should be protected. Manu suggests that a woman should be protected by

her father as a child, then by her husband, and finally by her son, as she gets older (as cited in Bennet and Singh 1979: xii).

Bennet (1983) suggests that the patrilineal system is the center of Hindu ideology and the birth of a son is always celebrated in every Hindu family. Among many important ritual tasks, *Kirya* (funeral ceremony) is the most important one for a son to perform for his parents (Galvin 2005; Bennet and Singh 1979). “Among rural Brahmans and Chhetris, there is a strong belief that people who die without a patrilineal survivor (preferably their own son) to perform these ceremonies are destined to haunt their communities in the guise of *prets* (spirits) or ‘hungry ghosts.’ A similar belief is found in ancient Sanskrit literary texts in which the son is described as “he who rescues parents from hell” (Bennet and Singh 1979:18). Bennet and Singh (1979) further argue that in the patrilineal Hindu system, a husband is perceived as a god. These strong prevailing cultural orientations reinforce male dominance over women and influence women’s everyday life (52).

However, Bennet’s (1983) argument that consanguineal women enjoy a relatively high degree of freedom in their natal home is contradicted by research findings which suggest that girls have been forced to work extra hours in domestic activities, are denied access to better education and their travel movements are severely restricted even within their village boundaries (Nowack 2015). Acharya and Bennet (1981) in their study *The Rural Women of Nepal: An Aggregate Analysis and Summary of 8 Village Studies* have also clearly acknowledged that for unmarried girls to engage in entrepreneurial activities, travel to markets and deal with strange males is unacceptable, especially in *Parbatiya* (mid-hill) and *Maithili* (eastern southern plain) communities (228). For example, “a young woman in one of the villages who had opened a small shop is socially stigmatized and labeled as characterless

woman” (228). It is also considered disgraceful for a family to allow their women to perform wage labor outside of the community (229).

Women usually gain status in their affinal families by giving birth to sons (Galvin 2005; Bennet 1983:187). Change in status means that women have more say in household matters and access to property (Bennet 1983). However, women’s travel from villages is always restricted.

The following direct quote from the research participant also highlights how important it is for a woman to follow the social norms or face severe stigmatization—

“A bad woman can do what she likes and say what she wants to say. But a good woman will always fear what others will say. Like when I go to the market and I’m late—then even on the way home I worry that something will happen, or someone will say something. If you walk when it’s dark, then others will say that you’re a harlot....” (as cited in Bennet 1983: 125).

This statement indicates the strong influence of socio-cultural norms and practices on women’s lives in Nepal. Roles and responsibilities of men and women are socially constructed (Acharya and Bennet 1981). Hence, women crossing these defined roles face social sanctions. Acharya and Bennet (1981) further argue that cultural contexts which shape relationships between males and females are very important to understand and analyze as they have tremendous impacts on evolving household economic decision-making processes in Nepal’s rural communities (54). Every domain of women’s lives, for example, health and entrepreneurships are negatively impacted as culture continues to take center stage in almost every decision to be made (Ranabhat 2015; Bushell 2008).

Decision-Making Dynamics in Nepalese Rural Farm Households

In Nepal, 83 percent of the population lives in the rural areas and agriculture is the mainstay of the country’s economy (Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal 2016). Women

play crucial roles in smallholder agricultural activities. Proportionately there are more female than male farmers in Nepal's agricultural sector (MoAD 2016; Acharya and Bennet 1981). Rural farming activities are heavily dependent on women, yet their tireless contributions are barely recognized. Further, women do not have property rights which affects their ability to access credit and inputs and engage in market activities (Roka 2017; Upadhya 1996).

While women's rights groups, scholars, and many development practitioners continue to portray women farmers in Nepal as property less and powerless in household dynamics. Reejal (1981) offers a different interpretation of women's status in Nepal's rural households, suggesting that:

“a Nepalese husband is the owner of the coparcenary property whereas a wife the manager of such property. As the owner of the household property, the husband assumes a prominent position in matters related to the ultimate disposal of the property. As a manager of the household property, however, the wife assume prominence in matters related to the ultimate use of the property. Needless to say that one simply looks at the ownership position of the husband without at the same time looking at the managerial position of the wife, a grossly distorted picture of wife's authority and power in household affairs is bound to emerge (106).”

Instead of focusing on whether husband or wife holds property rights, the author argues that it is important to understand a woman as a vital member of a rural farm household whose roles are equally important as her husband's to ensure that the family's livelihood strategies are successful. Reejal (1981) further argues that in important household activities, such as child rearing, control over food and kitchen, sales of harvest, daily wage cash expenditures, social celebrations, clothing and household equipment decisions are mostly made by women (106). Reejal asserts that a Nepalese wife controls all the family finances although she respects her husband (as the husband respects his wife) and consults

him on major issues (106). Reejal further suggests that the relationship between wife and husband in a rural Nepali household is mutual and reciprocal, noting that “the husband and wife power relationship in a Nepalese household is analogous to that of a shareholder and a manager in a modern corporation. If the husband is the shareholder in the household corporation, the wife is the manager of that corporation” (106).

A study conducted by Acharya and Bennett (1981) in nine different villages found that in 47 percent of the households’ women have primary control over cash compared to 39 percent in which men have control, and in 14 percent control is shared (266). They found that women are responsible for 72 percent of daily household decisions about what food grain to cook (268). Their study also reveals that most of the household decisions (95 percent) are taken based on mutual understanding between husband and wife. But the researchers warned that the respondents were probably not always willing to report on household disagreements and they also acknowledge that it is impossible to record ‘unexpressed or indirect dissent’ through a survey (295-296). Their study finds that the rate of dissent among mid-hill women is higher (13 percent) than other communities studied (283) but the reason is not identified. However, they suggest that large transactions such as selling and buying lands and animals are mostly done by males (293).

Reejal’s study was conducted nearly 40 years ago when the literacy rate among women was only 4 percent (ADB 1999), the country was governed by an autocratic monarch (*Panchyat* system) and was strictly closed to any type of international development interventions regarding women’s issues. Many cultural practices were against women (Bennet 1983, Acharya and Bennet 1979) and travelling outside of the village was strictly enforced (Pradhan 1979). Nonetheless, some of these studies reveal that women of those

days did have significant decision-making authority in certain domains in the household affairs.

Reejal (1981) argues that “issues relating to sexual differentiation and household authority have their ideological underpinnings in the Western feminist movement. This has not only led to a gross misrepresentation of the role and position of women in Nepalese society but also to a gross misinterpretation of the pattern of relationship between the sexes as visualized by sacred literature of Sanskritic Hinduism” (159). He was also critical of the women’s organizations in Nepal at that time, arguing that “women’s organizations in Nepal are the source of dysfunctional conflict in social life” (159). He further argued that “they tend to grossly misinterpret the true meaning of sexual equality in ways that place the blame for societal problems on men even when the inactivity of women in social and political domain is not the fault of men” (159-160).

Miller (1990) argues that although women do not challenge their husbands’ authority in public, inside the home they do hold significant decision-making power on important issues such as farm activities (planting and harvesting crops), managing farm labor exchange, celebrating rituals, and taking part in other major family decisions, for example buying new property (23). Echoing Reejal and Miller’s findings, Acharya and Bennett (1981) suggest that although there is observable behavior reflecting male dominance across the study villages, women in rural Nepal do have some level of authority at household as well as community level (4).

Miller (1990) asserts that social structure, institutions, cultural values and their importance attached to the everyday lives of rural Nepalese households have significant impacts on decision making processes. These cultural and institutional norms significantly

influence women's position in farm households (112). Miller (1990) argues that even when people make personal decisions within the household, they constantly think about possible reactions from their immediate neighbors and other community members. The word *Ijjat* (despising)⁵ is very important for people. Any decision that does not seem to be obvious or is not socially approved may be subject to criticism and being tarnished with *Ijjat* (124).

It is ironic that rural women in Nepal are trusted by their husbands with vital subsistence farming and rearing children, but when women want to engage in income generating activities—particularly if it involves traveling outside of the village—their loyalty is seriously questioned (Acharya and Bennet 1979). The consequences of cultural constraints on women are that rural women are heavily dependent on males as mediators to deal with markets, legal systems and government bureaucracy (Acharya and Bennet 1979:192). Acharya and Bennet (1979) note that women who earn money and make contributions to household economic wellbeing have higher status in their families (227). However, if rural women are not allowed to engage in income generating activities in agriculture, earning money is extremely difficult.

Current Initiatives to Engage Women in Cash Crop Activities

Nepal has diverse and favorable climatic conditions especially for demand driven agricultural production, for example, vegetables and fruits. However, research indicates around 70 percent of hard-earned remittance by young Nepalese migrant workers is spent on agricultural commodities imported from India, China and some other countries (Paudel 2016). In 2016, the government of Nepal, aiming at self-reliant agriculture production, has

⁵ Miller has defined *Ijjat* (despising) as people's social positioning at household and in the communities. Any actions that is perceived against prevailing social norms will tarnish performer's *Ijjat*.

introduced Prime Minister Agriculture Modernization Project (PMAMP) (MOAD 2016). Based on soil fertility and climatic conditions, the PMAMP intends to identify various zones, for examples, paddy, fruits, herbs and vegetables, and provide subsidies and incentives to farmers. Although this project is not specifically designed for women farmers alone it has extensive programs on supporting smallholder framers. The project provides more than 50 percent subsidies to purchase modern agricultural equipment. Further, it intends to provide up to 85 percent subsidies to build production collection centers, organized markets, primary processing centers, cold stores, and training centers and seed improvement programs (MOAD 2016). Through the project, the government also provides technical support to farmers.

In collaboration with its major multilateral and bilateral development partners, the government of Nepal in 2010 introduced 20 years (2015-2035) Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) (MOAD 2016). The ADS has laid some ambitious plans to empower women farmers, for example, it envisions by 2035, 50 percent of farm land will be owned by women or have joint ownership (MOAD 2016). The ADS recognizes that farmers, women's organizations and cooperatives are instrumental in managing financial activities, technology dissemination, market management, and logistical arrangements; hence, it intends to promote and support these activities (MOAD 2016).

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) funded Raising Incomes of Small and Medium Farmers Project (RISMFP) launched in 2011 specifically focuses on production and marketing of High Value Commodities in mid and far western regions of the country. The main goal of the project is to enhance vegetables, fruits, and other cash crop activities and reduce markets and business risks faced by small and medium farmers (MOAD 2016). The

RISMFP specifically encourages women farmers to engage in cash crop activities and provides technical and financial support for startups (MOAD 2016). It also provides various capacity enhancement trainings to women farmers on farm inputs, technology adoption and market linkages (MOAD 2016). Under its annual and regular programs, the Ministry of Agriculture Development (MOAD) through its extension offices at regional and districts levels continue to work with many development partners and provide various capacity enhancement trainings and other support to women farmers engaged in HVCCA (DADO 2016). Although there is no statistical evidence provided, research suggests despite many affirmative and supportive programs and projects women's participation in vegetable production and marketing in Nepal remains very low (Adhikari-Thapa 2013; Roka 2017).

Theoretical Perspectives

Despite increasing global attention to rural women's agricultural activities and women's empowerment, smallholder couples' decision-making processes and attitude-behavior dynamics have received relatively little attention in research. Theories and models of behavioral change help explain behavior, as well as suggest how to develop more effective ways to influence and change such behaviors (Glanz and Bishop 2010:401; Ardoin, Heimlich, Braus, & Merrick, 2013). To guide my research, I have drawn on insights from Theory of Planned Behavior, Self-Efficacy Theory, and Social Ecological Model to explain attitude change, household level negotiations and decision-making.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is widely used to explain human behavior, people's intentions to engage in and perform certain behaviors. TPB proposed by Icek Ajzen in 1985 is an extension of Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen's Theory of Reasoned Action.

TPB discusses three traits of behavioral change processes: (a) attitudes, (b) subjective norms, and (c) perceived behavioral control. Ajzen (1985) suggests that “the attitudes toward the behavior is determined by silent beliefs about that behavior. Each silent belief links the behavior with some valued outcome or other attribute” (13). For example, if the participant husband believes that his wife’s engagement in HVCCA (behavior) will increase household income and improve family’s wellbeing, he is likely to let her do so (outcome). Ajzen (1985) further suggested that “subjective norms are also assumed to be a function of beliefs, but beliefs of a different kind, namely the person’s beliefs that specific individuals or groups think he should or should not perform the behavior” (14). In this case, if the farming couples believe that their actions engaging in HVCCA are challenging social norms and they do not receive social support from community members, they may be hesitant to advance such activities especially husband will be hesitant to allow her wife to engage in HVCCA.

“The modified theory called ‘a theory of planned behavior,’ differs from the theory of reasoned action, in that it takes into account perceived as well as actual control over the behavior under consideration” (Ajzen 1985:12). The TPB takes in consideration that internal and external factors may influence individuals’ goal-directed behavior. Ajzen (1985) suggests that “successful performance of the intended behavior is contingent on the person’s control over the various factors that may prevent it” (29). Behavior outcome success depends on the individual’s will power and ability to control the intended behavior. For instance, although a husband may have already engaged his wife in shared decision making in HVCCA and is allowing her to freely travel to markets, if his peers, extended family members or community members raise questions about his wife’s unsanctioned mobility he

may backtrack. If he does not have full control over his behavior, he may not allow his wife to travel to the market alone.

Manning (2011) “examined how the extent to which behaviors are socially motivated influence the relation between subjective norms and behavioral intentions and behavioral engagement in the TPB” (359). Manning (2011) suggests that when individuals receive social motivation and support, they are likely to perform any intended behavior. Further, Manning (2012) argues that “when a behavior has the potential to fulfill a core social motive, namely, the need to belong, perceptions of what relevant others are doing with regard to the behavior will influence engagement simultaneously with behavioral intentions” (360). Since the research participants in these communities have a strong patriarchal system, couples’ intentions to fully engage in cash crop activities can be influenced because the participants must bear the duty of fulfilling social norms and they also need to maintain a sense of belonging in their community.

Okun and Slone (2002) conducted a study to explain the dynamics of ‘intent to volunteer’ and ‘volunteer enrollment’ in a campus-based program. They found that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control were significant positive predictors of intent to volunteer. They suggest that intent to volunteer is largely a function of how much a person would like to volunteer, how strongly a person perceives that significant others approve of volunteering, and how easy a person perceives it would be to volunteer. They also found that perceived behavioral control has the strongest influence on students’ intention to engage in volunteering work in the campus. They suggest that recruitment messages and other stimuli measures which focus on enhancing students perceived behavioral control can increase student future volunteering attitudes and behaviors (Okun and Sloane 2002:248).

Taking TPB as the main theory in this study, I assumed that husbands' and communities' positive attitudes towards women's engagement in high value cash crop activities (HVCCA) will lead to rural women's increased household decision making, empowerment, and overall household economic wellbeing. Community and extension support and encouragement will positively motivate couples engaged in HVCCA, especially husbands, to cope with subjective norms. Lastly, higher levels of husbands perceived behavioral control will lead to greater intention to engage in shared decision making and women's overall empowerment.

I believe that TPB significantly helps us to understand that even if the individuals have intentions to perform certain behaviors, their actual behaviors are influenced by their broader environment. This theory can explain how smallholder men are often influenced by social attitudes when they intend to provide decision making opportunities for their spouses. Men may experience consequences of preliminary changes, for example, community backlash, mocking and derogatory words, when they agree that their spouses may engage in HVCCA. Even if men share decision making with their partners, their behavior can still be influenced by their networks, cultural norms and group beliefs. They may be constantly thinking about what their family will say or how their community members may react towards their changed attitudes and behavior. In other words, men may have good intentions to allow their wives to engage in HVCCA, but they may be hesitant to confront social norms and sanctions. Women smallholders, on the other hand, may also have a similar dilemma over the relaxed decision-making authority granted by their spouses. These women may still closely experience social backlash and seek further approval from the community. TPB could offer ways to understand changes in men's perceived attitudes and behavior. This theory can

also be helpful in analyzing women's emerging roles in cash crop activities and their changing attitudes towards their husbands, extended family, and community members.

Like many other theories, TPB is not unblemished. Critics of TPB argue that the theory has limited predictive validity. For example, Sniehotta et al. (2014) suggest that reviews show clearly that most of the variability in observed behavior is not accounted for by measures of the TPB. Sheeran & Orbell (1999) argue that "in particular, the problem of 'inclined abstainers,' individuals who form an intention and subsequently fail to act, has been a recognized limitation of the TPB that remains unaddressed by the theory" (as cited in Sniehotta et al. 2014:2). Studies also suggest that recommendations for change in behavior originate from out-groups (Fielding et al. 2008). Hence, they hint that some behaviors and contexts may require elements that are not covered by TPB to predict behavior (24). In the context of this study, TPB does not provide sufficient explanation about the inherent self-efficacy and self-confidence of individuals nor can it explain the role of pervasive cultural practices, peers, women's groups, collective efforts and affirmative external support systems to shape personal behavioral outcomes.

Self-efficacy Theory

The Self-efficacy Theory, initially a portion of Cognitive Theory, was introduced by Albert Bandura (Bandura 2012). According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to influence events that affect one's life and control over the way that these events are experienced. "Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave" (Bandura 1994: 2). According to Bandura (1994), a strong sense of

efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. He further notes that people with high self-efficacy set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them. Level of motivation is reflected in choice of courses of action and in the intensity and persistence of effort that people make to progress in their personal development.

Research suggests that self-efficacy can be enhanced through various forms of learning—performance assessment, vicarious experiences (observing others), verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Wallace and Kernozek 2017). Bandura (2012) suggests that as people assess their experience and failures, they learn to overcome obstacles through continued perseverance and become resilient. Seeing and modeling similar people doing hard work and succeeding brings self-confidence among people and they start believing in their own capabilities. Bandura (2012) also suggests that persuading people to believe that they have the capacity to overcome difficulties helps enhance their self-efficacy and level of confidence. Lastly, peoples' self-efficacy can also be enhanced through various types of emotional support (for example, providing moral support, reducing anxiety, and correcting the misreading of physical and emotional states) (Bandura 2012).

Even though smallholder farmers (men and women) in rural communities are less educated and have less exposure to life in diverse contexts, it is believed that through various trainings and support programs their sense of self-efficacy and decision-making capabilities in high-value cash crop production and marketing can be enhanced, especially among women. It is valuable to understand how self-efficacy is related to factors that motivate smallholder men and women to negotiate innovative practices, take risks, and overcome obstacles associated with HVCCA in rural communities. It is also important to understand

how smallholder couples observe peer engagement in HVCCA, adopting or adapting it in their experiences. Smallholder farmers in developing countries often face challenges with production and marketing. Self-Efficacy Theory explains how a community support system can provide needed emotional and physical support, especially when they face cultural backlash. Further, increases in self-efficacy could contribute to improved confidence and ability to deal with any negative attitudes against women and men. An enhanced sense of self-efficacy can help women/men to better negotiate in and outside of the household. More importantly, the theory can help identify why and how some individuals (women/men) in similar socioeconomic settings find motivation and act to engage in HVCCA. However, this theory does not explain how attitudes and behavior can be changed and how women and men's interactions at various levels (household, extended family, groups, and community and national) evolve and impact it.

Socio-Ecological Model

Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model (SEM) was first introduced in the 1970s. SEM focuses on the multifaceted and interactive effects of personal and environmental factors that shape human behavior. SEM recognizes the complexity in a social system and its possible significant influence on individuals. The model discusses five hierarchical levels: individual, interpersonal, community, organizational, and policy/enabling environment (Bronfenbrenner 1994). Consequently, the model suggests that studying an individual's development requires examining not only at the individual and his/her immediate environment but also interactions with the larger environment (Paquette and Ryan 2001:1).

Traditional patriarchal social systems devalue women's role and discourage women's decision making and empowerment at household and community levels in many developing

countries (Chant 2016; Kabeer 1999, 2005; Verhart et al. 2015). SEM provides a framework to examine how women act and interact with others in the household (especially their husbands), extended family, social groups, and community. Everyday interactions at each of these levels can impact her and her husband's decisions. For example, the model is helpful to find how a husband's decisions in regard to his wife's decision-making in high-value crops are influenced by broader interactions within the community. These analyses could lead to affirmative programs and policies to change negative traditional attitudes towards women at the community level and can ultimately benefit women at the household level, although they may not be directly involved in such programs.

Using SEM, Dunn et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study among field-based professionals to understand barriers and contributors of breastfeeding practices at the individual, interpersonal, community, organizational, and public policy levels in New Hampshire. They found that mothers' modesty and discomfort with breastfeeding in front of others, breastfeeding not being viewed as the societal 'norm,' misinformation and lack of support from health professionals and free formula samples were the factors that negatively influence mothers' decisions to breastfeeding (Dunn et al. 2014). They found that educating mothers and their social support systems on the specific benefits of breastfeeding, challenging existing breastfeeding norms, and working with hospitals on establishing policy to not provide free formula samples are good interventions to better support breast feeding initiatives (7).

Lynch & Batal (2011) applied the Socio-Ecological Model to understand individual, community and societal level factors to influence healthy nutritional behavior among children. Despite many positive initiatives, they found that advertisements which promote

unhealthy food has a negative impact on young children (Lynch and Batal 2011). Their study also found that in center-based care and daycares in the Ottawa region in Canada, “providers decisions were also found to be influenced by fellow childcare providers both in their immediate communities and, interestingly, virtually through online childcare groups” (198). Although SEM is useful in identifying relevant levels of interactions between a woman and her environment, it does not tell how socially embedded negative attitudes towards women can be changed.

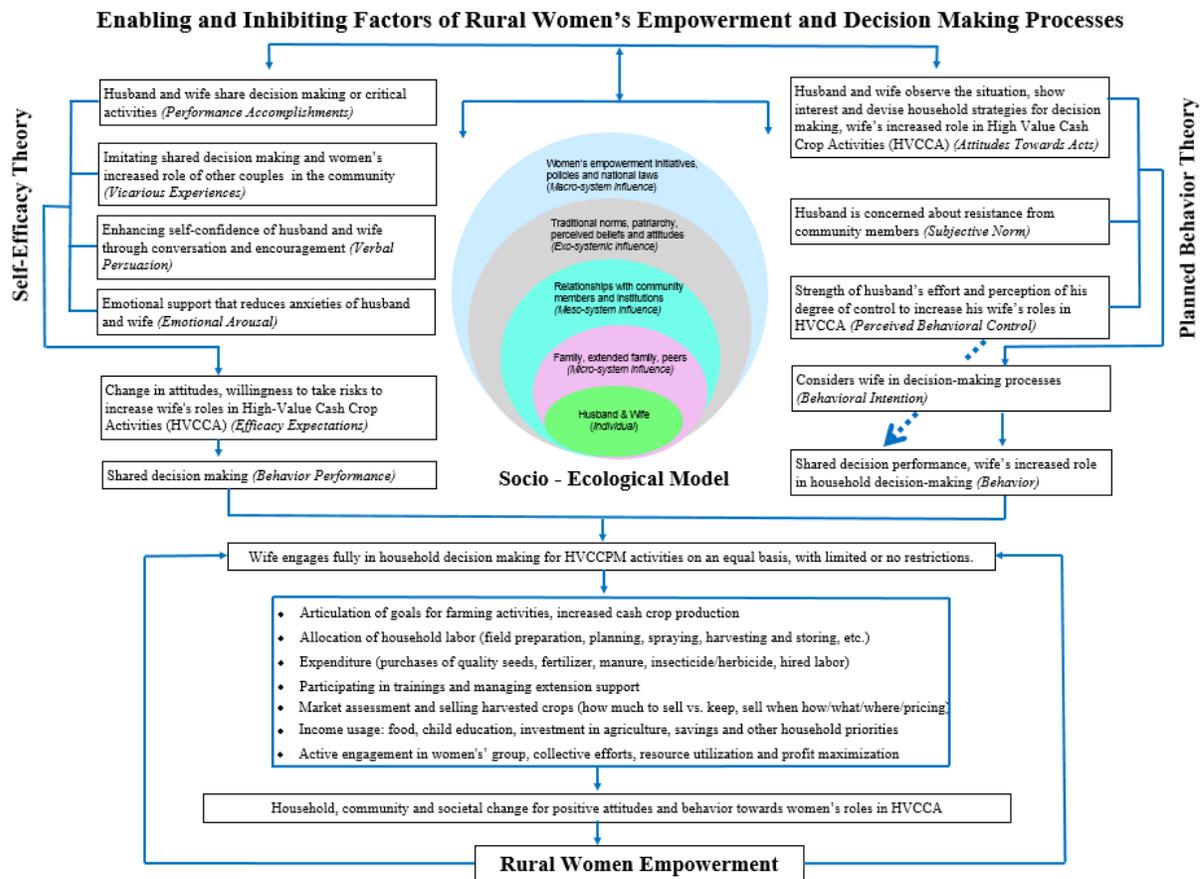


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework

The literature reviewed in this study indicates that women’s empowerment is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that requires deep analysis at multiple layers of

the community/society. Figure 1 integrates the three theories in one model to characterize and explain various dimensions of rural women's empowerment and decision-making processes in HVCCA. The theoretical framework in this research identifies enabling factors and barriers at various levels.

Literature reviewed in this study suggests that women's empowerment initiatives in developing countries are often aimed at reducing rural household poverty. However, women's empowerment as an overarching concept, in this study, is defined as their increased decision-making roles in all important aspects of HVCCA. This includes an environment that is free of fear and conducive for women to travel to markets, attend trainings and take part in exposure visits. This study identifies women's increased decision-making roles and empowerment in HVCCA as important aspects of human rights.

As discussed in Collins and Stockton (2018:4), Saldana "urged researchers to consider utilizing the frameworks of noted theorists to guide qualitative studies." Based on the three theories discussed and theoretical framework presented, the identified constructs were applied as a guide to formulate guiding research questions and the research design for the study within a specific geographic and culturally pervasive belief system where women's decision-making roles in household are often believed to be limited. This research was not designed to test any propositions outlined in the theories referenced.

The multifaceted nature of rural farm household decision making processes and women's empowerment cannot be adequately explained using a single theory or model. For example, intention is a great predictor of behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavior, but the external forces that facilitate such intentions and behaviors are not discussed in detail in TPB. It does not discuss the positive role of peer groups, community, women's collective

actions and groups, farmers' groups, cultural belief systems, affirmative policies and extension support systems. This wide range of prevailing systems has positive and negative impacts on individual attitudes, behaviors, and intentions towards performing certain behaviors. If husbands are continuously anxious about ignoring or challenging community norms and cultural practices that devalue women's decision making in families and their involvement in income generating activities, they may not be willing to engage in shared decisions with their wives. The Self-Efficacy Theory helps to explain individuals' efficacy levels, but it does not include broader structural influences on those individuals' ability to carry out certain tasks. Hence, efforts to change husbands' attitudes towards women and enhance couples' self-efficacy may not be enough for increasing women's role in HVCCA.

SEM demonstrates the complexity of multilayered causes at the individual, community, societal and policy levels. SEM is helpful in identifying factors that enable and inhibit women's household decision-making processes within the socio-ecological environment, for example, from individual to policy formation and intervention levels. Therefore, I believe that these dynamics can be explained well by linking the three theories. This theoretical framework demonstrates that each component of the three theories is important to explain enabling and inhibiting factors regarding rural women's decision-making processes and empowerment. Couples having self-efficacy, attitudes and intention to innovate may have to negotiate changing attitudes and behavior at the community and broader societal levels.

Previous Research Summary and Gap

Many researchers agree that women's empowerment is an ongoing process and it involves continued research. Empowering an individual woman does not necessarily translate

in actual empowerment and a sense of agency unless there is a broader change in the socio-cultural structure which currently devalues women's role in income generating agricultural programs. There is a plethora of studies conducted on women's empowerment, but very few have focused on women's decision-making processes, especially negotiation between smallholder husbands and wives for their increased roles in production and marketing of high-value cash crops at household level.

While indices that quantify levels of women's empowerment are useful, it is essential to conduct in-depth interviews to understand different socio-cultural and religious factors that influence processes of empowerment (Akter et al. 2017:272). Research indicates that husbands often report shared decision making in their households but wives disagree when asked separately (Anderson, Reynolds, and Gugerty 2017). To understand the dynamics of household decision making, Becker et al. (2006) recommend separate interviews with husbands and wives. The literature clearly indicates a continued need to include views from husbands and wives. Doss (2018) also argues that small-scale farmers in developing countries jointly operate their agricultural activities; hence, any study attempting to understand women's decision-making power and empowerment must include husbands and wives. Akter et al. (2017) suggests that most of the research on women's empowerment has focused on sub-Saharan Africa which does not provide a complete picture of gender gaps in agriculture in the Global South.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The literature review indicates that rural women's intra-household decision-making processes concerning high-value cash crop activities (HVCCA) are influenced by their socio-cultural milieu which affects many aspects of their lives. The purpose of this study is to *explore* how women engaged in HVCCA in rural communities in developing countries make decisions and take actions in the context of pervasive culturally-based belief systems and attitudes. Women's role in many important family decision-making processes in developing countries are often devalued or undermined. Qualitative research encourages research participants to discuss their experiences, beliefs and value systems. Liamputtong (2010) argues that "qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to be able to hear the voices of those who are silenced, othered, and marginalized by the dominant social order" (11). Creswell (1998) notes that qualitative research is a process of inquiry in which "the researcher develops a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (28).

The qualitative research provides a range of opportunities for the researcher to engage and interact with participants at the research sites where they experience the issue under investigation (Creswell 2009) and is highly relevant when the researcher wants to explore participants' thought processes and feelings (Strauss & Corbin 1998) and the meanings that people give to the events they experience (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Stake 1995). Ritchie et al. (2014) argue that social phenomena such as cultures, values, belief systems, rituals, and behavioral norms are important aspects to explore to understand processes of social change and that these phenomena can be best understood through qualitative research. In addition, Ritchie et al. (2014) argue that the purpose of the research should not only be to strive for

some degree of generalizability but understand the unique nature of individuals' and communities' problems and their solution strategies. Equipped with the best approaches and methods (for example, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions—FDGs), qualitative research methods applied in this study are well suited to the research purpose.

This study was aimed at understanding and characterizing possible socio-cultural and socioeconomic phenomena that operate as either barriers or enabling factors experienced by my research participants. The theoretical pinpoints about the nature of the qualitative research discussed above are proven to be significant tools to understand the patterns and forms of rural women's decision-making processes and their emerging roles and overall empowerment. I found many of these fundamental characteristics of qualitative approaches compelling and appealing for this research. I was convinced that adopting a qualitative approach would allow me to rigorously engage in deep conversations with research participants and understand their stories.

Further, I was confident that the qualitative methodology would enable me to access research participants' natural settings—homes, farms, and communities (Creswell 2014; Liamputtong 2010)—where I could observe and understand the patterns of behavior and attitudes of participants, their immediate and extended family members and influential community leaders. Another valuable characteristic of a qualitative approach is that throughout the research process, “the researcher is focused on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problems of issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers express in the literature” (Creswell 2009:175).

Patton (1987) argues that qualitative researchers begin with explorative questions such as *what*, *how* and *why* which provide opportunities for in-depth understanding of the

subject under investigation. In this study, I explored research participants' experiences regarding decision-making processes by asking these *what and how* questions: (1) What are the key enabling or inhibiting factors in women's empowerment in household decision making process regarding production and marketing of high-value cash crops? (2) What are the specific attitudes of women and men in smallholder farm families regarding women's involvement in high-value cash crop production and marketing? (3) How do women negotiate emerging roles in high-value cash crop production and marketing in relation to their spouses and other household members? in relation to their community members and institutions? in relation to agents and organizations outside their community? (4) How do husbands of smallholder women farmers respond to their wives' initiatives to achieve shared decision making in efforts to succeed in high-value cash crop activities? in relation to their community members and institutions? in relation to agents and organizations outside their community?

Philosophical Paradigm

For conducting qualitative research, Creswell (2009) suggests that the researcher must follow these important steps; "(a) philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to the study, (b) the strategy of inquiry that is related to this worldview, and (c) the specific methods or procedures of research that translate the approach into practice" (5). I wanted to study research participants' natural world settings in which they live and construct subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell 2009) regarding their engagement in HVCCA, and their micro level decision-making processes involving production, marketing and income utilization at household level. My goal in this study was to prioritize participants' worldviews

(Creswell 2009) of the issues examined; the philosophical paradigm framing this dissertation work, therefore, is constructivism or interpretivism.

The epistemology surrounding constructivism is that qualitative researchers use open-ended questions which allow them to listen carefully to participants' descriptions and explanations of their activities (Creswell, 2009). Crotty (1998) outlined several assumptions of constructivism which I find very pertinent in this study: (a) meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting; (b) qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions, so that the participants can share their worldviews and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives; and (c) the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising through interaction with a human community. Interpretations and findings in qualitative research are thus context laden.

Schwandt (2015) argues that “the constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience” (36). He further argues that “constructivists are deeply committed to the contrary view that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by the mind” (Schwandt, 1994:125). “The constructivist or interpretivist believes that to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it. The inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors” (Schwandt, 1994:118).

This study is based on analysis and interpretations of views shared by smallholder couples engaged in HVCCA in rural Nepal, a developing country. The interpretations are

based on smallholders' experiences of challenges, opportunities, and optimism about their profession and strategy of improving their household income and better overall livelihoods through HVCCA. Their narrated experiences of positioning and shaping behavior and attitudes, negotiations and decision-making processes can provide insights about community belief systems and social attitudes that hinder or facilitate women's engagement in HVCCA. Their interactions at the household and community levels and the ways that they construct meanings, negotiate with community belief systems and reshape behavioral and attitudinal patterns are essential elements of the complex social phenomena for which the constructivist epistemological paradigm chosen for this study will prove valuable.

Philosophically, I position myself as a constructivist, and this study rather aligns well with an inductive approach. However, the study also utilized three existing socio-psychological theories to develop the guiding framework that I believed would be insightful in understanding the behavior of participants as well as their extended family and community members in relation to women's involvement in HVCCA. The purpose of the theories discussed, and theoretical model presented in this study was to better understand the complex nature of women's household level decision-making roles in HVCCA involving their husbands, internal (peers, women's groups and community institutions) and external (government and development extension support system) attitudes and influences.

Research Design

This dissertation research focused on smallholder couples who have been engaged in HVCCA for at least three years. In my research area, two districts in mid-hills of Far West Nepal, a limited number of people engage in HVCCA. Despite the emerging potential for large scale cash crop production, many smallholders, particularly women, show very little

interest. By selecting couples who are engaged in HVCCA, I wanted to understand the factors that operate as barriers or enable women's roles in production and marketing HVCCA at household level and explore how their decision making and activities shape their empowerment. This study deliberately utilized a strategy of understanding and learning from 'positive deviants,' though they are currently in the minority, to learn about ongoing and incipient change. Despite it being known that HVCCA enhances household income and offers better livelihood opportunities, many in the study area are content with cereal crop production and women's participation in HVCCA is very low. Given such a unique context, it was deemed necessary to explore how this small number of couples have become motivated to engage in HVCCA and what strategies they have been using to cope with any cultural attitudes and behavior which have been intended to restrict women's involvement.

Given the nature of research questions and minimum number of smallholder couples engaged in HVCCA in the region, I decided to apply case study research design. Robson (1993) describes case study as "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence" (1993:146). Yin (1984), in a similar notion, defines the case study research method as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (23). Stake (1995) emphasizes the case study approach as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores a program, event, activity, process or one or more activities or individuals in an in-depth manner. Stakes (1995) further notes that "we may simultaneously carry on more than one case study, but each case study is concentrated inquiry into a single

case” (237). Since the study area contains people of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, it was considered essential to learn from several couples engaged in HVCCA.

Besides smallholder couples, the study involves conducting key informant interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders—for example, women’s groups in the research participants’ communities, government officials and development actors working in the community, at the regional and national level. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that “case study method relies on interviewing, observing and document analysis” (14). The number of couples interviewed in this study is 16, which can be considered appropriate in social science research (Flyvbjerg 2006).

Research Area Selection and Justification

Nepal is a predominantly subsistence agrarian country where over 66 percent of the people engage in small farm activities which constitutes about 25 percent of the GDP (ADB 2018). The national poverty rate has dropped from 68 percent in 1996 to 24.82 percent in 2011 (ADB 2018). Poverty is highest in remote hills and mountains especially of the mid and far west regions of the country (Mascie-Taylr et al. 2013). Nepal’s three-year interim plan (TYIP) for 2010/11-12/13 categorically acknowledges the vital role that the agriculture sector could play in increasing rural household incomes, generating employment and reducing poverty (National Planning Commission 2007). One of the main objectives of multi-lateral donor supported agriculture development strategy (ADS), introduced in 2016 in Nepal, is to encourage and enhance capacities of farmers for increased agriculture productivity, marketing and profit making, and hence to reduce poverty (Roka 2017). The Prime Minister Modernization Agriculture Project (PMMAP) also focuses on developing

commercialized agriculture pocket areas, enhancing farmers' capacities and expanding markets (PMAMP 2016).

These features suggest that Nepal is committed to better its agriculture system through providing technical input, financial subsidies and engaging farmers in intense productivity, marketing, and commercialization. The government of Nepal and donor communities working in Nepal are emphasizing investment and enhancements in the agriculture sector. More importantly, they have explicitly recognized the importance of engaging and empowering women in agriculture-based income generating programs and their role in reducing overall household poverty level in rural communities (MOAD 2016; RISMFP 2012; UN Women 2017).

With four million Nepali men working abroad (Sharma 2017), women's participation in agriculture activities continues to increase. Kaini (2017) notes that in 1981 only 36 percent of women nationally were involved in agriculture activities, increasing to 45 percent in 1991 and 50 percent in 2016. Women's participation specifically in cash crop agricultural activities continues to grow (Sharma, 2017).

The proposed research was conducted in two mid-hills districts of far west Nepal, *Dadeldhura, and Achham*. Far West, now called Province number 7 under the new constitution, is one of the poorest regions in the country where food insecurity among smallholder households is moderate to severe (NeKSAP 2014). There are nine districts in the Far Western region and seven are either hilly or mountainous. The total population of Nepal is 26.45 million, of which 470,000 reside in far west (CBS, 2012). Only 16 percent of Nepal's 14.72 million hectares is arable land, with 9 percent of that in the far west (CBS,

2012). Nepal's southern plains have 55 percent of the arable land, while the hills and mountain regions have 37 and 8 percent, respectively.

Many smallholders in the region grow cereal crops such as rice, wheat, and millet. Productivity of these cereal crops is very low, and most households are food secure for only 4 to 6 months a year (Nek SAP 2014). To obtain higher yields on small plots of land, some farmers grow cash crops in plastic covered greenhouses. An increased number of smallholder farmers in the districts sell cash crops such as vegetables and fruits. These characteristics offer great potential for growing high-value crops. To date, relatively few households engage in high-value cash crop production; instead, most utilize traditional agricultural production systems that emphasize cereal crops such as rice, wheat, millet, and lentils. Since the study areas are situated in and around river basins (600-1500 meters above sea level), irrigation is available year around and soil fertility and moisture are conducive for vegetables, fruits and various types of nuts.

While men have crucial roles in plowing land, planting crops and irrigating, women contribute by carrying compost fertilizer to the field, tilling and weeding. Men and women both engage in cereal crop harvesting, although women are more commonly seen in a variety of field activities in recent years. Women are responsible for preserving seeds for the next season's planting.

A few smallholders in the study area are engaged in high-value cash crops, mainly vegetables and fruits. Farmers who are engaged in cash crop activities tend to be less food insecure (MOAD 2016). In recent years, the Far Western region has been identified by government and development agencies as a priority zone to enhance agricultural activities and address food insecurity. Most of the development programs by government and donor

agencies in the region, especially involving high-value cash crops, concentrate on agricultural inputs and market extension, but very little emphasis is placed on understanding deep-rooted socio-cultural and socioeconomic issues. Pervasive cultural practices and norms in the region devalue women's role in important household decision-making processes. Many women in the Far Western hills are still confined only to household chores and their travel to markets is often sanctioned. Women who dare to contest established cultural practices are viewed negatively. Women are also hesitant to freely participate in extension support programs; for example, attending trainings conducted by male members is still a taboo. This is evidence that even though I am from the region and speak the same language as the research participants, women are hesitant to speak with me. Some women may face criticism and violence for just speaking with male strangers. These dynamics are very important to understand women's actual roles in decision-making in HVCCA.

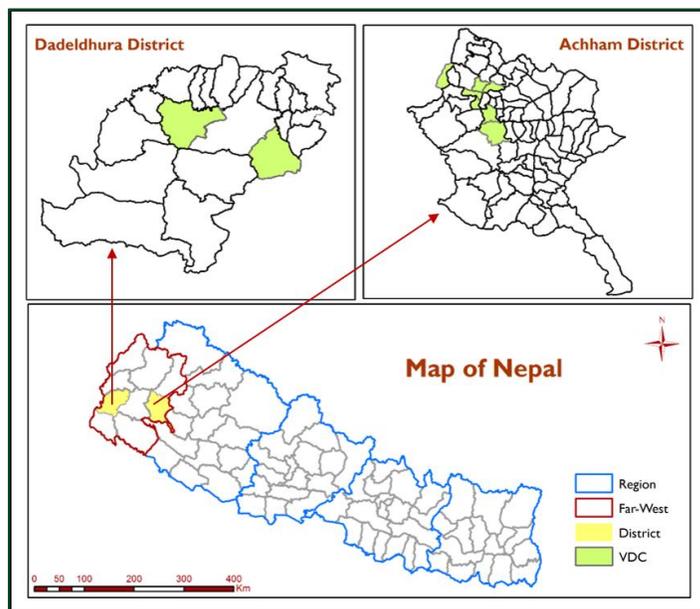


Figure 2. Map of Nepal and Research Sites

Note: Under the new constitution promulgated in 2015, the existing administrative system has been restructured and formerly known Village Development Committees are merged within Rural Municipality or Municipality.

Dadeldhura

Located in the Far Western region of Nepal, Dadeldhura district covers an area of 1538 square kilometers within the latitude 28° 59' N to 29° 26' N and Longitude 80° 12' E to 80 ° 47' E. Dadeldhura has elevation ranging from 462 m to 2639 m above mean sea level (DADO 2016). The district has five rural municipalities (RMPs) and two semi-urban municipalities. A total population of the district is 142,094 (53.2 percent females), with an average household size of 5.25 (CBS 2014). Smallholders in the district average less than 0.5-hectare of land (DADO 2016). Literacy rate among males is 80 percent but only 53 percent among women. Among postgraduate degree holders in the district, only 11 percent are female. Recent trends show that the gender gap in education is reducing, with 34 percent of intermediate level graduates being female (CBS 2014), and little difference at primary school level. Girls enrollment in colleges in the district is continuing to increase.

Dadeldhura district is considered as a gateway for connecting other hilly and mountainous districts to the Terai, the southern plain. The district is widely known for its vegetable production and other cash crop activities. The cash crop activities such as vegetable and fruit production and marketing in the district began approximately 40 years ago, about the same time the district was connected to Terai (DADO 2016). The district has three ecological zones: inner valley, mid-hills, and mountains. Nearly 70 percent of land in Dadeldhura is covered with dense and evergreen forest. Because of the great variation in ecological zones, the district offers great potential for many varieties of cash crop activities. Smallholders from Dadeldhura district supply vegetables, fruits, nuts, herbs and other cash crops to many surrounding districts and sometimes to India (DADO 2016). However, in recent years the district has been affected by erratic rainfall, drought, and hailstorms.

Research participants for this study were selected from Bhageshowr RMP and Amagadhi municipality. Bhageshowr is about 25 kilometers west of the district headquarters. Amaragadhi municipality is part of the district headquarters but research participants' villages are 15 to 20 kilometers away from the major town, district headquarters.

Achham

Located in the Far Western region, Achham District covers 1680 square kilometers and lies at 28°46'—29°23' latitude and 81° 32'—81°35' longitudes. Achham has elevation ranging from 540 m to 3820 m above mean sea level (DDCA 2011). A total population of the district is 257,477 (53.4 percent female), with average household 5.33 (CBS 2014). Smallholders average less than 0.5 hectares of land (DADO 2017). Literacy rate among females is 43 percent and among males it is 71 percent. Only seven percent of post-graduates are female. At intermediate level of education, 28 percent females (CBS 2014). Education disparity between girls and boys at primary school level in Achham is also low. The district has 4 semi-urban municipalities and 6 RMPs.

Achham is one of the remotest districts in far western region. The district was first connected to road in 1998. However, road connectivity to district headquarters was only made in 2003. The district has four different types of climate: tropical up to 1,200 m, subtropical from 1,200-2,100 m, temperate above 2,100-3300 m and alpine above 3300 m (DDCA 2011). The annual rainfall is about 1,891 mm and temperatures vary from 5 °C to 30 °C. In recent years, the district has experienced very erratic rainfall, drought, and hailstorms. Many smallholders in the district do not have access to irrigation facilities (DDCA 2011).

Although the district has great potential for vegetable production, very few people engage in HVCCA. Some farmers have started producing vegetables in the early 1990s, but

production remains very low. The district imports vegetables from Dadeldhura, Terai and bordering districts of India. As there were not many farmers engaged in vegetable farming the research participants selected for this study come from many different villages.

Sampling Strategy

Ritchie et al. (2014) suggest that snowball sampling approach allows the researcher to identify other prospective participants who fit the selection criteria based on suggestions from participants who have already been interviewed. Given that a small number of couples engage in HVCCA in the research districts, especially Achham, I have chosen purposeful snowball sampling strategies and personal contacts to identify research participants. Because I have lived and worked in these two districts for more than five years, I faced few difficulties in connecting with the research participants. Participants whom I interviewed were very cooperative in identifying other possible respondents and providing their cell phone numbers and other contact details.

Subsequently, to understand and operationalize identified concepts, 16 smallholder couples from two districts, *Dadeldhura* and *Achham* (eight in each) were selected. An additional 17 key informants (eight in *Dadeldhura*, five in *Achham*, and four in *Kathmandu*) from government and donor agency agriculture support system officials at district and national level were also interviewed. In addition to these principal participants and key informants, women's groups, women leaders, development actors and government officials at district, regional and national level were identified for FGDs.

Although Creswell (2013:155) notes that “the more diverse the characteristics of the individuals, the more difficult it will be for the researcher to find common experiences, themes and overall essence of the experience of all participants,” I have included two types

of respondents – couples who are involved in HVCCA and a wide range of key informants from government, women’s groups and development agencies which provides good variation in data collection. The research participants are from two non-contiguous districts and provide different contexts for rich analysis. Most of the people in the study area are Chhetris and Brahamins⁶. Further, those who are engaged in HVCCA are from these two caste groups. Hence, my attempt to interview participants from other caste groups and indigenous communities to reflect broader variation was not realized.

Field Procedures

Before leaving the United States for data collection, I had established contacts with senior government agriculture officials and prominent women leaders in Kathmandu and at the research sites. I was well acquainted with some of these contacts, while others were recommended through friends and close associates working in the field of women’s empowerment and rural women’s participation in HVCCA. I arrived in Kathmandu on June 14, 2017, and, together with my research assistant began scheduling meetings with senior government officials (responsible for accelerating vegetable production and marketing in the country), organizations, and institutions supporting women’s empowerment initiatives and prominent women leaders and advocates. These meetings provided great insights about the ongoing activities regarding my research work and the research sites. The first round of meetings with key informants was largely informal and aimed at rapport building, not conducting any in-depth interviews.

After the first round of meetings, I contacted some of the people that I had already met and conducted in-depth interviews. Since I have spent many years working in the

⁶ In Nepal’s caste system, Brahamins and Chhetris are considered upper caste groups.

development sector and worked several years for the government of Nepal, meeting people relevant to my research work in Kathmandu did not require much effort. Every person I met or spoke with over the phone in Kathmandu was very supportive of my research work and they all encouraged me to conduct the study. These people also helped me to connect with many key informants working in the research sites. While in Kathmandu, I made numerous phone calls to possible key informants recommended by the government officials in Kathmandu and informed them about my field trips and tentative dates of the arrival to the districts. I also made several phone calls to my friends and discussed about possible gatekeepers needed to take us on a tour of the vegetable producers' villages and identify possible research participants (Creswell 2014).

Research sites are approximately between 35 to 40 hours on a bus from Kathmandu. Travelling by road during monsoon is very challenging in Nepal. During rainy seasons, road travelers face many landslides and rapidly swelling streams and rivers could strand them for days before they reach their destination. Nepal has very high bus accident rates, particularly during the monsoon. Considering the limited time that I had available to conduct the research and that mid-June is the beginning of the rainy season, my research assistant and I decided to take the one-hour flight from Kathmandu to Dhangadhi, a large town situated in the southern plain of the far western region. From Dhangadhi to Dadeldhura, one can only travel by road as there is no airport in Dadeldhura. Public bus can take up to 10 hours to reach Dadeldhura. Roads are extremely narrow in the hills and mountains of Nepal.

On June 19, 2017, we arrived in Dadeldhura in a rented vehicle. It took us six hours to reach Dadeldhura. The distance between Achham and Dadeldhura is approximately 200 km which takes about seven hours to drive by private vehicle. Between June 19 – 27, we

engaged in rapport building with prospective key informants in Dadeldhura and Achham districts. We met officials from government agriculture extension offices, district women's offices, district administrative offices, women's support groups and key development agencies working in women's agricultural activities. The officials we met in the districts expressed their enthusiasm about the research and supported it whole heartedly. These officials further supported us by identifying many smallholder farmers who have been engaged in HVCCA in their districts.

During the first two weeks of our fieldwork, we spent a lot of time visiting various villages and identifying prospective research participants. We received great support from my acquaintances in the districts in locating possible gatekeepers, research sites, and participants. They helped us connect with smallholder farmers engaged in HVCCA and women's groups in different communities. Almost all the farmers and women's groups with whom we interacted happily agreed to cooperate us in the research activities. We received significant help from these smallholders identifying more farmers engaged in HVCCA in other villages in the districts. My fluency with the local language (Doteli) and understanding of socio-cultural and political dynamics in the region was very helpful in connecting with prospective research participants and key informants. In addition, I lived five years (between 2009–2014) in Dadeldhura while working with the United Nations World Food Program and travelled to many villages in the hills and mountains of far west, including some of the villages where the research participants of this study reside.

The data collection process in the field was further enhanced and supported by the presence of my advisor and mentor Dr. Robert Mazur. Dr. Mazur joined me from July 15–31, 2017 in Nepal. Dr. Mazur observed many in-depth interviews and engaged in Focus Group

Discussion (FGD) processes in both the districts. He accompanied my research assistant and me to all the research villages selected. Ongoing research approaches and some of the preliminary findings were constantly discussed and necessary amendments in guiding questions were made as necessary to fulfill the research purpose.

Although we received tremendous support from the government officials, key informants, local communities, travelling to the villages during monsoon was often difficult with rain, muddy and slippery roads. On several occasions, our vehicle was stuck in the mudslides. In one incident our vehicle almost skidded out of the road. Since these roads are narrow and traverse through the upper hills, vehicle skidding from the road can easily roll down several hundred meters.

We observed that during late June to early July many farmers are busy planting paddy and other summer cereal crops. Many adult male family members were present in paddy plantations in both districts. While male farmers were observed preparing paddy fields, women were planting seedlings and preparing food. The '*Parim*' (exchange labor) system is very common in the far west. This provided opportunities for us to meet many farmers at one venue and schedule in-depth interviews. We observed there was very little HVCCA during the monsoon. During our initial field visits, we witnessed people preparing for the first local government election in 20 years which was held on June 28, 2017 in the far western region. Despite farmers' busy schedules, we never faced any problems finding research participants. People in the villages were always generous, welcoming and were very enthusiastic about the research. Some of them were fascinated that someone who comes from a community similar to theirs was doing doctoral degree in the USA and was willing to understand the challenges that they were facing with HVCCA. I believe this unique relationship has helped me to

identify research participants and helped participants to speak freely during interviews. I interviewed all the male participants while my research assistant interviewed all the women. My research assistant was welcomed as a member of their community since she knew the local language and her husband was from the neighboring district. Women participants were at ease to share their stories with her without hesitation (Liamputtong 2010).

Data Collection

In a qualitative study, researchers collect data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2009; 2013). Yin (2009) emphasized the importance of having multiple data sources for case studies. To learn about women's decision-making processes and men's role in overcoming cultural barriers, I used in-depth interviews, focus groups discussions (FGDs), field observation and document reviews for data collection. With the permission of research participants, in-depth interviews and FGDs were audio recorded. Before conducting FGDs, I stated the purpose of the study, research procedures, expected benefits, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and full protection of confidentiality. Further, participants were also given opportunities to ask any questions about the study. Detailed contact information of the research team and IRB was made available to the research participants in the local language (Patton 1987). All the interviews were conducted at the researcher sites based on the participants convenience.

The primary source of data is in-depth interviews with 16 couples engaged in HVCCA for at least three years. Creswell (2009) suggests that "qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study" (175). I collected data in participants' communities – places where they live and conduct their HVCCA activities and experience everyday events.

Field data collection was conducted between June 17 – August 8, 2017. Two pilot in-depth interviews, one from each district, were conducted to better understand the data collection process. The pilot interviews provided information about the approximate time required for interviews, testing voice recordings, and other interview dynamics. The first in-depth interviews were conducted with high-level government officials working under the research extension unit of the Ministry of Agriculture in Kathmandu on June 15, 2017. The last in-depth interview was conducted with a key informant working for INGO in Kathmandu on August 8, 2017. The first research participants were from Dadeldhura where in-depth interviews were conducted on July 2, 2017. The last in-depth interview with research participants was conducted on July 27, 2017, in Achham district. Formal preparation for the fieldwork, for example, reading recent literature related to research field, developing guiding questions and ethical codes, purchasing interview recording tools and application process for IRB started in January 2017.

Context specific cultural sensitivities, for example, interviewing women participants and researcher bias (especially given that the researcher is from the far west region) were thoroughly considered for review. Women in the far west typically do not want to speak with a male interviewer, even if the person who was born and raised in the same locality. Consequently, I hired a well-educated and well-trained independent female researcher as assistant. She had a good understanding of the in-depth interview processes, language of the research areas and socio-cultural dynamics in the research sites. She passed the Protecting Human Research Participants (PHRP) training course and obtained IRB approval before entering the field and initiating research activities.

In-depth interviews

Conducting in-depth interviews is a powerful method for generating description and interpretation of the social world (Yeo et al. 2014). Liamputtong (2010) argues that through in-depth interviews, people share their deeply held stories. Fontana & Frey (1994) suggest that interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (361). As suggested by various scholars, I was convinced that recording the stories of smallholder couples regarding production and marketing of HVCCA during in-depth interviews would be valuable for subsequent analysis. Semi-structured interviews helped to stay focused on the purpose of the study and guiding research questions.

I believe that in-depth interviews provided opportunities for women producers to share their experiences and challenges engaging in HVCCA. Schwandt (2015) argues “the interview is a behavioral event – that is, verbal behavior, a verbal exchange, or pattern of verbal interaction” (170). Beyond learning about perceived attitudes and behaviors of husbands, extended family members and community members regarding women’s role in HVCCA, this study focused on understanding wives’ behavioral patterns and attitudes towards their husbands and on broader community socio-cultural prescriptions and proscriptions in their daily lives regarding HVCCA. The study also sought to understand husbands’ behavior and attitudes towards their wives’ engagement in HVCCA and their response to cultural norms that may impact their wives’ overall HVCCA.

In in-depth interview techniques, “using the logic of stimulus response (question and answer), the interviewer aims to ask the right questions so as to elicit responses in the form of authentic feelings and meanings of the interviewee” (Schwandt 2015: 170). “The typical in-depth, semi or unstructured interview aims to elicit stories of experience” (Schwandt 2015:

171). In-depth interview is a conversational, lengthy, and interactive exchange of ideas, during which the researcher works to develop a close relationship with participants so that responses are deep and meaningful (Boyce and Neale 2006). Because the basic focus of phenomenology is the experience of the individual, an in-depth interview with an individual is considered the most appropriate approach to data collection (Boyce and Neal 2006)

Focus group discussions

The collective context of focus groups creates a process which is in important respects very different from an in-depth interview, primarily because data are generated by interaction between group participants (Finch, Lewis & Turley 2014). FGDs stimulate individuals and groups of women to speak about socio-cultural embeddedness and the discrimination that they face at household and community level. Liamputtong (2010) discusses the importance of the reciprocal and reflexive nature of FGDs and oral life stories/history telling. She argues that these approaches bring collective testimonies on how women deal with social isolation, oppression, and discrimination experienced in their personal lives. Liamputtong further argues that FGDs bring out little researched aspects of women's everyday lives—feelings, attitudes, hopes, and dreams. She believes the participants' collective and individual untold stories and interactions with researchers generate new knowledge which often promote women's empowerment.

Fontana & Frey (1994) argue that “the use of group interview is not meant to replace individual interviewing, but it is an option that deserves consideration because it can provide another level of data gathering or perspective on the research problem not available through individual interviews” (364). Although I conducted in-depth interviews with 16 smallholder couples, I felt that it was necessary to also understand the views and dynamics of groups (for

example, women's cooperatives), and major stakeholders such as women's advocacy groups, government agencies at community, district, regional and national level, and development organizations. The FGDs were exploratory in nature, so I conducted them with 7-9 participants at in a relatively unstructured manner (Fontana & Frey 1994). Morgan (2002) states that the number of participants in FGD depend on the purpose of the research.

Documents review

Research related documentation collection is an important aspect of the qualitative study. Creswell (2009) suggests that “during the research process the investigator may collect qualitative documents. These may be public documents (e.g., newspapers, minutes, of meetings, official reports) or private documents (e.g., personal journals and diaries, letters, e-mails). I collected the following documents for review and analysis: (1) periodic and yearly cash crop activity reports about smallholders; (2) strategic documents on women's participation on cash crop activities; (3) women's grassroot movements such as cooperatives, women's groups and women empowerment initiatives; and (4) successful stories of women's empowerment. These documents were collected from government agriculture extension offices and development partners working with smallholder farmers and women's issues at community, districts, regional and national levels.

Field observation

Field observation and field note writing are vital components of qualitative research. In qualitative research “the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site. In these field notes, the researcher records, in an unstructured or semi-structured way (using same prior questions that the inquirer wants to know), activities at the research site” (Creswell 2009:181). Throughout the research process in the

field, my research assistant and I observed many participants' day-to-day activities in the field and documented these as field notes. Some of the observations include: (1) participants' day-to-day activities in the field (land preparation, sowing seeds, carrying and spreading fertilizer, weeding, harvesting vegetables, travelling to markets and selling vegetables, engaging in women's meetings, saving and credits); (2) division of labor between husband and wife and in-laws at household level; (3) women's group activities; (4) presence of the government and donor agencies working on cash crop activities and women's empowerment issues in the communities; and (5) women's participation in various programs in and outside of the communities and their travel times. We also observed how government extension offices and development agencies conduct their day-to-day activities at the district level and types of support and motivation systems that they implement for women's engagement in HVCCA and overall women's empowerment.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data analysis is a continued process. Spencer et al. (2014) put the evolving nature of qualitative study in this way: "although there will be a stage dedicated to formal analysis, the pathways for forming ideas to pursue, phenomena to capture and theories to test begins right at the start of a research study and ends while writing up the results" (270). To understand the research context and socio-cultural patterns and dynamics of women's participation in HVCCA in my research context as a first step, I conducted several in-depth interviews with high-level government officials in Kathmandu and reviewed policy reports and other literature. Secondly, I made preliminary visits to the research sites, met possible participants and conducted pilot in-depth interviews. These initial steps for analyzing the

research context helped shape guiding questions so that data collection could be conducted in a professional and efficient manner.

Creswell (2013) suggests “qualitative research involves preparing and organizing data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or discussion (180). According to Ryan & Bernard (2003), theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research. Coding involves data management, abstraction, and interpretation processes (Spencer et al. 2014:297-302).

I adapted four key data management steps suggested by Spencer et al. (2014: 262):

1. Familiarization – I carefully reviewed the transcribed data, revisited the main research questions and identified the main subjects of interest and topics for my research.
2. Constructing an initial thematic framework – Identified topics and subjects of interests were further compiled into main themes and sub-themes.
3. Indexing and sorting – The identified topics and themes were revisited, and redundant data was removed.
4. Reviewing data extracts – Themes were further refined, and subthemes developed.

To analyze the data, I used NVivo computer software. NVivo was extremely useful in data coding, cross referencing, storing, grouping and making quick and thorough reference analysis (Spencer et al. 2014). Besides transcriptions of in-depth interviews, I have transcribed FGDs, key informant interviews, field notes and other relevant documents and treated them as separate entities for data analysis. These different sources of information provided data richness.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that the main goal of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to substantiate arguments and findings so that the study can be considered worthy

of attention (290). I utilized the following techniques proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): (1) credibility – prolonged engagement in the field, peer briefing, triangulation and member check; (2) transferability – thick description and purposive sampling; (3) dependability – triangulation and peer examination; and (4) confirmability – reflexivity and triangulation.

Variety in data collection techniques (substantial time spent in the field, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, FGDs, field observation, field notes, analysis of related empirical studies) reflect triangulation procedures and provide corroborating evidence for credibility (Creswell 2014; Yin 2009; Merriam 2002; Lincoln & Guba 1985). The pilot in-depth interviews conducted at the beginning of the study further refined the data collection approaches and analysis. Continued interactions with peers working in qualitative research and my research advisor reflect rigorous debriefing. I subsequently shared some of the preliminary findings with research participants when I made a trip to the research site in May 2018. Due to time constraints, I could only meet with a few research participants in Dadeldhura. I personally briefed them about the major preliminary findings. During the same trip, I also spoke with research participants from Achham and briefed them about the findings. Further, I have shared my research work with my research committee members and professors having expertise in qualitative research at the Department of Sociology at Iowa State University and incorporated feedback received. Considering the limitations of the transferability of a qualitative study (Morrow 2005), I have provided thick description of the research context and settings (Merriam 2002). The detailed audit trail (Merriam 2002) about constantly evolving research procedures and peer examination were performed to increase dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba 1985). For example, preliminary analysis and findings of the study were shared with my research assistant throughout the data analysis

process. I have also shared findings with doctoral colleagues conducting qualitative research at the Department of Sociology and sought their suggestions. Lastly, being aware that the researcher's past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations may shape the interpretation and approach to the study, I clearly indicated these limitations (Creswell 2014).

Ethical Considerations

“Regardless of the approach to qualitative inquiry, a qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during data collection in the field and in analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports” (Creswell 2014:175). Key principles of good ethical practice are consistently stated in the research methods literature and in various guidelines: ethical research “should be worthwhile and should not make unreasonable demands on participants; participation in research should be based on informed consent; participants should be voluntary and free from coercion or pressure; adverse consequences of participants should be avoided; and risks of harm known, and confidentiality and anonymity should be respected” (Ritchie et al. 2014:78). My research assistant and I obtained approval of Iowa State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and followed university norms and laws regarding research ethics in Nepal. I was aware that participants may face possible embarrassment, other social exclusions and loss of self-esteem (Stake 1994:244); therefore, I did not reveal their names and applied cautionary measures to minimize the risks (244).

Researcher's Positionality

I worked more than 15 years in the socioeconomic development sector in Nepal, mostly in the Far Western region where this research took place. I was born and raised in a small village in the Far Western mid-hills and personally observed women's lack of decision-making roles in important family matters, including agriculture. The scene that observed as a

child some thirty-five years ago about women's everyday busy schedule – waking up early in the morning, grabbing left-over bread with salt in hand, walking long distances, collecting fodder and firewood, working in the farms, fetching water, cooking food and eating after all the family members have eaten – still predominates in many villages in the region. One of those women was my mother. I rarely witnessed any conversation between my mother and father, as was also the case among most of the couples in the village. A plethora of recent and current development programs are focused on women's issues, yet the lives of women have not changed much. Such a situation triggered me to return to the university and engage in scientific research to understand some of these phenomena. I acknowledge that the way I view women's situation regarding their decision-making at household levels may present biases (Creswell 2009). However, despite possible biases, researchers who share participants' socio-cultural and linguistic characteristics are well suited to carry research in a cross-cultural setting (Liamputtong 2010: 111-112).

Limitations

There are very few couples who are engaged in HVCCA in the mid-hills of Nepal's far western region. The concept of high value cash crops is relatively new for most of the people in the research sites, making use of purposive (snowball) sampling appropriate. I had limited time and resources to complete the study. Further, this study focused on smallholder vegetable producing farmers who live closer to towns and have some level of road accessibility, hence, does not represent women living in remote villages. Further, this study specifically focused among couples and did not include single women who may have different views about socio-cultural issues facing women. Although the study selected 16 couples as multiple case studies for analysis, and data triangulation was achieved through

multiple sources, it is still heavily context specific and should not be over-generalized. This study did not cover smallholders engaged in other cash crop activities such as fruits and herbs. Additionally, this study also did not include important aspects such as education (specifically) that could be a major factor for women's enhanced decision-making role at household level and their overall empowerment. While characterizing barriers to women's household level decision-making roles and empowerment in HVCCA, I must acknowledge that this study was deliberately designed to explore couples' initiatives as instances of positive deviance reflecting emerging changes in rural women's empowerment.

Summary

This chapter elaborated the underpinning methodological and epistemological positioning and methods for data collection and analysis. The issue of women's decision-making roles at household level, possible socio-cultural factors that could influence research participants' decision-making processes, the importance of understanding context and rationale for choosing qualitative research methods are explained. The detailed information about the research settings, data analysis techniques used, and issues of trustworthiness are also explained. I have also described my personal background, deliberate intentions and limitations that may reflect some possible bias in this research.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to *characterize* the barriers to women's empowerment in decision making in HVCCA (production and marketing) among smallholder households, and their strategies—individual and collective—to overcome such barriers. The study also examined husbands' roles in resolving or reinforcing the challenges that their wives face to achieve shared decision making in cash crop production and marketing. The following research questions informed this study: (1) What are the key enabling or inhibiting factors in women's empowerment in household decision making processes regarding production and marketing of high-value cash crops? (2) What are the specific attitudes of women and men in smallholder farm families regarding women's involvement in high-value cash crop production and marketing? (3) How do women negotiate emerging roles in high-value cash crop production and marketing in relation to their spouses and other family members? in relation to their community members and institutions? in relation to agents and organizations outside their community? (4) How do husbands of smallholder women farmers respond to their wives' initiatives to achieve shared decision making in efforts to succeed in high-value cash crop activities? in relation to their community members and institutions? in relation to agents and organizations outside their community?

During in-depth interviews, research participants described their perceptions and experiences about women's position in family and community, household decision-making processes, and extended family and community attitudes towards women's changed roles in HVCCA. The study participants also shared their own perceptions and attitudes towards changed scenarios about women's status in family and community, cultural barriers and negotiation strategies. Further, participants also shared extended family, community,

government agency and development organizations support in enhancing women's empowerment and decision-making roles in HVCCA.

The research findings presented in this chapter are based on data analysis from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document reviews and research field observations at the participants' households and communities. The findings reported here also include responses from in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) conducted among women farmers groups, women cooperatives groups, prominent women leaders in women's empowerment and government extension officials and development organization representatives at the research sites as well as regional and national levels.

Participant Characteristics

This study includes 16 couples (husband and wife) who have been engaged in HVCCA for at least 3 years. Participants mostly grow perishable seasonal vegetables (cauliflower, tomatoes, capsicum, radish, cabbage, potato, okra, etc.). Some participants also produce off-seasonal vegetables. The number of years that these participants have been engaged in HVCCA ranges from 3 to 27 years. Most participants have land holdings which are typically less than one hectare; for the majority, the primary goal for engaging in HVCCA has been to increase household income and address basic family needs such as buying foods, clothes, children's education, performing rituals, building new homes and buying more land. Research participants' ages ranged between 22 to 71 years. Half of the female research participants are illiterate, three have primary level of education, one is a high school dropout, two have passed SLC (School Leaving Certificate), two have an intermediate college degree. Only one male participant is illiterate, two are literate, five are high school dropouts, six have SLC, one each has an intermediate college and a bachelor's degree. Some

participants who have SLC or above education are also employed as ECD (Early Childhood Development, volunteer with minimum pay) instructors and school teachers in their respective communities. Only few are engaged in HVCCA while many continue to grow cereal crops and vegetables. ECD instructors are all female participants. They communicated that as ECD instructors they receive very nominal economic incentives from the government.

The history of vegetable farming at the commercial level in these districts is less than 30 years. The vegetables are grown close to home. Many couples still prefer to use better quality land for growing cereal crops such as rice and wheat. Rice remains one of the most preferred crops and growing one's own rice and wheat is still an indication of social prestige and status. A majority have received trainings and exposure visits on vegetable production from government agencies or development organizations before starting HVCCA. Some younger couples are inspired by their family's (mostly parents/father and mother-in-law) prior knowledge in HVCCA. Extension support, women's groups and farmers' groups also played a vital role in inspiring couples to engage in HVCCA. These institutions also play a major role in moderating prevalent cultural practices that restrict women's behavior and encouraging them to engage in HVCCA. In some cases, couples started by observing their neighbors getting better incomes from HVCCA. Only very few couples started HVCCA without external and/or internal support and motivation.

While this study was being conducted, many couples were observed working in their farm—planting, irrigating and harvesting vegetables. Participants, including significant numbers of women, were also seen travelling to markets (district headquarters and major towns in the districts) and selling vegetables and buying household necessities. Participants were also seen taking part in various capacity enhancement trainings and skill development

programs on vegetable production and marketing in major towns and district headquarters of the study districts. These skill development and empowerment training sessions were conducted by government agencies and non-governmental development organizations. They were also seen at the district agriculture offices and offices of development organizations to receive agriculture extension support. The participants were also observed in their communities engaging in women's group activities, for example saving and credit, collectively approaching development officials for support, and local election campaigning. Some were even running for political offices in their village municipalities. Compared to other community members, research participants' homes were generally cleaner, they and their family members were better dressed, and their children appeared healthy and clean. Participants, including women, were less hesitant to speak with visitors. Most seemed to be confident in communicating their strategies about HVCCA and future needs to researchers.

Although there are very few couples engaged in HVCCA, they struggle to find good prices for their products in the markets. The markets in the study area are often overflowing with vegetables coming from India and outside of the research districts. Most couples engaged in HVCCA have a small landholding and do not have crop insurance. Although government agencies and development organizations provide subsidies for vegetable production, these programs often require significant 'cost sharing' contributions from these poor farmers based on the assumption that this will increase the likelihood of sustainability. Hence, failing to sell vegetables could put their livelihoods at greater risk because they invest capital in purchasing fertilizer, insecticides and infrastructure (drip irrigation systems and plastic tunnels). Participants live in constant fear that failing to produce vegetables and generate income can significantly jeopardize their family's livelihoods. Further, they also

live in fear that if they cannot sell their vegetables, they will face backlash from extended family members, especially fathers- and mothers-in-law. Unlike their cereal crop producing neighbors, these farmers mostly rely on HVCCA for their family's basic needs. Some couples continue to produce cereal crops as well. Many couples are hesitant to produce vegetables only. Despite poor markets, high levels of competition and some restrictive cultural practices, many couples are willing to take risks to produce vegetables. Women engaged in HVCCA are actively participating in important decision-making roles and feel a strong sense of empowerment. These phenomena can be considered as reflecting positive deviance and may have great implications for motivating many other women in the communities to pursue a similar path.

Except for one female participant, all respondents have fully participated in the in-depth interviews and contributed information across all the themes reported. Therefore, I believe that this study validly represents views of all research participants.

Study Findings

Although the primary participants of this research are couples engaged in HVCCA, this study also includes views and experiences of women leaders and representatives of government agencies and development organizations working in the field of HVCCA and women's empowerment in research communities and districts as well as at the national level. Based on the research participants' responses, five main themes emerged from this study: (1) What are the factors that enable women's empowerment in household decision-making processes in HVCCA?, (2) What are the factors that inhibit women's empowerment in household decision-making processes in HVCCA?, (3) What are the specific attitudes of women and men in smallholder farm families and communities regarding women's

involvement in HVCCA? (4) What is the current state of women's changing status and emerging (negotiation) role in HVCCA? and (5) What are husbands' perceptions and responses to their wives' initiatives to achieve shared decision making in efforts to succeed in HVCCA? In line with participants' specific perceptions and experiences, these themes were further clustered into sub-themes. Although each theme represents participants unique responses, I must acknowledge that there is a significant overlapping across these themes. To protect the identities of the research participants, I have assigned pseudonyms. For the same reason, the names of officials in government and non-government agencies and development organizations were removed from participants' direct quotes.

The study findings are organized in three chapters. Chapter 4 covers Theme 1 only. Theme 2 is presented in Chapter 5 and Themes 3, 4 and 5 are presented in chapter 6.

1. What are the Factors Enabling Women's Empowerment in Household Decision-Making Processes in HVCCA?

Instead of directing specific questions toward enabling factors alone, participants were encouraged to express their naturally occurring everyday experiences in household decision-making processes in HVCCA, for example, vegetable production and marketing. When asked about how decision-making processes unfold, participants outlined some key areas where they engage in discussions, reach agreements, make decisions, face obstacles, feel skeptical and hopeful. Based on participants' responses, three main sub-themes emerged: decision-making processes, internal extension support system and external extension support system.

Decision-making processes

Women actively engage in many decision-making processes at household as well as community level. There are many factors that facilitate these decision-making processes and

contribute to women's overall empowerment. Based on study participants' responses under the decision-making processes sub-theme, ten specific headings emerged: economic needs and coping strategy; motivation to engage in vegetable farming; production start-up and decision-making processes; land selection and field preparation; crop selection; purchase and use of fertilizer; harvesting; traveling and selling vegetables; keeping income; household expenditures; and future investment. These headings reflect women's ongoing micro level decision-making and empowerment processes at household level.

Economic needs and coping strategy

Government officials reported that the unemployment rate in the study area is 50 to 60 percent. Although many young people have college degrees, most are unemployed. They suggest that public schools and universities have failed to offer education that motivate young people to create self-employment, for example, teaching them modern farming techniques. Many parents in the study area communicated that young people with college degrees feel ashamed of engaging in agricultural activities. Some suggest, therefore, that the current education system—especially in rural parts of Nepal—is creating educated unemployed youths and is becoming a burden to the nation's economy.

However, despite the poor job market and limited economic opportunities, participant couples see HVCCA as one of the major household strategies for enhancing income and meeting everyday expenses. These statements are reinforced by W2A's response: "If we did not do vegetable farming, we may have needed to take loan to cover household expenditures." She added, "Prior to engaging in vegetable farming I did not have any money and I used to wish someone could provide some. But these days I have access to cash all the time." Emphasizing the important role that vegetable production plays in children's

schooling, W3A commented, “Our older son studies in Kathmandu. The younger son who is with us also goes to private school. We have a good income from the vegetable farming to support our children’s good education.” W3D also sees vegetable farming as the best means of household income and overall wellbeing of the family.

Engaging in vegetable farming not only provides basic economic security but it also helps families make future investments. H2D said, “I started vegetable farming 20 years ago. It significantly raises household income. In the beginning, I earned only NPR 30,000⁷ per year now I earn about NPR 7-800,000.” He added, “Since I have started growing vegetables, I have purchased a lot of agricultural land, built two good homes, invested in housing land in Dhangadhi (major town in far western region) and have savings in banks.” H3A also said he earns more than NPR 3-400,000 per year. He asserted that “increased income opportunity from vegetable production has provided me great economic freedom and social prestige.”

Participants also expressed that income from vegetable production is very helpful to perform expensive rituals, worship and wedding ceremonies. For example, W7A said, “Income from vegetable production allowed us to perform our daughters’ weddings and it was a big comfort for the family.” W7D sums up her experience: “All the needs are met through vegetable production. We have no other means of incomes. We used to grow rice, wheat, and finger millet and it was somehow enough for family’s food needs but after vegetable production, our life has been much better.” HVCCA are also helpful in reducing male migration. H8D shared, “I have stayed in India for 10 years. I recall it as one of the darkest times of my life. It was very difficult to work there. Since my wife and I started vegetable production, I stopped going to India for employment.” He added, “We earn good

⁷ As of September 2018, \$1 US Dollar is = NPR 116.

money. We are living a decent life. Besides income, I get to stay with family. My wife and I are happy that we are together and are sending our children to private schools.” These varied accounts of participants’ experiences with HVCCA suggest that engaging in vegetable farming significantly increases household income and improves overall quality of life, especially for women.

Motivation to engage in vegetable farming

Smallholders still predominantly grow cereal crops. But things are gradually changing. The situation is best described by participant H4A. He said, “Initially for people, growing rice or wheat was the farming activity. Anything else they would perceive as if we were keeping our land barren.” He added, “Things have changed today drastically.” There are some communities in the district, especially in Dadeldhura that grow only vegetables. This statement is supported by H2D: “About 20 years ago this area was full of cereal crops such as rice, wheat, and maize but there are no cereal crops anymore. Everyone in our community only grows vegetables.”

Lack of employment opportunities in their communities and compelling family economic necessities motivated many participants to engage in vegetable farming. W6D said, “My husband and I are uneducated, and we needed to find a way to feed our family.” H5D reinforced ideas stated by W6D: “I had no employment and I saw the opportunity in vegetable farming. So, I discussed this with my wife and she agreed.” A participant in FGD2A suggested that producing vegetables is much more beneficial than cereal crops. She asserted, “Although we do not know much about vegetable farming and we have low yields, we still make more money than from cereal crops such as rice for which we have to wait six months for harvesting.” Rice plantation starts in March/April and it does not get ready until

September/October. FGD2A participant's comments are further supported by FGD3A: "We have three seasons of vegetables, but cereal crops we have only two seasons." Further, H2A reported, "Even with diseases and insect problems, we can still have more benefits from vegetables than cereal crops." Reinforcing H2A's observation, W4D added, "We get good benefit from vegetables. We can make up to NPR 25,000 per month from vegetable production from one *Ropani*⁸ of land." She added, "However, we hardly get any income from rice production; for example, we get about 60-70 kg rice from the same amount of land which is insufficient to feed a family for even a month." Smallholders, especially women, in the study area are increasingly interested in vegetable farming. DHOA said, "Vegetable production is the number one agricultural activity for women to make household income." Many participants communicated that they can make instant cash from selling vegetables.

Observing others engaging in HVCCA in and outside of their communities is one of the most prominent factors for participants' decisions to opt for similar activities. Participants have seen their neighbors earning cash from selling vegetables in local markets. This statement is supported by H8A: "I was inspired by couples in my neighborhood who have been producing and selling vegetables. They both have been engaged in vegetable farming. They earned good income. Many villagers have learned from this couple and now are engaged in vegetable production." He added, "I also observed so many kinds of vegetables coming from outside to this district. This provided me a thought that we could produce vegetables locally and sell." He also acknowledged that his wife has some level of knowledge regarding vegetable production from her maternal home which also played a key

⁸ 1 *Ropani* = 0.0509 Hectare. Source: Government of Nepal Ministry of Agricultural Development. 2012/2013. Kathmandu: Department of Agri-Business Promotion and Statistical Information on Nepalese Agriculture.

part for him and his wife to engage in HVCCA. W2A also has the similar experience: “I have travelled in the markets and saw people buying vegetables, for example, cabbages that came from outside the districts. So, thought it would be a good idea to try. Later, NGOs and government also supported.”

Extended family and community motivation are also inspiring factors for many participants to engage in HVCCA. For example, H6D shared, “My father has been doing vegetable farming for quite some time and he is the one who inspired me.” W4A also shared, “I learned from my father. He gave us seeds in the beginning.” Some participants commented about community influence on their decision to engage in HVCCA. For instance, H7A said, “A senior member, uncle, of our community started growing cabbage and cauliflower about 25 years ago. Those days we only used to grow garlic and onion for household consumption. After seeing him growing these vegetables my wife and I also decided to grow.”

Access to road and transportation also have impacts on participants’ decisions about pursuing HVCCA. H7A expressed, “As vehicles started to come to our village, we saw lots of vegetables coming to the local markets from outside. We realized that vegetables can also be grown locally and decided to give a try.” He added, “So, we looked for seeds. Some people from our community were in Kathmandu and we asked them to bring vegetable seeds. That’s how we started.” The impacts of road accessibility on women’s interest for vegetable production is well reported by H3D: “In the beginning, women had to carry vegetables to markets and they did not like it very much. But today they do not have to carry, so they want to grow more. There is a competition for producing more vegetables these days.”

It is also evident that many participants received support and encouragement to engage in HVCCA from government agricultural extension offices and development

organizations. Some officials from agricultural agencies and some non-governmental development organizations have significant impacts on some participants' decisions to engage in vegetable farming. For example, H6A shared, "A lady from an NGO has encouraged and supported my wife a lot for vegetable farming. She helped her to obtain NPR 70,000 loan from the bank to start farming activities." H4A reported that DHOA has personally encouraged him by sending him to Kanchanpur district to attend a one-month training on vegetable farming. H7D has the similar experience regarding external motivation. He detailed, "Initially we used to grow beans but later a person from DAO came and inspired us to grow vegetables." The government officials and NGO representatives promoting HVCCA have played a significant role in motivating smallholder couples to engage in commercial scale vegetable farming. SHO2K said, "I think it is the continued efforts of government agencies and development organizations. Exposure visits to successful vegetable production areas have helped internalize in many women in rural areas that they also can-do vegetable farming." DHOA, in a similar tone, added, "We are very happy. I have worked here 18 years ago and then farmers did not know what a radish is. They had very little or no knowledge about vegetable production. But today many farmers are doing very well."

A few participants were self-motivated. For example, W1A said, "Even without anybody's support, I have been doing vegetable farming for the last 6-7 years." Some were motivated after hearing information about vegetable farming on radio programs, by engaging in farmers groups and farmers field school activities. H8A said, "Although much of the motivation came from seeing others doing vegetable farming, my wife and I were also greatly encouraged listening vegetable farming programs on radio and television." He further

added, “We are also greatly benefitted from being engaged in farmers groups and women’s groups in the community.”

Production start-up and decision-making processes

All the participants communicated that the decision to start vegetable production was thoroughly discussed with their spouses. H7D replied, “Yes, I have discussed with my wife. I proposed that we have some options to earn income to support our family, for example, raising goats, raising buffalo or doing vegetables. But my wife said we should do vegetable farming.” When asked who decided to start vegetable farming W8A reported, “We both. I went to visit to Salyan district and observed that one women’s cooperative was producing tomatoes using 64 plastic tunnels. I immediately thought I can also do the same thing.” H5A has slightly a different view: “Of course, I always discuss vegetable farming ideas with my wife and she listens to me. But sometimes I must tell you that I insist when she does not listen or agree with my ideas.” Highlighting the importance of joint initiatives H8A said, “Of course it was well discussed. We realized that either husband or wife only cannot produce and market vegetables.” Few wives reported that they were the one who first initiated HVCCA in their families. W2A proudly said, “It was my decision. My husband used to advise me for maize production. We tried growing maize in the beginning, but we also started growing cauliflower. My husband said it was a good idea to grow vegetables and he further supported me.” W6A has explained how she motivated her husband to return Nepal from India to engage in vegetable farming. She shared,

“He worked with one of the governments supported program for 17 years in many districts in Nepal. And when he left the job, he did not get any incentives. Then he went to India and he stayed there for 4-5 months. He did not send any money. I asked him what do you do there? He said I work in a

hotel. Then I asked whether you also wash dishes? He said yes. Then I said why do you want to wash other's dishes. I have told him that I have paid all loans we owe and saved NPR 40–45,000 in the bank and told him to return home and he came.”

Her statement reflects many inspiring tales of women's active roles in household economy and overall decision-making processes in the study area. Many husbands are extremely cooperative with their wives and are always willing to listen them. H7D presents an example of mutual understanding between husband and wife: “Yes, I always discuss with my wife about vegetable production and marketing, but whenever my wife disagrees, I would stop doing that work. It will not be a good idea to do alone.”

Land selection and field preparation

Decisions regarding types of land to be used for HVCCA are taken based on good discussions and mutual understanding among husbands and wives. When asked whether he or his wife decide which land to be used for vegetable production, H2A replied, “No, my wife and I discuss about selecting the types of land and kinds of vegetables to be grown. It is not a single decision. We always discuss farming activities together.” He added, “She is my wife and I must listen to her.” Reinforcing H2A's comments, H4A said, “Yes, we always perform things in agreement. Based on the practical knowledge we decide to select the land and types of crops.” Many participants, for example, W1D, W2D, W6D all reported that land selection and field preparation works are jointly performed by husbands and wives. Level of education among participant women is seen as one of the strong factors of increased role in joint decision-making processes at the household level. For example, H3A said, “Although I often discuss many things about farming activities with my madam (wife), I need to make most of the decisions. She is illiterate and does not know much.” W3D statements further

highlights why it is important to have education. She said, “I am illiterate, and I do not know much about the types of land. My husband decides on most things. I contribute in land preparation.” She added, “However, my husband always informs and asks me on any decisions he is going to make about the types of land we are going to select for vegetable production.”

Crop selection

Participant couples described that decisions on crop selection are taken based on mutual understanding between spouses. When asked whether they discuss types of crop selection, W6D shared, “Yes, this is discussed not only with my husband but also among my sons.” However, she also added, “But whenever my husband says I listen to him because he has travelled many places and learned much more than me and he knows more.” When asked if your wife says this year, we should grow eggplant, not okra, would you listen? H5A replied, “Why not? She spends more time in the field but also, she has good knowledge about vegetable production.” H6A also replied, “We both discuss and agree on the crop rotations.” However, H8A has a different opinion: “This is all from my wife. She knows better than me. My wife has learned from her parents. They have always been involved in vegetable farming.” Some women confirmed that they make their own decisions about crop selection. For example, W2A said, “My husband always listens to me. Often, I decide on the kinds of crops to be grown.” W3A expressed her frustration about her husband’s excessive value placed on vegetable production. Although she likes vegetable production, but she wants to grow some cereal crops as well. When asked do you not tell your husband about the types of crops you wish to grow? In a frustrating tone, she replied, “I do. He is a husband. That is part of our discussion; I tell him that I want to grow cereal crops, rice, wheat and finger millet but

he says no, I do not want to give up vegetable production.” She added, “He says even if he fails to make a good production, he will not give up vegetable production.” For W4A, it is all about mutual work. She said, “We both discuss about the land, types of crops we grow. Any work we do we both must be involved. When we make mistakes, we should correct each other. Nothing can be succeeded if husband and wife do not make combined decisions.” In response to the question about when they generally discuss crop selection, H1D replied, “During spare time we both discuss seeds, price of seeds, fertilizer and fertilizer price, availability of the fertilizer in the markets and where and how much we buy and how much profits will we make and so on.”

Purchase and use of fertilizer

Most of the participants reported that purchasing and using fertilizer is a joint decision involving husband and wife. For example, W8D said, “Whoever has free time goes to purchase fertilizer. Sometimes, I go; other times, my husband goes.” H2D said, “My wife and I always discuss. The decisions such as what kinds of fertilizer is to be purchased and used, where to buy and how much to be used needs to be discussed with my wife.” Younger women participants tend to make their own decisions in purchasing fertilizer. For example, W8A and W6A who are in their late twenties and early thirties said they often travel to markets so when they see need, they just buy fertilizer without consulting their husbands.

Some reported that their wives are free to make decisions about purchasing and using fertilizer. H3A said, “Truly, this is my madam who brings fertilizer from market. However, she always discusses the issue with me.” Regarding who decides how much fertilizer needs to be purchased, H8A said, “It is my wife. She has a better idea about fertilizer and she also consults with agricultural officials.” Not all women participants engage in purchasing

fertilizer, especially older women who tend to have very little interest and rely mostly on their husbands. For example, W3D, who is in her sixties, said, “My husband goes to buy fertilizer and brings it in vehicle. We are women. We do not go to markets.”

Even if it is husbands who purchase fertilizer, they often consult their wives about the required quantity and types of fertilizer. For example, H5D said, “I buy fertilizer, but this is always discussed with my wife, especially the types and quantity required.” H5D’s comments are confirmed by his wife. W5D said, “Usually, my husband goes to markets. But I can also go. My husband does not tell me not to go to markets. Whoever goes to market brings fertilizer.” When asked how he feels if his wife goes to market to buy fertilizer, H5A replied, “I feel great. It is good for her to go to market. It is helpful to me.” Most husbands communicated that they encourage their wives to travel to markets.

Many participants reported that they mostly use compost fertilizer, but they also use some level of chemical fertilizer. Urea, Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Murate of Potash (MOP) are common fertilizers used by the participants. Some farmers do not even know the names of the chemical fertilizers they purchase in the markets. H2A shared his experience about fertilizer in this manner: “We mostly use compost but also some chemical. I have used some chemical fertilizer from markets, but I do not know the name.” H3A said, “Except urea, I do not use other chemical fertilizer. I use all compost fertilizer. I have bulls, buffalos, and goats for fertilizer. I also use goat manure as fertilizer. But I must confess that I must use urea.” Some farmers are understanding the negative consequences of chemical fertilizer. For example, H7A reported, “We use compost mostly. Chemical fertilizer is good only for short term. But compost fertilizer is good for two years. So, we raise buffalos to make compost fertilizer.” Highlighting the importance of raising animals for compost

fertilizer, H3A commented, “I think vegetable farming is very impaired without raising animals. They go together if success to be achieved.” However, some say they cannot grow hybrid vegetables without using chemical fertilizer. Some still see value in using chemical fertilizer. For instance, W7A said, “We use chemical fertilizer because cauliflower cannot be grown without it.” In a similar notion, H2D also reported that “the hybrid seeds are always susceptible to insects and diseases. So, we need to use some chemical fertilizer. This is also recommended by the district agriculture officers. They have tested our soil quality.” Most of the participants reported the decision about what kinds of fertilizers to use and purchase is a mutual decision between husband and wife.

However, some husbands reported that they make their own decisions. H6D said, “Mostly I tell my wife but not always. Sometimes I buy fertilizer without consulting with my wife. I assess the situation about the kind of fertilizer needed.” H7D expressed the similar thoughts. He said, “I decide how much and what kinds of chemical fertilizer to be purchased. My wife always insists me for compost fertilizers. My daughters-in-law and sons prefer chemical fertilizer as it has impact on the timing of the harvest. Chemical fertilizer makes vegetable get ready faster.”

In recent years, training programs have big influence on participants’ perceptions about using compost fertilizer. H6A said, “I only use compost fertilizer. I have never used any chemical fertilizer. I have learned through training to make compost fertilizer.” W2A said, “We use mostly compost fertilizer. The NGO people also suggested some organic fertilizer that is available in the markets.” Perceptions about chemical fertilizer are changing. NGO1D said, “Initially, farmers were using compost fertilizer. But then they used chemical fertilizer. Now they have realized that chemical fertilizer destroys their land, so even if we

tell them to use some level of chemical fertilizer most refuse it.” SDAOD said, “The use of compost fertilizer has increased in recent years. Farmers are discouraged to use chemical fertilizer.” During the data collection, we observed many improved compost pits in study participants’ homes. In one community in Dadeldhura, we have also observed participants taking part in training programs mainly demonstration activities to prepare compost fertilizer. The program was collaboratively initiated by the district agriculture office and a development organization.

Harvesting

Participants reported that harvesting vegetables is performed based on mutual understanding between husband and wives. For many participants, there are no set standard days for harvesting vegetables. Participants reported that they regularly visit the farm field for weeding and watering and whoever first sees that vegetables are ready to harvest reports that to their spouses. Through observation, most participants know when vegetables are ready to harvest. W2A said, “I observe vegetables regularly. For example, cauliflowers can be seen ready for harvest. Cabbages also can be seen when they are ready to harvest.” W5D also said, “We know from the observation and experience that vegetables are ready to harvest.” H1A shared his experience: “I heard potato is ready within 90 to 120 days. But also, I understand that potato leaves turn yellow when harvest time comes.” Some participants understand the optimal harvesting times well. For example, H5A said, “I have good experience and I know when the vegetables will be ready to harvest. I have been producing vegetables for a long time. I also remember the date I have planted the vegetables.” H3D said, “You can see some of the leaves of the vegetables start withering and they get yellowish. Cauliflower can be seen when it is ready. Cabbages look more solid when they are ready. So, these are the ways

we know whether crops are ready for harvest.” H5D said, “We do not plant local variety anymore. These are all hybrid and it is written in how many days vegetables are going to be ready. Also, vegetables that are ready to harvest can be seen.”

Some participants have received training and are aware when their vegetables are ready to harvest. H3A said, “I have received training from agriculture officers and I follow those rules. For example, generally, in 60 to 90 days vegetables are ready to harvest depending on their types.” Reinforcing H3A’s notion, H2D also said that the training he received about vegetables is helpful to know precisely when they get ready for harvest. He added, “Some are well defined and some we know from observation.”

Traveling and selling vegetables

For many female participants, there is no restriction on traveling to markets to sell vegetables. Some say their husbands always encourage them to travel. Many participant couples reported that they thoroughly discuss selling vegetables with their spouses. Discussions are often focused on current market prices, fixing tentative rates for their products, who goes to sell and where to sell. Participants’ descriptions about traveling to markets and selling vegetables are very similar, yet there are variations among their responses. Participants’ main goal, however, is to maximize profits.

When asked about decision-making processes regarding traveling and selling vegetables, W8D replied, “My husband and I discuss and decide how much and where to sell.” H1D shared, “We both decide. We both discuss and see whether we make more profit by selling in the markets or in the village. The decisions are taken based on the benefits we get.” In a similar notion, H6A shared his experience: “We both discuss and sell them in agreement. We both take vegetables to markets. Sometimes we carry, sometimes we hire

vehicles to transport. We make all decisions together.” W6A replied, “Yes, we always discuss together. This morning my husband said you go to sell vegetables and I will take care about goats. So, I am going to take vegetables to markets in a while.”

Regarding the question about who goes to markets, most participants said the decisions are taken based on the family’s priorities. For example, H8D replied, “My wife and I decide where and how to sell vegetables. Because children are small, I proposed that we should sell vegetables in a nearby village. My wife agreed, and we sell vegetables in the local markets.” W1D shared, “We both go, but generally I send my husband as I need to take care of children and other household chores. We have a fixed vendor in the market.” W8D stated that “generally it is my husband who travels to markets. But we also send with neighbors. I went very rarely because I had some other domestic works and duty for rearing small children.” Some argue that most women do not go to markets to sell vegetables. They say that mostly women whose husbands are not home or are educated travel to markets. For instance, W5D’s notion supplements the argument. She said, “Some women who are educated and women whose husbands are out of the village go to markets. But most women do not go.” W5D’s comments are further supported by W6D. She said, “My husband goes more often. When my husband is not home, I go.” She added, “I have many other priorities at home, for example taking care of animals, so I stay home.” She also confirmed that her husband does not discourage or restrict her travel to markets.

Not all women take part in discussion about selling vegetables. W3D said, “I do not know anything about selling vegetables. My husband is the ⁹*Malik* of the house. He deals

⁹ The literal translation of *Malik* is ‘boss.’ But *Malik* here refers to powerlessness or submissiveness to husband. Challenging husband’s decisions or engaging in decision-making without his will is disrespectful. During the study period, I observed that the submissiveness to husbands is still widely practiced by older women such as W3D.

with everything.” She also said, “No women from our community goes to market to sell vegetables. It is all men. If there is no male member in the family, a male member from the neighborhood can take her vegetables to the markets and bring income to her.” But her statement about no women from her community going to the market is not true. During data collection, I observed young women from her community travelling to markets to sell vegetables.

Some women are independently engaged in selling vegetables. For example, W4D said, “I sell vegetables. I keep the recording and I maintain track of vegetable selling, how much money I get this year and so on. This helps analyze production and income.” When asked whether her husband feels bad when she decides by herself, she replied, “No, my husband does not mind.” Most women are free to travel to markets to sell vegetables.

When asked whether he will let his wife travel to market alone to sell vegetables, H1D replied, “Of course. I encourage her to travel to markets because when she goes to markets to sell vegetables, she saves all the money. I do not.” On a similar notion, H7A responded, “When I go to markets to sell vegetables, I spent money on various unproductive stuffs, but my wife brings whatever income she earns.” H2A described his experiences in this manner: “No problem at all. In fact, I encourage my wife to go sell vegetables in the markets. She has better knowledge than me. She has received trainings.” But he also recognized some level of restrictions on women’s movements to markets. He commented, “Not everyone in his community would allow their wives to travel markets.” However, the participants in FGD3A said, “We still ask our husbands, but we are very free to travel to markets these days. People appreciate women who sell/engage in vegetable farming.”

Some participants reported that they also include their children in decision-making processes to sell vegetables. For example, H4A said, “My son, me and my wife all discuss about selling vegetables. My son and I travel to far and bigger markets. But my wife goes only markets closer to home.” When asked why his wife does not travel to towns away from home, H4A replied, “My wife is illiterate, and she does not feel comfortable travelling to bigger towns.” H3A also made similar comments. He said, “I wish my wife travels to markets and sell vegetables, but since she is illiterate, she does not know how to calculate; also, she has difficulty recognizing currency denomination. His wife, W3A, confirmed his comments in this manner: “If we were educated, we would go to the markets. We do not know how to deal things in the markets.”

In the past, there was a price variation when women took vegetables to the markets. The participants in FGD2D said, “Women used to receive less price compare to men in the past but today there is nothing like that. I think we know how to calculate.” W1D and W4D also asserted that there is no price variation regardless of the person selling vegetables in the markets these days.

Keeping income

Husbands described that keeping income with their wives is a better idea because wives only spend it on the family’s well-being. For example, H1A said, “Mostly my Madam (wife) keeps money. If I need, I ask Madam. Sometimes I do not have even NPR 10 in my pocket and ask her.” H2A shared, “My wife keeps all the income because she spends money on household consumption: food, children’s education, and so on. But we as men, tend to spend money on unproductive things such as alcohol, cigarettes and sometimes even playing cards.” H5A replied, “All the income is with my wife. She spends money for family’s

wellbeing and anything she spends she informs me.” H8D said, “My wife keeps all the income. She is the boss of the family. We as men tend to spend money in the markets with friends. It is safe to give to my wife. I am happy that my wife keeps income.”

Most of the wives also shared that their husbands willfully ask them to keep the incomes. For instance, W2A shared, “I keep the money. I buy things needed for household. I also give money to my husband. He also needs money. My husband always listens to me. He has never taken money from me against my will. He never interferes.” W7D proclaimed, “I keep the income. You know women are considered as *Laxmi* [Goddess of wealth] so, I must keep the income with me.” She suggested that it is always auspicious for women to hold the money in the family.

Some participants prefer to give income to their parents, especially if they live in a joint family. H6A said, “Income is always given to my parents. But my wife and I always can take money whenever we need. They have raised us, and we should trust them. My wife respects my parents more than I do.” W8A said, “Mostly, I keep the income, but my mother-in-law also keeps some money. We have a very good understanding.”

Lately, some women are more organized as they keep records of the day-to-day income. H4A said, “There are three to four women in my community who keep the record of the income. Women today know how to make efficient record keeping. For example, how much I earned in a month or in a year. In my family, my wife and I also keep general record of the income.” W5A said, “We both keep income. Generally, we save the money coming from vegetables. We keep the record of the income. We also keep the record of spending.”

Even though women keep income, some of them may not necessarily hold full authority over it. W7A said, “Although I always keep the income, whenever my husband has

need, I will have to give him.” Participants in FGD2D also have the similar experience. They all expressed, “We keep money in our control, but we give it to our husbands when they ask.” Some suggested that their husbands ask money to drink alcohol. W7A and FGD2D’s comments are reinforced by H7D. He said, “I know some husbands wants to keep income with them and most of these men consume alcohol. These are the men who may give income to their wives but later they persuade them to give it back.” Some women communicated that sometimes they find themselves helpless when their husbands want to take income.

Some husbands encourage their wives to open bank accounts. For example, H7D communicated, “All the money is kept by my wife. I spend money on unnecessary things. My wife has a saving account in the bank and we keep income in the bank. W8A also shared, “My husband does not have an account in the bank, so whatever he earns he gives to me and I keep it. My husband always trusts me.”

Some husbands take income themselves. H2D said, “I inform how much we earned to my wife. but since I have taken loan and invested in vegetable production activities including buying land, building home and so on, I keep the money.” He added, “I do not see great logic in giving income to my wife because the income is further invested to better our family’s economic wellbeing. But all these activities are done in consultation with my wife.” H3D said, “My wife does not keep anything. Since she is illiterate, she cannot even handle NPR 10 to 20. Even if I tell her to keep money she refuses.” W3D said, “My husband keeps all the income. I am an uneducated person. He runs the family. My husband brings everything we need. When I need money, he gives me. I never thought of keeping money with me.”

Some reported that they keep the income together. H5D said, “We both have equal access to income. We discuss how much money is earned in a day. The money is kept at home and we can use whenever it is needed for the family’s wellbeing.” H6D echoed that.

Household expenditure

Many participant couples regularly discuss household expenditures and make decisions based on mutual understandings. As discussed in the *Keeping Income* heading, husbands describe their wives as rational spenders of income. They spend money on household needs, for example food, clothes, children’s schooling, marriages and other ritual performances. On the other hand, some husbands spend money on unproductive and harmful substances such as alcohol and tobacco. Husbands also shared that they spend money on playing cards. H1A described his experiences in this manner: “While my wife spends money on every day basic household needs, I tend to buy alcohol not only for me but also for my friends. And, I also spend money on playing cards.” He added, “My wife always shares with me whatever expenses she makes. I generally do not share about the petty expenditure I make.” H8A said, “Women are much better in keeping income. She is using money for family consumption only. No unnecessary expenditure. But If I keep the income I spend on unnecessary products.”

H3A shared, “My wife does not spend money without asking me. She does not even buy a piece of candy. I really trust her. But sometimes, I do not ask her when I buy things even if they are for household consumption.” Not all husbands are irrational spenders. For example, H4A said, “I do not have unnecessary expenditures. My wife knows about my daily expenditure and she gives to me. My wife and I have an absolute agreement in everything we do. We both have great trust for each other.” He added, “Sometimes my wife spends money

on necessary items for example clothes and foods without consulting to me but that applies for me as well.”

W1A said, “Even if I spend NPR 5, I always share with my husband. My husband also always tells me how he spends money. We always have good discussions about spending income. My husband always trusts when I spend income.” She also added, “When I give him money I only give based on the absolute need.” In a similar way, W7D shared, “I keep the money and I only give money to my husband and other family members when they intend to spend money on household needs.” W7A said, “We do not spend money like men. We spend money for family wellbeing only. Maybe sometimes we buy clothes and jewelry.” Frustrated with her husband’s bad habit, she added, “Sometimes my husband spends money on alcohol. There is no male in this village who does not drink alcohol. I wish he does not spend money on alcohol, but he does anyways.”

Some of the FGD participants shared that they provide money to their husbands despite knowing that money was going to be used for alcohol. A participant in FGD2D said, “Sometimes we have to give money to husbands although we know that they are going to spend it on alcohol. Because we need them to work in the farm.” However, most husbands do not drink alcohol, nor do they spend money on unnecessary things. For example, H1D, H4D, and H5D claimed that they never drank alcohol. Some husbands often seek their wives’ approval before spending money, even on household items.

About whether his wife asks him when she makes personal spending decisions, H4D replied, “Yes, sometimes she asks. But I do not feel bad if she does not ask. They also have right to make their own expenditures.” Many husbands have full confidence in their wives’ spending decisions. For example, H5D said, “I am confident that my wife does not spend

money on unnecessary stuffs.” H6D said, “There is no extra expenditure other than household expenditure for my wife.” He continued, “She asks me when she buys clothes and jewelry; however, I do not ask when I buy the same things for me, which is bad. I should always inform her.” H8D said, “No problem if she wishes to spend money. If she asks, I will never say no. Whatever she wishes, I am happy to buy for her. She also does the same thing for me. Never opposes.”

Some women reported that their husbands take charge of household income, but they also said that they ask them before spending money on various activities. They also reported whenever they need money, their husbands provide. For example, W6D described the situation in this manner: “If I need money for some reason, I ask my husband and he always provides me. He makes most of the household expenditures. If he is not home, I also spend on household needs. But it is mostly my husband.” When asked who spends more money, W6D replied, “Obviously, it is my husband. He goes to markets. Women stay home and there is no expenditure for them.” Reinforcing W6D, W8D also replied, “Of course it is my husband who spend more money. But whenever I need, he gives me money. He brings whatever we need in the family.”

Future investment

Couples thoroughly discuss major future investments, for example, buying bulls, water buffalos, land and building new homes. Children’s wedding and sending children for further studies in major cities are also discussed. Purchasing gold jewelry is seen as future investment which is also discussed together. Most of the wives expressed that they have full participation in all these major decisions. When asked whether she engages in future investment discussions with her husband, W4D expressed her experience: “Yes, my husband

and I always discuss about the future investments. Sometimes I take money from women's saving groups that I am member with and give it to my husband, if needed. We always use the money for good." W6A also shared, "My husband and I always discuss about buying more land for vegetable farming. We also discussed about goat keeping so that we have more compost fertilizer for vegetable production. Further, we discuss about buying land in Dhangadhi." W1A said, "My husband and I decided to take some loan and build new home. We plan to increase vegetable production activities and pay loans. Mostly my husband and I discuss future investments and plan during bed times." W1D said, "Even if we have to take loan from the bank, my husband and I always discuss together. If I say that we should not take loan, he would always agree with me. We have better understanding on all our activities." She added, "We also discuss future plans and activities with my father-in-law." W8D also said, "If we need to take loan or buy some bigger things, we discuss but we do not discuss petty issues." H5D said, "Anything big is always discussed between me and my wife. For example, children's marriage, buying bulls, building a home etc." H3A said, "Besides my wife, I also consult my father and mother about future investments. It is important to have parents' suggestions." Almost all participants reported that all future investment plans and major issues are always discussed between husbands and wives.

Internal extension support system

Study participants reported that internal extension support systems have very positive impacts on women's decision-making processes and enhancing overall vegetable farming activities. Further, many participants reported that these support systems often provide much needed counselling and guidance to women engaged in HVCCA. Based on participants'

responses, under internal support system sub-themes three main headings emerged: *farmers groups, women farmers groups, women's saving and credit groups.*

Farmers group

Many farmers are organized in groups. Some farmers groups have male and female members and women are also included in leadership roles. In fact, government agencies and development organizations have made it mandatory provision to have 50 percent women in all kinds of group activities to implement the development programs. Many participants reported that they often work together to achieve better income from vegetable production. H1D said, "Yes, I am a member of a farmer's group. The group facilitates and utilizes funding received from government agencies and development organizations. Every month we also collect NPR 50 per person as part of mandatory saving activities." He added, "To accomplish bigger projects such as irrigation canal we always work together as a group." H8A said, "Since seeds are expensive, we discuss among group members and purchase collectively. We also buy tents for tomato farming in group." H3D shared his experience being with farmers groups in this manner: "Farmers group in my community meets every Saturday and they discuss about the kinds of seeds to purchase, types of vegetables to grow, use of fertilizer, and so on, and such meetings are very helpful." He added, "Decisions are made collectively and in agreement." H7A is also associated with a farmers group. His group is mixed, having male and female members. He shared, "Being in a farmers group is a big support as he receives various kinds of technical support, information sharing, trainings, improved variety of seeds and insecticides." However, he also said that the group does not provide enough seeds for planting. He is also concerned that exposure trainings are often grabbed by a select few men or women in his community. He expressed his frustration this

way: “We raised voice that one person should not have repeated chance for trainings, but it happens anyway.” His assessments about support systems reflects that there is a bias concerning who benefits from external support within the community.

Women’s farmers groups

In the recent past, government and development agencies have started positive discrimination programs in favor of women. This has led to forming women only farmers groups. Many participants of this study reported that they are actively engaged in many kinds of women’s groups in their community. Participants expressed having women only farmers groups are helpful to share many issues related HVCCA. However, women are not limited to farmers groups. They are members of many other women’s groups in their communities. This statement is well reflected in W2A’s response. She shared, “I am a member of a mother’s group, women farmer’s group and a community health volunteer.” She added, “During the meetings we exchange many ideas, for example, sharing training experiences, travel arrangements, moral support and guidance for women traveling outside the village, health, agriculture and other social work-related issues.” W2A’s accounts of women’s group association is further recognized by W4D. She said, “We have great cooperation among sisters (women). We work in everyone’s farm if needed. We are together.” She added, “We discuss about enhancing vegetable production. For example, if I have better production, I share others why it has become better. We also share ideas about controlling insects and diseases. All women in our group are very cooperative and active.” According to H1D, “Women’s groups are very helpful in knowledge sharing about vegetable production and markets. These initiatives are very supportive, especially for beginners.” He added, “When women need to go out of the villages, women’s groups use their connections and networks

and facilitate such programs. They also provide encouragement, counselling, and guidance to women, particularly the new comers.”

Many participants acknowledged that women farmers groups indeed encourage fellow women to save income, arrange exposure visits and trainings for women farmers, and provide moral support. Members of the women farmers groups also take initiatives to convince husbands to allow their wives to travel to markets to sell vegetables and attend trainings. This situation is best described by participants in FGD3D: “Many husbands allow their wives to travel to markets and participate in trainings these days. Those who do not allow, we meet them and explain the importance of women engaging in these activities. Most husbands accept our suggestions and allow their wives to travel.”

But not everyone speaks positively about women’s groups. When asked whether women indeed share training experiences during group meetings, W7D said, “Yes they share only if I ask. Actually, if everyone in the community knows that they have been to trainings, then they share; otherwise they do not.” One of the FGD1A participants expressed her frustration in this manner: “Just one person went for a training, but she did not share much about her experience. I am disappointed about her not sharing things she learned from the exposure visit about vegetable production. She just said that we visited these many districts.” Some women do not have very positive views about women’s groups. In fact, W7A has a very negative experience with the group. She said, “No I am not associated with any kinds of women’s groups. Whoever is there takes the opportunity. They provide some seeds; it is very little. Sometimes they also provide fertilizer, but I have not got anything out of it.” For some, they are not even aware of the types of groups to which they belong. This situation is best mirrored in W2D’s response: “Yes, I am a member of women’s group. But I do not know

what kinds of groups I am with.” It is possible that many women in the community were just picked by their relatives or friends without their consent so that the family can access training, material inputs or finance.

In many communities, women’s groups are often formed when a new program intervention begins in the community. When these programs are phased out, those groups often become non-functional. W5D explains this situation in this manner:

“I think there was one women’s group formed to utilize an NGO supported programs. The NGO used to channel funding through the group for the project implementation, for example irrigation canal upgrading and maintaining. But I am not sure about the current state of the group now. I do not think it is functioning.”

However, W1D has a contrasting view. She said, “An NGO formed women’s group and I was a member of the group. The program is phased out, but the group is still existing and functioning, and we continue to use it for saving and credits purpose.” In some communities, there are no women farmer groups. W6D lamented that there are no women farmers groups in her community. She shared, “Most of the women in my village are uneducated.” Maybe only two to four women are educated. Although we talked about forming the group a long time back; it has not been initialized yet.”

Many husbands are highly supportive of their wives’ engagements in group activities. For example, H5A said, “My wife is a member of the women’s group. Women’s groups are beneficial. If there is any program from NGOs or government, they get equal benefits, for example, seeds and exposure trainings and so on.” H5A’s statement is further supported by H8A. He said, “Women’s groups are very active. They run cooperatives. My wife is a member of the women’s group. If we need money for further investments in vegetable production, we can get loan from women’s group instantly.” W3A also asserts, “They ask us

money every month as part of saving activities. They provide loans to group members at a low interest rate.” W8D said, “It is easier to receive program and funding support through a women’s group. Women’s farmers group receive heavy subsidies for agricultural activities.” DHOA confirms this statement. He said, “We encourage women to organize in groups and get more subsidies in various agriculture related programs. Government has allocated many subsidy programs for women farmers.”

Women’s saving and credits

There are many women led cooperatives in the study area. These cooperatives are mostly initiated by national and international non-governmental organizations. WDOD said, “We provide various kinds of trainings, for example, basic trainings on savings and credits, group formation for collective action.” She continued, “The activities are also focused on women’s empowerment and these women empowerment programs are mainly focused on leadership skills; we encourage them to come together.” The cooperatives are instrumental not only for saving and credits but also for cementing women’s collective voices. The participants in FGD3D told that one of the INGOs has provided some logistic support and trainings to bring scattered women’s groups in the village and facilitated registration of saving and credit cooperatives. Since its inception, the cooperative has enrolled hundreds of women and it continues to grow. The current state of cooperatives is best described by one of the FGD3D participants: “We started with 25 members, but we have more than 600 now. The initial money was NPR 12,000, but now we have a total of NPR 4,000,000 cash.” She added, “Our cooperatives encourage smallholder farmers, especially women, to save money and further invest in vegetable production and other household needs.”

Acknowledging the remarkable work that cooperatives are doing in the communities, H2D described his experience in this manner: “Cooperatives are encouraging farmers, especially women farmers, to save money, have crop and animal insurance and they are providing easy loans for agriculture related infrastructure development.” Women can deal with all types of record keepings for saving credit activities. FGD3D said, “There are no male members in the group. We do not trust male members. They drink alcohol.” They added, “We have never experienced a situation where cooperative members did not pay the loan back.” However, they expressed their concern about the safety of having a large amount of cash money on hand. Participants in FGD3D expressed their concerns in this manner: “We worry that some people will steal our money. The bank is too far, and people here need money on daily basis. Money rotates a lot. If we could complete the under-construction building for cooperatives, it will be very helpful.”

External extension support system

Many study participants recognized that external extension support system has played a key role in advancing HVCCA in their communities. Under the external extension support systems sub-theme, two main headings emerged: *government agency support systems and development organization support systems*.

Government agency support systems

Commercializing vegetable farming in the research areas is one of the major priorities of the government. ACDOA best highlighted this statement. He said, “The government is providing huge subsidies to vegetables growers. Farmers, especially women, can get up to 75 percent subsidies to purchase modern equipment. But only about 5 percent women are engaged in vegetable production.” He added, “Every program intervention is targeting 60

percent women to 40 percent men ratio.” In similar notion, DHOA said, “We have lead women farmers training programs. These trainings are between 3 to 7 days and are intended to enhance and promote vegetable production activities in the district.” He added, “To make sure that women participants attend the trainings, we reach to the families and try to convince them.” When asked how successful he thinks the government support systems are, he replied, “If we compare to the investment the government and donor community made in agricultural activities, I am not satisfied, but if you look at the amount of vegetables people are producing and eating in this district today it is incredible.” SADOA disagrees with ACDOA’s comments that only 5 percent of women are engaged in vegetable farming. He continued, “While there are no accurate data on the percentage of women involved in vegetable production in the district, it is safe to say that among the support seekers approximately 90 percent are women vegetable producers.” He added, “It tells that there are many more women engaged in vegetable farming in the district.”

District offices organize farmers field schools with demonstration farms for vegetable producers. Participants reported that they have learned many new ideas on vegetable production through these demonstration farms. W1D and H1A both agree that demonstration farms are very helpful as they continue to learn things about vegetable farming. However, DHOA said, “These activities are not very successful in motivating and convincing mass population of the farmers.” He added, “Although the government has introduced insurance policy against vegetable crop loss, many farmers are not willing to take risk and are more comfortable with growing cereal crops over vegetables.” He asserted that exposure visits have been very motivational for vegetable producers. However, he also warned these

opportunities are often taken by males. He did affirm that “those who have taken subsidies for vegetable production are doing exceptionally well.”

The government is also focused on engaging men in household activities that includes vegetable production and marketing. WDOA said, “Initially we launched programs for women only, but we realized that engaging only women was not effective. So, when we initiate trainings, that engages men as well.” She added, “We cluster women’s and men’s work in mixed training groups. These programs helped men realize that they were contributing very little to family. Some husbands have confessed their mistakes and ask their wives for forgiveness.” However, WDOD said, “If we conduct training programs for men and women together, women cannot speak so, we have to initiate separate programs for men.” She also said based on the needs, her office often encourages communities to design their own training programs. “This is more effective”, she added. WDOD further said, “Not all the farmers are committed to supportive programs. However, if people find new programs that are more attractive, especially if they see monetary value, they leave the ongoing programs. This is a big challenge.”

Some key informants suggest that the subsidy programs are not reaching the designated beneficiaries. KIFGDK participant said, “Although the government has many subsidies in the name of farmers, especially for women farmers, these farmers themselves are not aware of those programs. Even if they know, they do not know how these subsidies can be obtained.” UNK reinforced KIFGDK’s observation. She said, “The subsidies and other programs that are meant for women are not reaching women or they are not aware. Also, the Ministry of Agriculture does not know the exact situation of women in the villages.” She

added, “It seems the government is not aware of the rural women’s financial situation; otherwise, how can they expect women to contribute NPR 50,000 to obtain subsidies?”

However, many study participants reported that they have received many types of supportive programs from government. For example, W6A, W8A, and W2D confirmed that government support, especially the role of district agriculture officers, is very important in advancing vegetable production and marketing activities. H3A confirmed that he received great support from the district agriculture office, especially skill development trainings on vegetable farming. However, he expressed frustration and lamented that government officials have asked his political affiliation as a precondition for receiving support. He said,

“You know, I must tell you that it is very difficult to get support as an independent farmer. I mean one must affiliate to some political party to get even government support. They ask to which party you belong. Political party cadres track everyone when they receive subsidies from the government. Some people in his community forced him to be a member of a political party. It is bad that people like us who raise animals and live on farm products are forced to carry party flags.”

It is not only that government officials ask people’s affiliation. They are also very slow at times, and he indicated that officials were deliberately delaying work. H1A shared his deep frustration about the slow process at the district agriculture office. He said,

“I have been going to the agriculture office often. The agriculture office gave me one steel/iron tunnel. They told me that I needed to pay NPR 15,000 and I was ready for it. Although the tunnel is of a low quality with rusts, I gave the money. But later I was told to pay a total of NPR 50,000. They told me the total cost of the tunnel was NPR 110,000. It was very confusing. I think they were looking for commission. If we do not pay commission, we cannot work.”

H1A accounts of experience in dealing with government offices suggests that corruption is one of the major problems in government support system. Farmers from far

flung areas often travel days to reach district headquarters and they expect government officials to deliver service on time and without hassles.

Development organization support systems

Participants shared positive as well as negative views about development organizations and their programs in their communities. Many participants have, however, acknowledged that it was the tireless efforts put forth by a few development organizations that inspired them to engage in vegetable farming activities. For example, H4A and H3D, who are among the early starters of vegetable production, greatly appreciate the training and seed support they received from the NGOs. They acknowledge because of these NGOs they started growing vegetables. For example, W8A shared, “One of the development organizations have provided me an exposure visit to Salyan district. The organization has also provided trainings on preparing nurseries and growing vegetables. These activities really enhanced my ability to grow vegetables.” H1D also shared his experience about support he received from a development organization in this manner: “An NGO provided trainings on managing seed nursery to vegetable producers in my community. It has also provided NPR 150,000 which is utilized to improve irrigation canal.” He added, “Another NGO provided 50 percent subsidies in materials such as water tanks and other agriculture equipment.” He continued, “However, it also asked us to contribute 50 percent to purchase the equipment.”

When asked what types of activities his office was conducting currently, INGO2A described in this way: “Our activities are focused on providing plastic tunnel houses, constructing micro irrigation projects and conducting demonstration farms in the communities.” He added, “Further, we also support improved seeds. Approximately over 70 percent of participants in our programs are women farmers. We encourage women to form

women farmers groups.” INGOD said his office activities are focused on women’s group formation and cooperatives movements. He explained,

“Our projects are focused on cooperatives and our beneficiaries are mostly women. We form program users’ groups and around 75 percent are women. Nearly 80 percent of shareholders are women in these cooperatives and they are in leadership positions. Most women engaged in cooperatives do not get any capital. All the money is generated from the women themselves. Our role is just to provide capacity building trainings to them.”

NGO1D said that their programs largely cover three categories of agricultural programs: individuals, groups, cooperatives, processing and marketing. INGO1A said the programs they are implementing are mostly focused on identifying model farmers. He added, “These model farmers are further trained and encouraged to engage in various types of cash crop activities.” He added, “The selection criteria for model farmer was based on the farmers interest, their entrepreneurial skills, and commitment for cash crop activities.” The programs implemented by various development organizations not only help increase household income but also provide venues for women to come together and exchange knowledge and ideas.

The development organizations are careful not to create economic dependency among farmers. For example, NGO1D said, “Generally, we provide 65 percent of project costs and 35 percent is collected from the community.” Participants’ contribution is intended to create ownership of the programs, and this modality has been reported to be successful. However, some farmers reported that contribution money sometime is too high, and they fail to contribute.

When asked about the measures applied to help illiterate women to have equal participation in the programs, NGO1D said, “We deliberately intend to form mixed groups,

educated and illiterate women. We believe that they both learn from each other. Educated women can teach illiterate women. This helps empower women that are behind.”

About the issue of specific programs for women farmers, NGO2D said, “We are advocating for women friendly technology transfer, for example, weeding machines and hand tillers.” During our interactions, a few women reported that they had received hand tillers but had not yet received weeding machines.

On women’s empowerment and advocacy issues, NGO2D said, “We are focusing on bringing women together through various advocacy programs and cooperatives.” He added, “We continue to encourage women to organize in groups, take leadership roles and work collectively.” When asked about the inclusiveness of all the participants in support programs, NGO3D said, “For disadvantaged and marginalized people (category one) we give 100 percent grant. For the rest, we provide about 50 to 65 percent funding. Some women farmers qualify for 100 percent grant.” He added, “We implement positive discrimination about gender, ethnicity and marginalized people. This has greatly contributed towards women’s leadership roles in programs and access to trainings and exposure visits and these activities have ultimately contributed to women’s empowerment.” INGOK said, “We focused on reflex circle where women could come together and learn many decision-making skills—for example, who should have land rights, how to make better decisions and some functional literacy programs.”

However, not all participants are happy with development organizations’ support systems. During the FGDs, some participants expressed frustration about false promises that some of the development organizations made. For example, one of the participants in FGD1A expressed her frustration in this manner:

“Well, they came to us, convinced us to grow more vegetables. They promised us to buy everything we produce. I had to convince my father-in-law

and other family members to grow more vegetables. My family was not happy about my idea of scaling vegetable production. But I insisted and scaled up. Mainly, I planted cabbage. But despite repeated promises, they did not help me to sell. Most of the cabbage was rotten and damaged. I had to face harsh criticism from my family, particularly my father-in-law was very angry with me. Because of this incident I lost my credibility.”

Another participant in FGD1A lamented: “During the program phase, they seem to be very cooperative, they provide tents and other necessary support. But after the project is phased out, they leave, and they do not care about us and do not help sell our products despite their commitments.” Some governmental officials also did not appreciate development organizations’ work. ACDOA, for example, said, “We have many NGOs and INGOs working in the district. Their programs are not very effective. Most of their programs are limited to formality. They only seek popularity.”

Participants of the FGD2D said, “INGO helped to rehabilitate an irrigation canal. They have also supported plastic tunnels. However, not everyone received support from this project.” These statements are supported by the views of W8D: “Yes. Some agencies have provided plastic drums and other support, but my husband and I were in hospital as my son was sick, so I missed that opportunity.” The situation reflects some bias in program support. H1A is highly critical of development organization supported programs. He said, “I tell you, in fact, NGOs/INGOs have spoiled people as they provide money as incentives for attending trainings. More than learning, people are interested in daily attendance for cash incentives.”

Summary

These findings are based primarily on analysis of in-depth interviews with participants, key informant interviews, and focus group discussion transcripts. Further, findings are supported by reviewed documents and field observations throughout the period

of data collection. The study findings suggest five main themes. In this chapter, I have presented information only for Theme 1—‘factors that enable women’s empowerment in household decision-making processes in HVCCA.’ The theme is organized and discussed in three sub-themes: decision-making processes, internal extension support system and external extension support system. Based on the participants’ responses, these sub-themes were further organized under many headings. For example, under sub-theme ‘decision-making processes,’ ten specific headings were presented and discussed: economic needs and coping strategy; motivation to engage in vegetable farming; production start-up and decision-making processes; land selection; and field preparation; crop selection; purchase and use of fertilizer; harvesting; traveling and selling vegetables; keeping income; household expenditures; and future investment.

These sub-headings detailed how micro level household decision-making processes involving husbands and wives regarding HVCCA are evolving. Most participants take HVCCA as central to their household strategy to earn income, supporting their family’s basic needs and averting extreme poverty. Seeing others doing vegetable farming and earning income, extension support and trainings, travel exposure, and access to road networks are among the factors that influence couples to engage in vegetable farming. Many couples reported that every major decision (e.g., engaging in vegetable production, farm activities, vegetable selling strategies and future investments) are conducted jointly and with mutual understanding. In most cases, women engaged in vegetable farming are free to travel to markets and to make expenditures. Although almost all wives report every single expenditure, husbands expressed that they have no objection if their wives make personal expenditures without asking them. Many husbands also report most of their expenditures to

their wives. Income is mostly managed by wives. Husbands encourage their wives to keep income, citing them as responsible and rational spenders. FGD participants, women's group members and key informants (officers in government agencies and development organizations) reported that they have observed women's increased roles in decision-making processes in HVCCA.

Under the 'internal extension support system' sub-theme, data focused on three main headings: farmers groups, women farmers groups, women's savings and credit groups. Many participants reported that collective actions through farmers groups are extremely helpful in countering negative cultural practices, sharing knowledge and resources, and accessing and utilizing external funding. Specifically, women's saving and credit groups are instrumental in encouraging mandatory savings. Under the 'external extension support system,' data focused on two main headings: government agency support system and development organization support system. Participants reported that the external support from government agencies and development organizations have very positive influence on their decision to become involved in HVCCA. Capacity enhancement programs, start-up funding and exposure visits initiated by these agencies have contributed to more women's active participation in HVCCA. However, some participants reported that the external support system is biased and at times some representatives have made false promises.

In sum, the findings presented in this chapter reflect couples' household level decision-making processes in vegetable production and marketing. The findings characterize women's involvement, roles, and decision-making processes and level of empowerment in HVCCA and achieving overall household economic wellbeing. Findings also reflect enabling factors that enhance women's decision-making processes and empowerment.

CHAPTER 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the recent past, there has been significant change in the way that society views women's roles in the family and communities. In some communities in the study area, women are viewed as equal partners in household economic strategies and community wellbeing. However, derogatory and pervasive clichés such as *mahilale bolnu hunna* [women should not speak], *pothi basyoki bigryo* [if a hen crows, it is inauspicious, it is a rooster's business to crow], *mahilako buddhinai hundaina* [women do not have wisdom] and *mahilako bharosa hunna* [you cannot trust women] are still voiced in many rural communities in Nepal. These degrading statements are equally prevalent in the Far Western hills.

*Chhaupadi*¹⁰ practice is also widespread. Considering women as 'polluted,' the practice of *Chhaupadi* not only dehumanizes women's bodies but also impacts agricultural productivity, especially high-value cash crop activities (HVCCA) because there are general perceptions that vegetables touched by women during their periods will get infected and die.

On the other hand, some husbands who support their wives in HVCCA and related activities receive tremendous backlash from their peers, extended family and community members. For example, they are labelled as *Joitingre*¹¹, *swasniko chhoro* [wife's son] and *swasniko kamai khane* [one who lives on his wife's income]. These statements are often made behind one's back, but some communicate them directly. Such criticisms can discourage husbands from making joint decisions with their wives.

¹⁰ *Chhaupadi* is a menstruation taboo which is widely practiced in Nepal. During menstruation, women's body are considered polluted. See more about *Chhaupadi*: The New York Times (2018). Where a Taboo Is Leading to the Deaths of Young Girls. [online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/19/world/asia/nepal-women-menstruation-period.html> [Accessed 1 Oct. 2018].

¹¹ *Joitingre*: In Nepalese society the word *Joitingre* is used to describe a husband who always listens his wife. It is perceived that he has no authority over his wife and is highly submissive to her commands. It is a very insulting word for a married man.

Further, men's and women's roles and responsibilities in the household and the community are clearly defined. For example, what women can/should do and cannot do are guided by pervasive social norms and beliefs. Women are expected to be responsible for child rearing, taking care of the elderly and other household activities such as cooking food, raising animals, etc. They are also expected to work on a range of farming activities, often more than their male counterparts. Cultural beliefs which hold that women must obey their husbands' commands, and that they should not question their husbands' authority on any account can seriously harm women's ability to fully engage in household decision making. Additionally, prohibiting women from speaking with unfamiliar males limits their opportunity to interact with government agency and development organization representatives and learn about HVCCA. Although things have changed, for many women traveling outside of their village without being accompanied by a male family member is still very difficult and considered taboo. In this chapter, participants' experiences dealing with inhibiting factors in HVCCA are presented

Theme 2. What are the Factors That Inhibit Women's Empowerment in Decision-making Processes in HVCCA?

Interest and involvement of women's progress in vegetable production, marketing, decision-making and overall empowerment are detailed in this chapter. Participants' responses under this theme are organized in five main sub-themes: traditional belief system, market management, infrastructure issues, natural impacts and support system. These sub-themes are further aligned in different headings. I acknowledge that some of the factors reported by participants are not limited to HVCCA. I believe that the consequences of some of the deep-rooted and dehumanizing cultural practices against women, for example, *Chhaupadi* are very important to understand women's actual empowerment. During

menstruation women are deemed polluted. Such a widespread mindset impacts their presence in vegetable farms, their mobility in households, communities and markets.

Traditional belief system

Participants' responses under the sub-theme 'traditional belief system' are further organized under six main headings: *woman's work and man's work; consequences of Chhaupadi on vegetable farming; roaming domestic animals; women's work drudgery; financial insecurity and male dominance; and alcoholism.*

Woman's work and man's work

Predefined roles for men and women are challenging to break. ACDOA describes his experience about identified division of labor between men and women in the study district in this manner: "Work division between male and female is traditionally defined and culturally sanctioned. So, any work defined for women is strictly for women, and men's work is for men." He added, "As a result, besides heavy contribution in many farm activities, women are expected to perform almost all the domestic chores." Saving seeds, preparing seeds, tilling land, carrying compost fertilizer in the field, weeding and harvesting are defined as women's work. Men's works involves plowing land, planting seeds/seedlings, irrigating and providing overall economic support to the family. Most participants reported that vegetable harvesting is performed by women and men, but during data collection we observed mostly women engaged in harvesting potatoes, tomatoes, and other vegetables.

When asked what types of work she does on the farm, W3A said, "All the activities—tilling land, carrying and spreading fertilizer, weeding and also fodder collection and so on." W5D described her experience about the work division in her family in this way: "I never ask my husband for fodder collection and carrying fertilizer. Men should not do this work. I tell

him not to do this work. I do most of the domestic work. Most women in our community do the domestic work.” W6D reinforced most comments made by W5D. She said, “Men should not work women’s work, for example, cleaning animal dung, carrying fertilizer, etc. My husband sometimes goes to fodder collection, but these are women’s work and I do not feel good when he does these activities.” A participant in FGD3A described the scale of perceived beliefs about the work division: “Men do not carry fertilizer to field. If men carry water, people still say is there no women in his family? This kind of attitude is still there in our community.” Even if husbands are willing to cross cultural boundaries wives are not comfortable with such attempts. W1D confirmed how carrying fertilizer by a man is stigmatized: “We hire people. It does not sound good that my husband carry fertilizer. It does not fit for men. He does all other works. It is a social shame.” Subconsciously, women feel guilty of allowing their husbands to carry fertilizer in the fields or collecting fodders for animals. We observed that many in the community still strongly believe that performing activities defined for women is shameful. If husbands are spotted carrying fertilizer or working hand-in-hand with their wives in domestic work, they are labeled as *Joitngres*. They face social backlash and criticism. A participant in KIFGDK confirmed the statement: “If a man starts supporting his wife in her every endeavor, society labels him a *Joitngre*.”

There is a wide spread perception that if women plow land, disasters such as famine and long drought will occur. When asked whether she plow land, W1A quickly replied “No, women, not in Achham.” Her alarming answer suggests the scale of cultural embeddedness and influence on women’s thinking. W4D has a similar notion: “No women plow land here. We are afraid of society. If we do, perhaps community people will expel us from our home. They say it is highly inauspicious for women to plow land.” However, she also added, “If

other women plow land in my community, I will also do.” None of the women interviewed said that they plow land. Many female participants have similar responses about plowing land. For example, W2A shared, “People in the community say women should not plow land. It must be performed by men only. They say women should not be even allowed to touch.” However, she also expressed, “My husband and I do most of the work together. My husband can do anything for me. He carries fertilizer in bags but not in a *Doko* (basket made from bamboo tree).” When asked why he does not carry in *Doko*, she replied, “Men do not carry *Doko*.” Her statement reflects that the problem is with *Doko*, not with carrying fertilizer. *Doko* is symbolized as a women’s tool to collect animal fodder and carry fertilizer. W2A also reported that her husband is supporting her in every activity. She added, “My husband carries fertilizer in the field. If it is not my husband, who can carry if I cannot?” When asked how community members react when one’s husband carries fertilizer, she replied, “I am sure they talk behind my back and perhaps mock my husband, but we do not care about it. I have not heard anything directly.” Although no women had dared to plow land so far, W6A said, “I have told the community that if my husband is not home or he is busy I am going to plow the land. My husband agrees, but my mother and father-in-law do not agree with the idea. They are older people.” It is harder for older people to let go of some of the cultural practices. On the positive side of not being able to plow land, W6A said, “I think we are working already 18 hours a day and if we plow land, we may have to work 24 hours.” We observed that many women in the study area work long hours in the farm and at homes. We did not observe men carrying fertilizer or women plowing land.

Consequences of *Chhaupadi* on vegetable farming

Chhaupadi which is widely practiced in the study area has implications on various domains of women's socio-economic life. *Chhaupadi* practice was more prevalent and strictly followed in the past. However, many women of the older generation still believe that their in-laws and daughters must strictly practice the culture. W1A explains the situation: "I know it is just a fear. If we do not follow, nothing happens. But people from the older generation, for example, my mother-in-law and her friends are strict in following the norm." W1A's accounts are supported by W7D: "During menstruation, we do not touch some vegetables. If we touch, we believe they will wither and die. My daughters-in-law do not go to the fields, especially when it is raining." She thinks the combination of menstruation and rain further harm vegetables. Many also believe that women should not visit vegetable farms after they deliver the babies. For example, W7D said, "Women who have just delivered babies also do not go to vegetable farms. If they touch vegetables, they will die." Many *Hindus* in the study area follow *Sutak* (seclusion after the baby is delivered). People believe vegetables will die if a woman who has just delivered the baby touches them. Generally, women and babies stay in isolation for 11 days, but it varies place to place. After the baby's naming ceremony by the *Brahamin*, mother and baby are said to be purified.

When asked whether they work in farms during menstruation, W6A replied, "I do but many in this village do not. One of my in-laws said because she touched gourds, they withered and infected. I told her it was not because of her menstruation but insects. She agreed but only briefly." She asserted, "Many women in our community do not touch vegetables and also do not touch food during menstruation." W2D reinforced W6A's comments: "I go to the field but there are many women who do not touch vegetables of

cucurbits family. They think these vegetables are more vulnerable.” However, for W1D it is harmless to enter vegetable farms during menstruation, but she does not water the vegetables. She said, “I go to vegetable farms to pull weeds, but I do not feed them water. Feeding water during periods can harm vegetables.” A participant in FGD2D also believes watering vegetables during menstruation damages vegetables.

Chhaupadi is related to almost every single aspects of women’s life. W7A expressed her experience: “People say that women during menstruation should not work in farms or crops will get withered and die but we still go and weed them. However, I do not sleep inside the home.” She added, “I could sleep inside the home, but I am grimly concerned about society. People keep saying God and Goddesses get angry if we do not follow the custom.” Although she blames society for imposing *Chhaupadi* practices interestingly, she also confirmed that when it is not strictly followed sometimes snakes come inside the home. Her goat was taken by a tiger some years ago and she thinks that was because she did not observe *Chhaupadi* properly. Although she still observes the practice, she also hopes for change. In a gloomy voice, she said, “I do not know whether change will take place against *Chhaupadi*. Perhaps if everyone starts opposing the practice it may be abolished but it cannot be tackled alone or by few people. It is very difficult.” Families and community members put huge pressure on individual behavior and actions for which violators will be criticized or even punished. In a similar notion, W1A said, “I think women and girls today understand that they should not be staying in *Chhaupadi* huts, but they face tremendous pressure from families.” She added, “You know if something goes wrong in the family, people quickly comment that it happened because I do not follow *Chhaupadi*.”

Women are fearful to cook food and sleep inside the home. This situation is best described by W3A: “People say ‘do not touch vegetables,’ but I go to the farms and do most of the works during the menstruation. However, I do not cook food. I do not believe vegetables get infected just by touching them.” However, during the menstruation, she said she still sleeps in the animal shed. When asked whether it is difficult to sleep in an animal shed, she said, “It is difficult, and my husband always encourages me to sleep inside the house, but I do not feel good. If I sleep inside the home the tiger comes.” When asked how a tiger knows about you having menstruation, she replied, “What can I say? Maybe our Gods know. We sacrifice goats and worship our Gods. Tiger takes our goats if we do not follow *Chhaupadi*.” Asked why there are no bad effects on vegetables, she said, “Maybe that is why sometimes my vegetables get infected.” She earlier said that she does not believe that vegetables will get infected just by touching. She added, “I think I can sleep inside the home, but if I do not practice *Chhaupadi* older people in my community scold harshly. They say we believe in God and Goddesses and if you do not follow these norms, we stop drinking water from you (the literal meaning of stopping drinking water means complete isolation from the community).” She continued, “We often discuss this issue during the mothers’ group meetings but no success as all women are under pressure to follow the social norm and obey community people.”

Some women are attempting to break the norms. For example, W8A said, “I must tell you, initially, I also did not go to vegetable farms, did not touch pumpkin trees, and other vegetables and fruits because I was afraid that they will die. But I do go these days.” She asserted, “Except families of witch doctors and priests, women in our communities do not follow *Chhauapadi* strictly.” She gives credits to NGOs and government interventions for

change in women's changed perceptions and attitudes. However, she also said not all women could hold that new attitudes: "Some people got leprosy in the community and they believed that it was because some women did not follow *Chhaupadi*. As a result, some women started following *Chhaupadi* again." She added, "They built new huts. As a part of purification, they had to offer sacrifices up to 12 goats to local Goddesses. Actually, sacrificing goats is a punishment for not following the custom." These actions can further impair women's overall decision-making ability at the household and in the community. Further, goats are expensive and buying them to offer sacrifices worsens the household's economic situation. Although W8A claimed that she works in the farm during menstruation, her husband contradicted her. H8A said, "During menstruation, my wife does not go to the vegetable farms." He added, "Not only during menstruation women also do not enter vegetable farms for several days after a baby is delivered."

Unlike W8A, W1A did not appreciate program interventions for change: "I think NGOs/INGOs have put lots of families in trouble. They failed to understand the social norms properly. They forced people to sign in the paper to declare *Chhaupadi* free villages or district." She added, "They should have built safe homes for women preferring to follow the custom. As forceful demolishing of huts began, some women started to sleep in a small *Doko* which is even dangerous. In such situations, they can easily get snake bites or get attacked by wild animals." Every year, some young women and girls lose their lives due to snake bites or lack of oxygen in cramped small huts. Some key informants are also not happy with the approaches to abolish *Chhaupadi*. A participant in KIFGDDH expressed his frustration: "So much money is being spent on abolishing *Chhaupadi*, but nothing really seems to be working. Huts being demolished yet women continued practicing." He added, "We are

working with religious leaders. But if someone young dies in the village or a goat is taken by a tiger or a leopard the religious leaders start blaming on women for not following *Chhaupadi*.”

When asked what they think about *Chhaupadi*, many husbands said things are gradually changing and the community is more accepting of change. But they also live with constant fear from God and Goddesses. For example, H4A said, “We still follow the custom. During menstruation, my wife does not enter the kitchen. But going in the farm field these days is not a problem.” H6A made similar comments: “My parents strictly followed *Chhaupadi*, but not me and my wife. My wife milks cow and buffalo and works in the farms. Vegetables do not get infected if women touch them.” H7A said, “My wife freely involves in vegetable production. But she does not sleep inside the home and does not touch water. She is restricted to it. We believe in God and Goddesses, so if she touches the buffalo, we think buffalo will not give milk.” He added, “I know this is wrong. I told my wife to milk buffalo during menstruation, but she said she would not commit such sin.” He continued, “We have a mother’s group that advocates to demolish *Chhaupadi* huts and abolish the system. But these women themselves follow the custom strictly. After they demolished many huts their daughters-in-law started sleeping in cow sheds.”

Some positive changes occur due to compelling situations. H8D said, “Last year, I went to India and in my absence, my wife irrigated vegetables and touched cucumber. They did not die. She regularly visits to farm fields these days.” However, he is still careful about *Dhami* (witch doctor) local God and Goddess. He added, “During the periods, we do not give her milk. Even if I give, she refuses it. She says she does not feel to drink milk. It is sinful to give cow milk to women during their period.” He continued, “Cow suffers the most. Cow

does not give milk but starts giving blood. It is same with water buffalo. It is possible they may never breed again. It cost up to NPR 50,000—60,000 for a buffalo and it is a huge risk.”

Some husbands are brave enough to challenge the custom. For example, H2D said, “When I moved here about 10-15 years ago to do vegetable farming, people warned that we were living in the proximity of forest Goddess. They told us to be careful about *Chhaupadi*. But I simply ignored their advice.” He added, “During her period my wife works in the vegetable farms and she freely travels in and around the forest. We have not witnessed any ill fate.” But many still believe in local Gods and Goddesses. Participants in FGD2A voiced “Yes, we all go to the farm fields. We do not have problem going into the farms but since we have Goddess in our home, we have to be careful. We do not stay inside the home during our periods. If we do, the tiger comes.” It is not only homes where women and girls need to be careful during menstruation. They are also barred from crossing suspension bridges. There are many streams in Nepal and most streams are crossed using these tiny suspension bridges. NGO2D said, “Women do not use suspension bridges to cross streams or rivers during their period. There are cases where girls have lost lives attempting cross through streams.” Such practices not only place lives at risk but also limit women’s accessibility to towns and other villages. The bigger consequence is that during their periods they may not be able to go to markets to sell their vegetables.

ACDOA also suggested that *Chhaupadi* is one of the biggest cultural stigmas in the district and it impacts women’s overall progress. He said, “We demolished *Chhaupadi* huts in the district, but women did not stop practicing it.” He added, “I think *Chhaupadi* is deeply associated with people’s religion and belief system, therefore, government and development agencies need to engage in broader community dialogue to overcome the practice.”

Participants in KIFGDK also believe that forceful interventions to demolish *Chhaupadi* huts are not the solution for dealing with such culturally sensitive practices. They said, “Many agencies have demolished *Chhaupadi* huts, but women rebuilt them, or they went to huts that are far from their homes. Or, they started spending nights in even dangerous places. We must understand the context.” However, WDOA justified the demolition of huts and advocated for strong laws to eradicate *Chhaupadi*: “A girl who slept in menstruation hut died recently. The hut in her home was demolished but her mother instead of letting her sleep inside home she forced her to go to neighbors’ hut where she got snake bite.” She added, “That is why I feel that we should have strong laws in place to prohibit *Chhaupadi* practices and deliberate plan to remove or demolish all the huts in the district.” She also suggested proper counselling to all involved stakeholders—women, men, and the community members.

Roaming domestic animals

Some participants, especially in Achham, reported facing serious problems from their neighbors’ bulls, cows, water buffalos, goats and so on. As harvesting cereal crops comes to an end, people let their animals roam around the villages. H2A expressed his frustration about freely roaming animals: “There is no rule. Winter or summer, right after harvesting cereal crops people let their animals roam around my vegetable farms. If I ask them to control animals, they do not care, instead confront. It is difficult to grow vegetables.” W5A is also frustrated with fellow villagers’ irresponsible behavior: “People just let their animals roam around especially during April/May. We cannot even have time to eat food as we need to guard our vegetable farm. I request my children to look after vegetables.” She further expressed her pain in this manner: “I gave vegetables to my neighbors, door to door, hoping that they would control their animals and start producing their own vegetables. But they do

not listen. There is no impact.” She added, “Although they liked free vegetables, they love their animals more.” H8A has a similar story: “We planted vegetables away from home. Initially, we did not get better production. Later, use of fertilizer boosted production. But people let their animals free and they ate most of the vegetables. We stop growing there.” SHO2K is also concerned that freely roaming domestic animals might discourage many vegetable producers, especially women. He shared his experience: “Neighbors in the community do not care where their animals go. These animals often destroy vegetable farms. There is no law to punish people who do not take care of their animals.”

Unlike in Achham, in Dadeldhura none of the participants reported that they were facing any issues with domestic animals in recent years. When asked why people in his community keep their domestic animals away from vegetable farms, H3D replied, “When I first started growing vegetables many years ago, people used to let their animals free and they would destroy my vegetables often. But today everyone grows vegetables and they keep their animals tied at home.” Many communities in Dadeldhura only engage in vegetable productions. H8D said, “We only grow vegetables throughout the year. Everyone knows their duty to keep domestic animals away from farms.” If everyone produces vegetables, people seem to keep animals in their control.

Women’s work drudgery

Although most women did not complain, many key informants openly described serious levels of work drudgery. For example, INGOK who had spent many years working in Dadeldhura and in many other hilly districts in the region suggested that “Women in in the Far West are always working while men are spending time in unproductive things such as playing cards, drinking alcohol and gossiping.” SHO1K, who was also stationed in the study

area for many years, argued that “women have added burden. They work in farms, they take care of children and they also engage in markets and other important social events, especially if their husbands are out of the country. They always struggle to maintain the workload.” He suggested that “agriculture mechanization, for example, women friendly agriculture technologies such as hand tillers and weeding machines are important to reduce women’s work drudgery.” SHO2K and UNK also confirmed that women in the Far West continue to face serious work drudgery. During the data collection, we observed most women working either in farms or at homes while many men were seen in groups at local shops and in resting places in and around the villages.

Financial insecurity and male dominance

In one of the research districts, the research team talked with a woman who was not part of this study at the district police office. We asked about her coming to the district headquarters; she said, “I am here to complain against my father and brother who have been beating and torturing my husband because he married my distant cousin as his second wife.” She added, “I have no problem with his choice to marry my cousin. We can live together in harmony. I do not want my father and brother to interfere in our personal matters.” This woman has a bachelor’s degree in education, yet she strongly supports her husband who violated the law by marrying another woman while still married. Regarding the motivation for that woman to protect her husband, the police officer said, “Her husband is a school teacher. He has two children from this woman. She does not have a job and is dependent on her husband’s income. I think she is economically in a compelling situation to raise her children.” He continued, “Married women neglected by their husbands often face harsh criticism from their immediate families and community members. If marriages fail it is

women who are always blamed.” W5A’s assessment about women’s economic dependency better describes this situation: “I wish women did not have to depend on their husbands’ incomes. Literally, they depend on their husbands for everything. Even educated women depend on their husbands because they are unemployed. Most women depend on their husbands for even NPR 1.” W8A added, “Many women think if they speak anything against their husbands they will be expelled from home.” She added, “If women have income, they can be freer. Also, if women receive good support from other male members, especially extended family members, they can be more vocal. For example, if someone treats his wife badly there should be some elderly men counselling that man.”

Alcoholism

Alcohol consumption among men in the study area is very high. Excessive consumption of alcohol has socio economic consequences at household as well as community level. Women suffer if their husbands are alcoholic. Some men, especially in Achham district, acknowledged that they drink alcohol. However, they also reported that they let their wives keep most of the income generated through vegetable production so that it is used for household needs. Some female participants acknowledged that their husbands drink alcohol, but they added, “Mostly to social limits.” WDOA, however, does not agree that most men drink socially. She portrayed a grim picture about alcohol consumption in the district: “About 99 percent of husbands drink alcohol. Even the small income made by women is snatched by husbands and used for alcohol.” She added, “For the monitoring purposes we have to walk to reach many villages and, on our way, we always see people with heavy alcohol effects. It is not safe to travel as women.” WDOA’s comments were reinforced by KIFGDDH: “I have seen many women from the hinterlands of the district headquarters

coming to sell vegetables early in the morning. As they return home, they buy alcohol for their husbands.” During the data collection, we observed some drunk men in the research communities. However, we have not witnessed any participant drunk or consuming alcohol. WDOA links male alcohol consumption to unproductive expenditure and violence against women. She warns that women often do not report their husbands’ misconducts due to social pressure. She added, “Because of the social norms, stigmas, and social shame, women often do not report domestic violence and other problems they are facing.” She continued, “Even if women reported to watch groups, within a few hours they drop the cases against their husbands.”

Market management

The markets in the study area are poorly managed. The vegetable producers often struggle to sell their products. The price of the vegetables fluctuates and is often manipulated by vendors. Producers also struggle to compete with vegetables coming from the southern Terai and border towns of India. This sub-theme is further examined in three major headings: *poor markets; price fluctuation; and collection centers.*

Poor markets

“I am always concerned about selling vegetables, how and where? There is no market. I feel like I should tell my husband, hey! can you find a way for me to sell? I wish someone could help me.” These agonizing comments from W2A explain the grim reality of markets for vegetables. During the data collection, we observed that markets in the study areas are small and are mostly limited to the district headquarters and a few other small towns. These markets are approximately 5 to 40 km away from participants’ homes and their farms. Compare to Achham, markets are more organized in Dadeldhura. However,

participants from both districts expressed their deep anxieties about limited markets in their village proximities.

The situation of markets was discussed by many study participants. H2A said, “There is no market for vegetables. We cultivated a big plot of cabbage but could not sell them. Mostly it was infected, and insects damaged it. It was a big loss for small farmers like us.” H7D expressed his unpleasant experience over the limited availability of markets: “Even though we have good production, there is no guarantee that we will have markets.” H5A’s story is heart wrenching. Looking visibly painful, he expressed his frustration: “I started vegetable production in 1999. But often, I throw away some tomatoes because I cannot sell. Just this year, I threw about three quintiles of tomatoes.” He added “I can also show you I have neighbors who could not sell plenty of bitter gourds they produced. They went to markets but could not sell and returned home.”

Many participants expressed frustration that limited markets discourage them from continuing vegetable production. Women are especially discouraged. A participant in FGD2A said, “We convince our families to grow more vegetables, but if we cannot sell them it is hard for us to continue.” Many female participants, especially in Achham, have less than five years of experience in HVCCA. W2A is worried about the weak market system and the consequences it might have on new starters. She said, “People are not confident about the markets. They do not believe that they can sell their vegetables, especially women.” She added, “I am worried it will discourage many women who are just stepping into these activities.” The local government officials and the representatives involved in HVCCA in the study area acknowledged that they have not been fully successful in facilitating better market systems for vegetable producers. However, WDOA said, “Whatever vegetable products

women bring into markets I have not seen them returning home without selling.” But she also added “Of course, it is true that women do not get better prices of their products.”

Some producers and key informants argue that local markets are impacted when many trucks loaded with seasonal vegetables come to their districts from India. This affects markets through the mid-hills and mountains in Far Western Nepal. Many participants see off-seasonal vegetable production as a way to deal with the market crisis. They reported that off seasonal vegetables such as cauliflower are generally grown in November/December, but these days they can be grown other times of the year. For example, W8A said, “If we can prepare vegetables off seasonally, we can make some money. We cannot compete with seasonal vegetables coming from bordering India and Terai.” W1A also expressed her concerns about vegetables coming from India: “Indian vendors living here in the district bring vegetables from India. They are significantly cheaper than local products. Consumers do not understand the value of local products and freshness but always care about the low prices.” Many Indian vendors have shops in major towns of the study districts. Indians do not need a visa to live in Nepal and engage in business activities. The same applies for Nepali citizens in India.

During the data collection, we observed vegetables coming from India in the study districts. Indian origin vegetables were available at the district headquarters of Dadeldhura and Achham. District agriculture officers in both the districts acknowledged widely available Indian vegetables in far flung areas of far western Nepal. They suggest these vegetables are low in quality, lack freshness and contain high levels of pesticides. They argued that poor smallholders in the region still prefer these inexpensive vegetables because compared to local vegetables, they are more affordable.

Indian government provides heavy subsidies to their vegetable farmers. As a result, these producers from towns bordering far western Nepal can sell vegetables at low prices. When asked how it is possible that Indian vegetables can be sold so cheaply in the region, INGOK said, “I am not surprised.” She added, “The agriculture system in India is well integrated with research, production, and marketing. But we have serious gaps in information flow and, further, farmers here have no access to knowledge.” SDAOD agrees to INGOK’s analysis: “India is well ahead of us in terms of research, planning, execution, providing subsidies and crop insurances to vegetable producers.” None of the study participant farmers said they have crop insurances.

Some participants suggested establishing vegetable processing factories in the study area would enhance their ability to deal with the poor market situation. H1A said, “For example, we cannot sell pumpkins when there is a lot of production and supply in limited market like ours. But what we can do is to process them to produce different kinds of preserved foods.” Many participants in both study districts think provision of cold storages would allow them to store vegetables for several months. For example, WD4 said, “If we have cold storage, we could keep cauliflower for some weeks or months. Storage system can help us to get better price.”

However, not all participants are concerned. H5A commented, “You know even if we fail to sell most of our vegetables, the good thing is that we can still make money whatever we manage to sell.” H2D shared his experience: “Our vegetables go to towns and bigger cities. I think there is always a demand for vegetables. But price in the market fluctuates very often.” A participant in FGD1A suggested that if the farmers calculate their cost of productions and market prices, they should be able to sell at a lower price. One of the key

informants working in the region also made the similar assertion. RISMFPD said, “Farmers do not calculate their investments. For example, how much money and labor they have spent. There is no record of their costs.” SHO2K made similar comments: “Farmers do not calculate their investment, but they always complain that they are not getting appropriate price for their products.” H4A reinforced comments from RISMFPD and SHO2K: “I think we have less farmers involved in vegetable farming. We need to produce more, calculate our production cost and sell vegetables at a lower price.” He continued, “If farmers from outside of our district can sell vegetables at cheaper prices at our door, why cannot we compete with them? I see no reason why we cannot do that.” Although most farmers do not calculate their cost and time in vegetable production, some do maintain records. These farmers are willing to sell their products at lower prices and are ready to compete with vegetables coming from outside. For example, W4A said, “We always calculate first. Let’s say if we purchased seeds at NPR 100 maybe, we will sell in NPR 20 per kg. We do not have problems finding markets and selling our products.”

Price fluctuations

Many producers interviewed expressed deep frustration that vendors make more money from their hard labor in vegetable farming. They serve as middlemen between producers and other retailers in the districts and outside of the districts. This study did not interview vendors, but many participants suggest that vendors make much more money than farmers. Most participants reported that they carry vegetables to vendors who have shops in district headquarters and other small towns of the districts. The vendors, particularly in Dadeldhura, supply vegetables to adjacent districts. Sometimes, vendors from Dadeldhura send vegetables to Dhangadhi, the largest city in the southern part of far western region. One

of the participants reported that these vendors often spread false messages about the lower vegetable price. W4D explained vendors tricks in this manner: “Vehicular movement was closed for 3 days during the recent local election. We could not sell vegetables. When the road opened, we brought vegetables to markets. But vendors told us that they could give us only NPR 10 per kg.” She added, “When I inquired why the price was NPR 30 less than they were receiving a week ago, the vendors replied that there is too much cauliflower this week so the price in the markets was significantly lowered.” Visibly frustrated, she continued, “I checked the cauliflower price in different markets and I was surprised to find that it actually went up. This is how vendors make false stories and take advantage of every situation.”

In the study districts, there is no system determining or communicating vegetable prices. The price of the vegetables often relies on vendors whims and the amount of vegetables available in the markets. Personal relationships with vendors also matter. H7A and H4A best described the situation. H7A said, “We have contacts with vendors. They give us price based on the season. Sometimes cabbage is sold at NPR 10 per kg, but currently we are getting up to NPR 70 per kg. We have a good relationship with vendors and they generally give us good price.” H4A said, “I have contacts with vendors in the markets. These are regular customers, so generally we have better understanding, and we fix the price mutually.” When asked about the mechanism through which they receive information about vegetable prices in the markets, many participants reported that they know by contacting different sources, for example vendors and consumers in the markets. W5A said, “There is no system. We just ask people in the markets and other vegetable producers about the ongoing prices.” W4D has a similar experience. She said, “We know the price of the vegetables from the vendor in the market where we regularly sell vegetables. We have no

option but to trust them.” Many participants remarked that the price of the vegetables in the markets often fluctuates. W5D said, “The price of the vegetables is not stable in the markets. We do not get better price. Not more than NPR 20 to NPR 25 per kg. Sometimes we are forced by vendors to sell at NPR 7 per kg.” W5D’s experience is further supported by H7D: “Even though we have good production there is no guarantee that we will have markets. We wish vendors would take our vegetables. There is no fixed price. Sometimes we sell between NPR 5 to 50 per kg of cauliflower.” W1D expressed his frustration: “We are forced to sell at the vendors’ will. We are never given opportunity to rate the price for our products.”

When asked whether they bargain with vendors, H7D said, “Yes, I do, but vendors do not listen much. However, if the vendors come to our home we can bargain for better prices. If we go to markets, they bargain for lower prices, we must give as vendors says.” He added, “Vendors are always watching, and they look for opportunities. They know we do not have a storage system and vegetables are perishable. They take every advantage.” We are not making any advancement in vegetable production, unfortunately.” H2A said, “Generally vendors bargain more with women. For example, vendors always try to persuade women to sell at the rate they want.” Mostly, these vendors are locals and they know farmers well. Sometimes, farmers get opportunity to sell vegetables to vendors outside of their districts. H2D said, “Local vendors who have means of transportations come to our village. Sometimes vendors outside of our districts also come and they provide better price.” H5D reinforced H2D’s observation. He added “If there is more vegetable in the markets, we must sell vegetables as vendors will. But if the vegetables are not available in the markets, vendors compete among each other and, in that case, I can increase NPR 5-7 per kg.”

Regarding the question whether women get lower prices for vegetables, W7A said, “Mostly my husband goes to the markets. Sometimes, I go if I need to carry more vegetables.” She added, “Although, personally, I have not faced any discrimination, some vendors always seek ways to cheat women and try to take advantage.” However, W6D said, she never experienced such situation. She further said the price of the vegetables in the markets is known to everyone. Not all vendors try to take advantage of women sellers. H8D has described a unique experience. He said, “When women go to markets, the vendors tend to give more money at least up by NPR1 per kg. The vendors give this extra money to women so that they can buy fruits and other foods for their children.” He further added, “There are no difficulties when women go to markets to sell vegetables.” H1D explained his experience dealing with vendors: “We do not get better price in the markets. Some time we get somehow okay price, but vendors always make more money than us.” He added, “In some cases, the vendors make 300 percent more money than we do. The farmers always have to bear the brunt if the price fluctuates in the markets.” Apart from personal relationship, farmers’ age also matters while determining vegetable price by the vendors. For example, H3D said, “I go to the markets. My sons say I have a better network. I know many vendors. I have a better relationship. Also, as I am little older, so they are sympathetic to me. They generally do not trick me.” However, he also acknowledged that vendors cheat farmers: “If I want to send sons- or daughters-in-law to sell vegetables, I would have to call the vendors beforehand and set the price; otherwise vendors would cheat them and give them low price.”

When asked what kinds of actions they take against vendors who cheat women producers, WDOD said, “I have not received any formal complain about cheating by vendors. But yes, these are genuine issues and need attention. I believe with new

representatives elected things will be changed.” She added, “Women might have reported at agriculture office about vendors cheating. They have not shared anything to me so far. We do not interfere other government agencies’ business.” An FGD participant from a women’s organization that deals with women in small business at the district headquarters also expressed their unawareness about vendors cheating of vegetable producing women. They also said that they are not directly linked with vegetable producers. For example, FGDA3D said, “We are not aware about such situation. If women come to us and complain about the vendors, we will explore what can be done and how these issues can be resolved.”

Not all farmers complain about vendors. H5D said, “I am not seeing any difficulties in selling vegetables. In the past, whoever reaches early would get better price. But these days we fairly receive good price.” He added, “However, I am not saying that we have excellent markets. I also blame farmers because they are divided. If they get better prices, they will sell to some other vendors despite having previous agreements with a particular vendor.” H5D’s comments are further reinforced by INGOK’s observation: “Most of the time I think we are seeing from farmers perspectives only. Of course, the middlemen seem to be taking most advantage. But we also cannot ignore the role of middlemen in enhancing value chain development.” She added, “The farmers must calculate their investments before blaming on middlemen only. The trust and formal coordination among stakeholders seem to be very essential.” Some farmers say that if they explain to vendors their investment in vegetable farming, vendors generally provide better prices. This statement is supplemented by H6A: “We explain the vendors about our investments for the vegetables and they often understand it and provide us better price.” Communication with vendors is essential.

Many participants suggested that there is a lack of understanding and coordination among producers. H3A said, “Poor unity among farmers hurts us. Culturally, we follow hierarchical system where we think we all should have bigger status. Then, how can we be together and united? Unity is very important should we want to have better price of our products.” H3D has a similar experience: “I am trying to bring all the farmers together for collective voice for better price, but it is not working. They wish to have their own contacts in the markets.” WDOD also emphasized the importance of collectiveness. She said, “I think this is true that unless they come together it would be difficult to address the issue. Collective actions are not only effective to put pressure on vendors but also help to raise voices to top level bureaucrats in the districts.” However, LDOD claimed that vegetable producers are organized and work in groups: “Mostly farmers sell individually but they are also coming collectively. They are together in their collective efforts to establish collection centers and cooperatives. These activities help reduce cheating from vendors.” He added, “The improved networks of producers and communication system for example internet provides opportunity to farmers for price verifications.”

The district agriculture offices in both study districts have acknowledged the serious problems with pricing and vendors cheating. SDAOD said, “The middlemen take most of the benefits. Most of the farmers produce 30-40 kg per day which is not much. To bring these small producers together is challenging.” INGO2A has expressed similar views: “Many middlemen take advantage of the small producers. The agriculture office is also aware of the situation.” He added, “We have been organizing women farmers through cooperative movements, but it still needs continuation and rigorous follow-up. We have built a collection center, but I must tell you that there is not enough production to collect and facilitate

markets.” WDOA also recognizes the severity of middlemen taking advantage of vegetable producers. She said, “Most of the district offices—for example, chief district office, agriculture office, women’s office, and local development office—are coming together and constantly discussing to discourage middlemen, but this has not achieved desired outcomes.”

Collection centers

Government agencies and development organizations claimed that they have invested in farmers’ collective activities and collection centers for enhancing vegetable production and marketing. These officials suggested that the collection centers built are functioning well. For example, WDOA said, “In collaboration with many development organizations, we have constructed some collection centers in different parts of the districts where women bring vegetables to sell. These collection centers are effective.” However, during data collection, we did not observe any functioning collection center in Achham. There were a few operational collection centers in Dadeldhura. Almost all the participants believed well-functioning collection centers would enhance their productivity and save time. Participants also suggest that collection centers could better facilitate markets. For example, H1A said, “Collection center would be great. It would help facilitate the marketing process.” H2A acknowledged that they have a building constructed as a collection center, but he suggested that “it has never been used for vegetable producers’ purpose, instead, it is used by one individual for his personal use.” There are many collection centers that are unused and deserted in the communities.

H4A shared his experience about the collection center: “We formed a group and built a collection center through cooperatives. To make this center run, we sold at NPR 15 per kg to the collection center although we could sell NPR 20 per kg individually.” He added,

“People always preferred selling individually. We thought bringing farmers together would increase the bargaining power and would be helpful in long run. Unfortunately, we could not sell vegetables through the collection center. So, we decided to sell individually again.” He added, “The collection center was supported by our cooperatives, Village Development Committee (VDC), and NGOs.” H5A has a similar experience: “I sell individually. No collection center here. Some NGOs started collection center, but it did not work. People who were supposed to be running the center showed no interest to buy our vegetables.” He vented his anger for people assigned to run the collection center: “These guys are liars. When NGO people come, they say they buy vegetables from us. The collection center is useless for common farmers.” H6A said, “We do not have many farmers to grow vegetables in our community, so there are no collection centers.” She believes well-functioning collection centers would encourage many farmers to produce vegetables. She added, “People are afraid of growing vegetables because they feel that their vegetables will have no markets and get perished.” W2A and W7A also wished to have good collection centers and organized markets for enhancing HVCCA.

There are a few collection centers running well in Deldhura. These centers are led by individual farmers. This is supported by H1D’s statement: “We do not have public collection center. There is one run by an individual vendor. He invested his own money to build this center.” He added, “Some NGOs have built collection center bit farm from the vicinity of our village, but it never worked. Not sure why it was built and why it is not operational.” But not all individual initiatives are successful. H3D said, “We did have an individual led collection center. But it did not work well. The vendor wanted to buy vegetables only when there are no vegetables in the markets. The collection center is good if it runs properly. Even if a

collection center is functioning, some farmers look for better prices. H6D's comments suggest this notion: "We do have a collection center, but we sell to whomever provides better price to us. We sometime go to the main market instead of selling vegetables at collection center nearby our community."

In Dadelhura, it is not only individuals who are running collection centers. There are some collective efforts that produced strong farmers groups and successful collection centers. For example, H2D said, "We just initiated the collection center. We purchased a mini-truck with 85 percent subsidies from government fund. This truck will help bring vegetables from different communities. A few NGOs have supported us to construct the center." H2D added, "Besides the collection center, we have also built small cold storage where we are storing mostly potato seeds." When farmers work collectively, they can make more income from their products. But many participants in both districts communicated that bringing farmers together is challenging.

Infrastructure issues

Study participants reported that the poor road networks and lack of irrigation facilities are two major infrastructural problems that seriously hinder progress in advancing vegetable production. Under the infrastructure issues, two major headings emerged; *poor road connectivity and lack of irrigation facility*.

Poor road connectivity

Some vegetable producers still carry their products for hours to reach nearby markets. Road connectivity in the study districts is limited and most of them are dirt and not passable during the rainy season. During the data collection, we met a woman who walked with a heavy load of vegetables for 3 hours to reach district headquarters. She said she spends

nearly 6 hours every next day to sell her vegetables in the market. When asked why she does not use a vehicle, she said, “They charge more than NPR 100 one way. Also, this is the rainy season and roads this time around are damaged by rain and vehicles do not come regularly. The service is not reliable.” INGO2A confirmed that graveled roads are not reliable during the rainy season and added that the markets are not close to many vegetable producers in Achham district. SADOA agreed that transporting vegetables to the markets has been one of the biggest challenges for vegetable producers. He said the government is planning to provide trucks to farmers, especially women, if they approach collectively or in organized groups. He added that the government is considering building collection centers in various locations.

Many participants in Dadeldhura also reported that they carry vegetables to markets as they still do not have road connectivity to their villages. But the road network is much better in Dadeldhura compared to Achham. Still, some carry vegetables for an hour. For example, W6D said, “There is no road to my village, so I had to carry vegetables for about an hour.” SHO1K also emphasizes the importance of improving road networks. He said, “Poor road accessibility is the biggest challenge when it comes to enhance HVCCA. In many places of Dadeldhura and Achham, farmers still carry their products for hours to reach road heads and nearest markets.” He added, “Vegetables are often carried by women. Since women also need to take care of household chores, carrying vegetables for hours can discourage them from engaging in vegetable farming.” Many participants communicated that one of the major factors for them to engage in HVCCA is road connectivity to their villages. For example, H4A said, “When road reached to our village my wife and I saw good opportunity to produce vegetables and sell them for household incomes.” Many towns in the study areas are along

asphalt roads. Road networks expands market opportunities for people living in proximity. We also observed that farmers who live close by roads tend to engage in commercial farming. The argument is complemented by INGOD: “When people have better road networks and enough irrigation facility closer to home, they tend to grow more vegetables.”

Poor irrigation facility

In recent years sources of spring waters are drying. Farmers are witnessing more dry seasons. Many participants have reported that poor irrigation facilities are one of the biggest inhibiting factors in advancing HVCCA. H1D has shared his experience about irrigation problems: “We are doing our level best to enhance vegetable production. The biggest problem is we do not have irrigation facility.” W1D said, “Irrigation is a challenge especially during the dry season. We have few drums to store rain water. They are about 300 liters each which is not enough for irrigating all our vegetables.” Plants not only require water to grow but water also keeps insects away. For example, W7D said, “The biggest problem is lack of irrigation. Without irrigation, insects can damage vegetables.” She added, “Vegetables that have better fertilizer and irrigation get ready for harvest little earlier than others.” W8D, W6A, and W7A also confirmed that irrigation is one of the biggest challenges for them to continue vegetable farming.

A participant in FGD1A said, “Lifting water from the river would solve the irrigation problem, but it is expensive. I think the rural municipality has some budget for irrigation projects, but we are asked to contribute half of the funding for the project. It could cost about NPR 1,500,000 (approximately \$15,000).” She continued, “We could contribute NPR20,000 to NPR30,000 which is just a peanut for such a big project.” Some NGOs and government programs are focused on enhancing irrigation facilities, but they have not had enough success

so far. Farmers are encouraged to harvest rain water. For example, W6A said, “We did not have irrigation facility, so we used to fetch water from far distances. Seeing my hard work government officials gave us plastic pond where we can store rain water. An NGO provided drip irrigation equipment.” She added, “While this support is very helpful, we still do not have enough irrigation water. I believe if we have enough irrigation many of my neighbors would produce vegetables.” Since there is not enough water to irrigate some farmers chose their land for vegetable production closer to water sources. W8A said, “The land selection for vegetables is never based on the quality of soil; instead, we prefer water sources.”

FGD2D also explained their problems about irrigation in this manner: “We have no irrigation facility. Mainly during the winter or dry seasons, we do not have enough water to grow vegetables. Not having enough water for irrigation is discouraging.” SHO1K said, “Cash crop activities require year-round sufficient irrigation facilities. Irrigation problem is a big issue in the hills and mountains.” When asked what kinds of programs the government is initiating to resolve the irrigation shortages, SDAOD replied, “Currently, we have four big irrigation projects under construction. I believe with the completion of these projects there will be enough irrigation facility for most farmers in the districts.” In the study area, we have observed some rain harvesting ponds funded by government agencies and development organizations to irrigate vegetables.

Natural impacts

Many participants reported that natural calamities are frequent events in recent years. They also reported that wild animals such as wild boars are increasing in numbers and destroy their vegetable farms. Three major headings emerged under this sub-theme: *climate change impact, disease and insects and wild animals.*

Climate change impact

Smallholders in the study area are facing adverse weather conditions. Rain patterns are very different than in recent decades. SADOA said, “We are observing erratic rainfall. This time around (July) it should have been green all over. The weeds must be green. But it all looks dry.” SDAOD described his experience regarding climate change: “The climate change is visible. Farmers are adjusting sowing time by moving some weeks early. For the last 7-8 years, this is the only year we have regular rainfall. For the last 10 years, we have not received rain before June which is quite late.” He continued, “Surprisingly, some farmers now starting to grow mango in the upper hills (around 1500 meters above sea level) which used to be only grown in the lower belts (less than 600 meters from sea level). During the data collection, we observed some mango trees in the upper belts of the hills.

Some participants suggested that now hail storms are more frequent. They destroy vegetables. W6A lamented her loss: “I planted tomato. In a few days, big hailstorms came. It did not take long to destroy my tomatoes. I was so sad, and I did not eat that evening. Hail storms are frequent events these days.” H4A also suggested that hail storms become a serious problem for crops. He said, “This year we faced at least 14 hail storms. We cannot stop this.” He added, “We are also having very unpredictable rainfall. Some year we have so dry weather. Some year there is too much of rain. During dry season, even if we feed plenty of water it is difficult to protect the plants.” RISMFPD also acknowledged the problems with erratic rainfalls and hailstorms. He said, “We are focusing on tunnel houses, ventilated houses, for vegetable production. The indoor production can save farmers from hailstorms and other natural disasters.”

Diseases and Insects

Farmers experienced many kinds of diseases in vegetable production. Many of them do not have proper knowledge for dealing with diseases. H8A said, “We have very little knowledge about insects and other prevalent diseases in vegetable farming.” He added, “I do not know which and how much insecticide to use.” W3A said, “Many times we do not know what kinds of diseases we have in our vegetables. These unidentified diseases harm our vegetables. We have to bear big loss in vegetable production.” W6A expressed her frustration about how little knowledge they have for dealing with diseases: “Many people do not know about seeds, how to control insects and how to get rid of diseases in vegetables. Many NGO people came and made videos of us and our farms, but they have not supported much.” H6A said, “One time I noticed cauliflower leaves started withering but I had no idea what was happening.”

Participants in FGD3A also expressed their concerns about the increasing number of insects. One said, “We are doing vegetable farming for more than five years. But we are barely making any money. The insects are the big problem. They are mostly prevalent for last 2-3 years and are damaging summer crops.” She added, “The agriculture office in the district taught us to use local remedies for insects but they did not work. So, we tried metacritic and malathions. These medicines work but they do not sustain for long. Insects come back.” NGO1D confirmed that the communities are making their own local remedies for insecticides. She also suggested that these remedies do not always work. However, she also said, “The district agriculture office continues discouraging chemical insecticides and chemical fertilizer. The office is running IPM [integrated pest management] programs for many farmers.”

One participant in KIFGDK said, “I am afraid that many women know nothing about information and communication. For example, I have seen many women in the rural areas using extremely dangerous pesticides in the farms.” She added, “They have no idea whether it is good to use or not. Women are using all kinds of pesticides while carrying their babies. Women have no idea how dangerous it is. This is more prevalent even in the vicinity of Kathmandu.”

Wild animals

Most of the study participants stated that they are facing severe problems with wild animals. There are many types of wild animals that keep H4A and his wife busy: “We are always watchful about monkeys, jackals, and bears. They can destroy entire vegetable farms within few minutes” H2A is more worried about wild boars: “We are having serious problems with wild boars. They destroy everything in farms.”

Compared to Achham many participants in Dadeldhura reported that they have many wild animals that damage their vegetable farms. Dadeldhura has one of the largest forests in the country which provides good habitats for wild animals. H1D suggested that his community is struggling to keep barking deer, rabbits and boars away from vegetable farms. He said, “They often destroy our vegetables. Sometimes we must stay wake during the nights to scare them away. This is one of the biggest problems.” Not everyone is suffering from wild animals in Dadeldhura. H7D has a unique story about wild animals: “No wild animals here. No monkeys, no porcupines and wild boars. This is a holy place. Maybe sometimes about 1-2 kg vegetables can still be destroyed by wild animals.” He asserted that it is his *Deuti* (Goddess) who keeps wild animals away, and that punishes people who steal vegetables: “If someone steals vegetables from our farms, our *Deuti* destroys him/her. So,

because of that fear, people do not dare.” SDAOD confirmed that the “Issue of wild animals destroying crops is getting serious.” He added, “Especially wild boars destroy all kinds of crops. It is illegal to kill wild animals, so people have sentry to watch these boars and scare away. Women often watch throughout the nights.” Guarding wild animals is an extra burden for women who are already having so much work. Some participants reported that these wild boars sometimes attack people.

Support system

The government officials and development organization representatives suggested that it is still very difficult to involve women in capacity enhancement trainings. They indicated that many vegetable producers lack proper knowledge in vegetable farming. On the participants’ accounts, they reported there is a certain degree of bias in the support system. Three major headings emerged under this sub-theme: *convincing families; knowledge gap in vegetable farming; and support bias.*

Convincing families

Many women participants reported that they have great support from their husbands and extended family members to attend vegetable farming trainings and other capacity enhancement programs in and outside their districts. However, some are still reluctant to travel outside of the village, especially if they need to travel out of the district for which they need approval from their husbands and extended families. For example, W4D said, “If the training is going to be in the district, I talk to my husband but if it is outside of the district, I have to get approval from my husband and mother and father-in-law.” INGO2A said, “It takes a lot of effort to bring women to the training programs. If we are conducting three-day

training, we need to call their husbands or guardians for their participation. Women often do not stay full-time for the training and come with children.”

RISMFPD also has had similar experiences: “It is hard to convince families, especially husbands, to bring women in trainings. Presenting evidence that women can make better income for the family helps to convince. Internalization of the concept that women are income generator is a major challenge.” KIFGDDH said, “We wanted to conduct empowerment trainings for girls to challenge stereotypes, bad clichés, and narratives against them. But bringing them to these trainings alone is the biggest challenge. We need to negotiate with their parents.” INGOK has had a similar observation: “I think we still struggle to bring women in training programs. They used to bring *Heralu* (someone to look after them), for example husbands or male members. Now they bring children.” However, such a situation is not true for everyone. For example, W8A, W6A, W2A, W2D and W8D all reported that they do not have problems attending trainings, even if the trainings are outside of the districts. They said that their husbands and extended family members greatly support and appreciate them. Their husbands also confirmed that they have no problem sending their wives for learning programs.

Knowledge gap in vegetable farming

Many reported that they have received various capacity enhancement trainings on vegetable production, for example, preparing nurseries, seed plantations, preparing compost fertilizer and pest management. However, they acknowledged that they still lack knowledge about proper soil for different types of vegetables, timing for seed plantations, use of pesticides and insecticides, and so on. H5A said, “We never tested soil and we do not know specific soil needed for various types of vegetables. We have been selecting land and soil

based on our own experience and observation.” H8A shared a similar experience: “Although experts suggested, we never tested soil. In fact, we never felt the need. I think we are getting good products. However, I must confess that we are randomly using the land for all kinds of vegetable production.” H7D said, “I have been producing vegetables since 1993 but I still do not know how to grow cauliflower properly.”

H1A shared his experience about planting onion seeds: “I purchased about NPR 500 onion seeds and planted them. I sold seedlings to my neighbors and made NPR5,000. I also planted some. But as seedlings started to grow, I observed big flowers in them. None of us got any production from those seedlings.” He further said, “I went to inquire about the seeds at the agriculture office and they told me the timing for planting was not right. This year, I have planted on time and am told these are good seeds, but I already lost credibility among neighbors.” He added, “My problem is my neighbors do not trust me now.”

H1A said, “I wanted to grow off-seasonal vegetables, but I do not have proper knowledge about it.” SADOA confirmed lack of proper knowledge among many vegetable producers: “Although we have provided many trainings to vegetable producers, they still lack proper knowledge for commercial vegetable farming.” SHO1K suggested that it is not only smallholders who lack knowledge in many areas of vegetable farming. Government is unable to equip vegetable producers with appropriate technologies: “The major challenge is insufficient amount of quality seeds. The government is unable to provide hybrid or quality seeds to the farmers. We have no hybrid center in the country. We must rely on foreign countries.” He added, “Some farmers are used to specific seeds. But sometimes countries where these seeds come from abruptly stop producing and farmers get panic. It is difficult for us to convince farmers to use another type of seeds.”

Support bias

Although many acknowledged that they have received many types of support from government agencies as well as development organizations, some suggested that there is a bias in such activities. For example, H3A said, “It is hard to get support from even the district agriculture office if we do not have political affiliation.” One of the participants of KIFGDK also suggested that beneficiaries do not get support if they do not align with political parties. She said, “One of the high-level government programs to address issues with commercial vegetable farming is supposed to provide a soft loan up to NPR1,000,000 to farmers but the money is channeled among political cadres. She added, “The genuine farmers are not getting any benefit from the program; this is just an example.” Another participant in KIFGDK added, “One of the Trusts Fund setup by government is also not reaching to genuine beneficiaries. People who have access to the fund or people who run this program are taking advantage of it.” She added, “This is a real example of misuse and stealing of funding allocated for poor framers. These kinds of events trigger frustration among young people and make them to leave the country.” UNK suggested that “the government’s policies have been focusing on women farmers issues, but they have still left out some specific areas such as they have not been able to identify women and men farmer’s strengths and weaknesses and outline programs and subsidies accordingly.”

Many study participants blamed NGO supported programs for favoring certain group of people or individuals. H3A said, “Because we live close by district headquarters, many development agencies do not enter our village. They do not think we need support. They treat us as if we are step children.” H1A has a similar feeling and experience as H3A: “Although we have received some government support, I have not seen any NGO coming to our

village.” He added, “I am not sure what is their basis for selection of program villages. As you can see, we are not rich, and we need some good training programs to continue our vegetable production.”

Summary

This chapter focused on inhibiting factors in women’s empowerment in decision-making processes in HVCCA. Participants’ responses under this main theme have been organized in five sub-themes: traditional belief system, market management, infrastructure issues, natural impacts and support system. Based on the participants’ responses, these sub-themes are detailed under different headings. Under the sub-theme traditional belief system, participants’ experiences about inhibiting factors were presented under six major headings: women’s work and men’s work, consequences of *Chhaupadi* for vegetable farming, roaming domestic animals, women’s work drudgery, economic insecurity and male dominance and alcoholism. Since the work divisions for men and women are predefined, it is hard for men to fully support their wives; for example, they are hesitant to carry fertilizer in farms, especially using Doko. Although farmers did not exactly communicate how they fill work gaps when women do not work on the farm during the menstruation, it impacts women’s roles in vegetable production and marketing.

The sub-theme market management focused on three main headings: poor markets, price fluctuation, and collection centers. Smallholders are struggling to access proper markets for their produce. Indian vegetables being cheaply available in local markets makes it difficult for these poor producers to sell their vegetables. For the infrastructure issues sub-theme, participants’ responses were organized under two major headings: poor road connectivity and lack of irrigation. Road connectivity is very poor in the study area. Farmers

still carry their vegetables long hours to reach markets. Farmers also suffer due to poor irrigation facilities. The natural impacts sub-theme data contains participants' experiences on climate change impact, disease and insects and wild animals. The support system sub-theme covers convincing families, knowledge gap in vegetable farming and support bias. Many vegetable producers are struggling to cope with natural calamities such as hail storms, erratic, delayed or no rainfall situations. They also lack proper knowledge in pest management. The extension support bias is also not helping many farmers to advance.

The study findings in this chapter characterized possible factors that inhibit women's empowerment in decision-making processes in HVCCA. Data presented in this chapter detail how women in the study area continue to struggle to overcome many socio-cultural belief systems that often do not recognize their roles in HVCCA which can negatively impact their decision-making and empowerment.

CHAPTER 6. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings about women's active engagement in high value cash crop activities (HVCCA), and their changed and emerging roles and status in their households, communities and overall society. The chapter also details how husbands and community members view women's active engagement in HVCCA. Three themes described in this chapter are: Theme 3—What are the specific attitudes of women and men in smallholder farm families and communities regarding women's involvement in HVCCA? Theme 4—What is the Current State of Women's Changing Status and Emerging (Negotiation) Roles in HVCCA? and Theme 5—What are husbands' perceptions and responses to their wives' initiatives to achieve shared decision making in efforts to succeed in HVCCA? These main themes are further organized in sub-themes.

Theme 3: What are the Specific Attitudes of Women and Men in Smallholder Farm Families and Communities Regarding Women's Involvement in HVCCA?

Many participants in the study area communicated that long-held beliefs and taboos that men and women should not sell vegetables have significantly subsided. Most women reported that they freely engage in vegetable production and marketing. While cereal crop production is still the main focus of farming, women's increased roles in HVCCA and contributions to household income are perceived as encouraging. Further, successful women in vegetable farming are portrayed as role models. Participants' perceptions and experiences under this theme are further organized in four sub-themes: general perceptions regarding vegetable farming; past perception towards women's involvement in vegetable farming; perceived extended family attitudes towards women in vegetable farming; and perceived community attitudes towards women in vegetable farming.

General perceptions regarding vegetable farming

Twenty years ago, most smallholders in the study area did not engage in HVCCA. Engaging in vegetable production and selling vegetables was considered a taboo. The predominant social belief was that people must produce their food themselves. People who dared to engage in vegetable production and marketing were labeled as lazy. In the local Doteli dialect, the literal meaning of farming was producing cereal crops, for example, rice, wheat, and lentils. Comments expressed by many study participants reinforced my observation and reflection. For example, H4A said, “Not long ago, there used to be a time when people like me who wanted to shift from cereal crops to vegetables were labeled as lazy and cheaters. Today, these same people follow our footsteps.” He added, “In fact, they now say everyone in the village should be producing vegetables.” He continued, “The *Chaukhhute Bazaar* established in 1988. People were hesitant to sell even green cilantro there. The villagers would mockingly say, ‘Oh you sell cilantro.’ In 1995, one of my uncles was criticized for selling milk in the market.” Not only vegetables but also selling dairy products was considered outside the norm. W8A suggested that there are still some communities in Achham that refuse to sell water buffalo milk. She shared, “We have serious dairy shortages and some dairy products are supplied from Dhangadhi, yet some poor producers here are culturally constrained to sell milk.” H1A said, “My father, who is 84 years old constantly presses me to grow more rice, but I know there is hardly any production from this kind of crops, especially as we live up here in the hills. For him producing rice and wheat is farming.” H8A shared his experience about how people deeply care about cereal crops: “People would rebuke and think that we were stupid when we started growing vegetables in the rice field. Still, many people believe rice production is most logical and useful for the

family.” He added, “Last year, one of my relatives removed a well-built tunnel house from the rice field. The tunnel was built for tomato production by his daughter-in-law. But this couple did not lose their faith and moved that tunnel to less rice productive land.” One of the participants in FGD2A has a similar assertion to H1A and H8A. She said, “In our communities’ mothers-in-law and fathers-in-laws always pressure us to grow more cereal crops. However, now they started to realize the importance of vegetable production in household income.” Established negative attitudes towards growing and selling vegetables are eroding. As more people start to engage in HVCCA, it is becoming the accepted norm in the study communities.

But this transition did not come without some paying a price. Given the strong negative social orientation, some believe selling vegetables those days was challenging and considered courageous. For example, H5A shared his bizarre experience about first selling vegetables: “Some 10-12 years ago, when I just began vegetable farming, my friend saw me heading to market to sell vegetables. He was surprised. He came after me, pulled my jacket and tore it. I knew he was mocking me for selling vegetables.” He added, “But I did not stop there. I went on to the vendor’s place at the local market and sold my vegetables. I also knew that my friend did not mean to tear my jacket.” Confirming the difficulties her husband faced, W5A said, “People still talk about my husband. They say this man has a job yet why he is so desperate for vegetable production. But we do not care about what people say. We have to think about our family’s economic wellbeing.” People attempting to change negative cultural norms suffer but they make positive contributions to society.

Many smallholders in the region are still skeptical about engaging in commercial vegetable farming. Food deficit households rely either on development aid or male members

of the family to go to India for employment opportunities. These farmers often travel to India during the lean seasons, for example when summer or winter cereal crop planting is completed. They generally return home for crop harvesting. ACDOA said, “Many male members from the district are continuing going to India for employment opportunities.” But working in India is physically demanding and people hardly earn any money. For example, H4A said, “It is not easy to work in India. My neighbors still go to India to be watchmen, laborers and domestic servants. They feel no shame to perform such duties. But at home they see selling vegetables is a problem.” People care more about their cultural practices in their communities. Reinforcing the statement, H5A said, “I think culture is very important to people. There is a mindset that if they grow rice and wheat, they would not be able to eat throughout the year. Many people still do not believe that vegetables can support their livelihoods.” However, reports from government as well as various development organizations suggest that most smallholders in the study area do not achieve more than 6 months of food security from cereal crops.

Past perception towards women’s involvement in vegetable farming

Women’s engagement in vegetable production and marketing activities was considered to be a social disgrace not only for their immediate families but also for their neighbors and communities. In the past, it was extremely difficult for women to travel to markets in general. One of the participants in FGD1D shared her overall experience regarding traveling to markets and vegetable production: “Initially, it was very difficult for women to go to markets. Husbands would not let their wives travel to markets and sell vegetable products. They would say, ‘You are insulting me by selling vegetables in the markets.’” Another added, “Husbands would say, ‘I will rather go to India than allow you to

go to markets to sell tomatoes.” In a similar notion, participants in FGD3D said, “In the beginning, we used to face many derogatory words just because we were engaged in income generating programs such as selling vegetables and attending trainings. They would label us as leaders.” In the local Doteli dialect, the literal meaning of ‘leader’ is one who contests the social norms. One FGD2A participant described her experience selling vegetables the first time in this manner: “Since I did not have children, I needed to go to market to sell vegetables. It was a very uncomfortable situation for me, as I did not see other women selling vegetables in the markets.”

Even today, not all women are free to travel. Many must seek permission from their husbands and extended family members. For example, a participant in FGD3D said, “To send women away from the village to attend trainings, we still need to obtain approval from husbands and extended family members. As a women’s group, we request and counsel husbands and families.” She added, “When we do it collectively, it is more effective because husbands and families get to hear different perspectives from our group members. They trust us more if we approach together.” Although they are defiant, some women are still mocked. W2A’s account reflects continued stereotypes: “Some people with little knowledge continue to mock at my back. In general, society still does not appreciate what I am doing. Even my own extended family members do not want me to grow vegetables.” But she is surprised that many of her extended family members and neighbors continue to ask her for free vegetables. She expressed her frustration in this manner: “If I tell them to grow vegetables, they do not feel good. But they come to me and ask for vegetables free of cost. I give them. I feel sorry for them that they do not listen to me and engage in vegetable production.” DHOA said, “Barely 10-15 years ago people did not even eat vegetables here. There was no question of

women engaging in producing and selling vegetables. What you are seeing today is a remarkable change.” During our data collection, we observed women freely selling vegetables in the markets. They did not show any sign of hesitation selling their products.

Perceived extended family attitudes towards women in vegetable farming

Many study participants reported that their family members are very positive towards women’s involvement in vegetable farming. When asked how their extended families view their involvement in HVCCA, W1A explained: “My extended family members understand what I am doing. My father-in-law is very supportive of me, although he always wishes to grow more cereal crops.” She added, “They think I am an educated person and I should be involving in different activities. In fact, my close neighbors also support me. They always encourage me to take lead roles in supporting other women in the community.” As agriculture is still perceived as an uneducated people’s profession some families expect educated people to have well-paying regular jobs. W6A also said that she is receiving all types of support from her extended family, especially her father-in-law and mother-in-law. She said, “They never question my integrity even if I come home a little late. I have been receiving great support from my family. They always encourage me to grow more vegetables and I am happy that we are earning good money.” W3A also said that she has great support from her extended family: “When I go to markets to sell vegetables, I do not fear being a little late because my family is always supportive of me. In fact, if I return late, I rather fear other people I see on my way home.” W4D also said that she receives tremendous support from her extended family: “My in-laws do not have a problem even if I go out of the village for trainings. They are very supportive.”

W2A has a different experience with extended family attitudes. She said, “My father-in-law is unhappy and angry with me. Since I failed to sell vegetables, he is upset. He keeps telling me you should have grown cereal crops.” She added, “I know I still have more than double earnings from vegetables compared to cereal crops, but he is not convinced. However, when I get better income from vegetables, he and my mother-in-law are happy.” She continued, “When I go to market, my father in-law is concerned whether I could sell vegetables on time and return home before dark. I think he is just concerned about my safety. My in-laws trust me very well.”

Perceived community attitudes towards women in vegetable farming

In recent years, there has been a steady increase in women’s involvement in HVCCA in the study area. There is a significant positive change in terms of the way that society views women’s participation in vegetable production and marketing. The changed scenario is reflected in many participants’ views presented here. When asked how her community sees women’s involvement in vegetable farming, W4A said, “My neighbors and relatives appreciate me. They say because of you we also learned to do vegetable farming.” W6A also has a very positive observation about community attitudes towards her engagement in vegetable farming. She shared, “Not only my family but also community people and even people in the district greatly appreciate my work.” W1D, W4D, W8D confirmed that there are no negative cultural clichés voiced against women engaged in vegetable production these days. Instead, they said that women’s role in vegetable production and marketing is appreciated by every community member. A participant in FGD2A said, “About 10-15 years ago, women would not even dare to talk about the idea of selling vegetables in the markets. It

would be against family values. But today women are very comfortable producing and selling vegetables. Everyone in the community appreciates.”

Men also asserted significant positive changes. They appreciate women’s roles in HVCCA. For example, H4A suggested many people in his community view women as real drivers of vegetable farming activities and the household economy today. He explained “Women are the one who grow and sell vegetables. They do not feel shame going to markets. There are only one or two male members who carry vegetables to markets in my village, but the rest are all women.” He continued, “People all over the society greatly admire and appreciate women for their engagement in vegetable farming. For example, they say that woman sold this much vegetables, earned this much money and you should also be doing the same.” Men feeling uncomfortable selling vegetables is further reinforced by DHOA: “During my interaction, many women shared that their husbands do not feel comfortable carrying vegetables to the markets for selling, especially carrying in *Doko* (basket made of bamboo primarily used for fodder collection and carrying fertilizer). *Doko* is considered to be woman’s tool.” H1A also said, “I am not comfortable selling vegetables in the markets. Especially I cannot carry vegetables in *Doko*.” H5A has reinforced H4A’s accounts. He said, “I do not see any challenges for women to involve in vegetable farming in my community these days. Everyone appreciates them for their role in vegetable production and earning income for the family.” H1D said, “I see no negative attitudes towards women engaged in vegetable farming in my community. Everyone appreciates their role in earning income for the family.” H4D and H5D, H6D all confirmed there are no negative perceptions of women in their communities but rather appreciation and praise.

However, not everyone has had positive experiences. H6A said that many women in his community continue to face challenges especially when it comes to traveling to markets. He said, “Women still face many kinds of problems. We still have people who say women should not go out of home.” Reinforcing H6A’s observation, H8A said, “Our society is highly conservative, and I know many people do not like women to be fully immersed in the markets.” When asked whether people talk negatively regarding her engagement in vegetable farming, W6A replied, “They do not tell anything in front of me, but they may behind my back. But I do not care. I should not make any mistakes. I should not go with someone’s husband or put someone in trouble.” She added, “People say that even though you earned so much income, you still carry *Doko* of vegetables on your back to market, but I tell them this is my compulsion to generate household income.” Her village is a few kilometers away from the asphalt road. A gravel road that connects her village is not passable during the monsoon.

Despite having full support from husbands and extended family members, some participants find it extremely difficult to fend off negative community attitudes towards them. In a disappointing and frustrating tone, W8A shared her story: “I constantly feel like I am making mistakes. Although my husband does not question my late returning home, the community is always watchful and raises many questions.” She added, “I know I do right things. I also know my in-laws greatly support me. Yet, I do not know why I am in constant fear all the time. I am overtly concerned about society.” She added, “It maybe because as a child I have seen my mother and aunties questioned and punished even when they returned home a little late from day-to-day work, for example fodder collection and working in the field.” She continued, “Maybe fear is deeply engrained in my mind and I am struggling to get rid of it.” In a society where even employed and educated women are afraid to travel with

men for official business, fear expressed on returning home late by W8A is understandable. For example, NGO1D said, “Office hired two women social mobilizers and two agriculture technicians. The idea was we go monitoring as mixed gender. But we all agreed to form teams between women and men separately. Travelling with a man in the village is still a taboo here. It gives room for community to chat and backbite.” Women’s movements are still strictly monitored by society.

Many people in the study area still do not appreciate when women express their views in community forums, especially when men are also present. About her participation in important community meetings where men and women participate, W8A shared her observation: “If I speak a little loud and present my thoughts on any issues related to the community wellbeing, they criticize and label me as a leader. This is when I am most embarrassed and feel I was making a mistake.”

The representatives of the government and development agencies working in the field of vegetable production and women’s empowerment also suggested that, in general, people in the research communities have very positive views towards women’s engagement in commercial vegetable farming activities. SDADOA said, “Because women who are engaged in vegetable farming generate household income, I have not seen any negative aspects in this regard.” He added, “Women in the district mostly engage in vegetable production for enhancing economic activities while males go to India. Further, most of the work even in the farms is performed by women.” SDADOD also sees no negative perceptions towards women engaged in HVCCA these days.

There are many factors in people’s changed attitudes towards women’s engagement in income generating activities. SHO1K, who spent many years in the study area, suggested

that the positive changes in attitudes towards women's engagement in commercial vegetable farming is the result of numerous program interventions by government and development agencies. He also suggested that many people in the region are under tremendous economic burden that pushes them to test social boundaries. He added, "Not only involvement in vegetable farming but women's increased role in family and in community decision making processes is well accepted these days and the trend is continuing to surge significantly. More importantly, men are changing their attitudes towards their wives for good." He continued, "Community members see women earning income. Economic changes in vegetable producers' families have positive influence over other families. This contributes to increased number of vegetable growers. As a result, commercial farming is increasing in every community." In sum, "Society is becoming more positive towards women," he asserted. Based on the informal interactions and observation in the study area, we also believe that social acceptance for women engaged in vegetable production and marketing has increased significantly.

Theme 4: What is the Current State of Women's Changing Status and Emerging (Negotiation) Roles in HVCCA?

Study participants recognized significant change in women's status in family and community. They voiced the negative belief system against women is waning as they are freely engaged in HVCCA. Study findings indicate that women play significant roles in major household decision-making processes not only in HVCCA but overall household economic strategies (Theme—1). Women can produce vegetables, transport them to markets, negotiate prices, generate household income and improve family's living conditions. Key informants recognized the emerging roles of women in HVCCA and the household economy and their overall empowerment in decision-making processes. Participants' responses in

Theme 4 are organized in three sub-themes: women's change status; women's emerging roles and empowerment; and change processes.

Women's changing status

Taboos that women should not travel outside their homes are disappearing. Most of the study participants enjoy a changed, more respected status in their families and societies. Given the unfavorable belief systems about women in the past, women were asked how they view the present status of women in their community. An elderly woman in FGD3A described her experience: "We are old people? Things have changed a lot today. It looks like a heaven. A complete change. I went to Dhangadhi. Those days women were restricted to household chores only. No freedom." She continued, "Today, even I can go to the meetings. I do not need to ask my husband or any other family members." Echoing FGD3A's comments, a participant in FGD1A, who is also a study participant, said, "Things have completely changed. Even if we stay for a month away from home no one says anything. I think we speak more than men in the household these days." She added, "In the past, if we wanted to attend exposure visits, we literally had to beg our husbands. They would refuse. Even if they agree, they would tell us to take our boys with us. But today we just inform that we are travelling." She added, "Even the villagers appreciate women's increased role in family and are very positive towards women's travel to markets and cities." With great sigh of relief and joy, she said, "Sometimes, I think and compare the situation that we used to have in the past and today, and I feel like the whole era has elapsed. It is entirely a new world." Participants in FGD3D also communicated that seeing the great change in women's active decision-making roles in important household as well as community matters and overall increased status in society, men sarcastically say that 'this is women's kingdom' (Theme 1).

Confirming what FGD3D participant described, H5A said, “People have increased positive views towards women. Even older people think that women’s days have come. Women are doing very well in general. Also, women today have better awareness level.”

W1A shared her experience about her past: “In our village, only me and my sister used to go to school. I remember the boys in our village would block our paths to school. But today, you will see no girl staying at home. Everyone attends school. This is the biggest change for me.” She added, “Vegetable farming has significantly increased women’s access to income. Women used to beg money from their husbands. But not today. They have cash in hand and this is a big change.” She added, “When women have money in hand, they run the family. This gives them great confidence. I am very satisfied how the women’s movement is taking place in our village.”

Besides prevalent negative belief systems operating against them, many women in the past did not have opportunity to eat regular meals and wear nice clothes. Even today, many women eat last, although they prepare the meals. In terms of food consumption and availability, things have significantly changed. W3A and W4A described how happy they are to be able to eat enough food regularly and have a better life today. For example, W3A said, “I am happy we do vegetable farming. These days, I can eat what I want to, and I can wear what I want to.” She added, “Now I have money in my hand. I can spend. Things have changed. We have some freedom now.” In a similar tone, W4A shared her story: “We had a big family and have faced many difficulties for food and other basic needs. Since we engaged in vegetable farming, we have enough food for the family.” She added, “Women can take part in many activities and are very capable of engaging in vegetable production and marketing. Women are much freer these days. Women can speak.”

For W6A, the biggest change in her life is that she does not have to beg money from anyone for basic needs. She suggested that since she began vegetable farming, she always has money in her pocket. She argued that “any woman who engages in vegetable production has better income and better life.” Reinforcing husbands’ attitudes over women’s spending, she said, “If women spend even few NPRs on their own their husbands would say, ‘Why did you do that? Did you earn? Do you know how difficult it is to earn and so on?’ If women have money, they can be self-reliance.” She added, “I think there have been many positive changes. Prejudices against women and Dalits have significantly reduced.” W2D said, “I am happy about the great change we are witnessing for women. I used to ask my husband for even a small amount of money, but I have cash in hand now. My husband is happy.” Echoing W6A and W2D, H4A said, “Women engaged in vegetable farming are happy because in the past they would only get money when their husbands give them. Or, when they would sell ghee (processed butter) or chicken. Today, if they sell cabbage, they can make NPR 400 in a day.” He added, “The big change is women today are not dependent on their husbands. They always have some cash in hand.”

Study participant husbands recognized women’s change status. When asked about women’s present status in the family and community, H1A said, “Women were restricted to household chores. But today women are coming to the markets, can freely interact with other men. They can drink tea at shops. They are lot freer compare to where they were nearly 10-12 years ago.” H1D also said, “There is a tremendous change in every aspect of women’s life. They were confined to household activities. Women are free to travel outside of the village. If these encouragements were initiated 50 years ago our country would have progressed a lot.” Echoing H1A and H1D, H2A said, “Women are very active these days.

They have good level of awareness. They are telling each other not to follow practices that are against women. I think education has been a big drive.” He added, “Educated women are vocal. They are frank. For example, when they are in their periods they can stay inside the homes. But women with poor literacy are very hesitant and shy.” H3A said, “Women were hesitant to go to close by markets. But today they sell vegetables and buy all the household needs by themselves.” Reinforcing H3A’s comments, H6A said, “Let’s say 15 years ago, mothers-in-law would tell their daughters-in-law to come home on time; they would not be allowed to travel out of home in the first place. Women were shy to go to markets, especially to sell vegetables.” H7A also said, “Women can travel to markets; no pressure over women these days. There is no restriction for women’s movements. But this was not the situation in the past. People appreciate women who engage in vegetable production and marketing.”

In H2D’s experience, “There used to be much negative backbiting about women. For example, where does she go? What does she do in the markets? Why does she go out of home? And, so on.” He added, “Today things have changed. In fact, some women earn more money than their husbands. They are eager to attend any meeting without hesitation. Women are more active these days.” For women in the past, getting home late was punishable. For example, H7D said, “Those days women were not allowed to go to markets to sell vegetables. If women were late, they would be beaten.” WDOD said, “In the past, there was a mindset that women are just to work at home and serve. They should not be engaged in decision making-processes. Their opinion is not important. But today, things have changed.” SHO2K suggests that women engaged in vegetable farming are viewed as role models in their communities. Recalling past observation, DHOA said, “There was a situation where women would not come closer to men. Women were extremely shy and did not want to talk

to men or any outsiders. But now things are changed.” NGO1D shared her experience about the past perception towards women: “When I came at the district headquarters to work with NGO, many people in my community and the district did not receive me well. For women, working with NGO was perceived very negatively. Today, many families want their sons to marry working women.”

Women’s emerging roles and women empowerment

Many women are taking good initiatives to advance HVCCA. They have received many capacity enhancement trainings and exposure visits from government agencies and development organizations. These programs have significantly increased their confidence level. For example, W5A said, “I was too content in traditional farming. Lately, I have travelled a lot and got good exposure about vegetable farming. So, now I am fully engaged in vegetable production.” She added, “I can eat vegetables, sell vegetables and earn income for the family.” W2D said, “Although I used to sell vegetables at my parents’ home, I did not know how to grow vegetables. But today I know it. I am completely engaged in vegetable farming.” W4D said, “Initially I had no idea about vegetable production. But today I know many things about it. I think my overall situation has improved as I have engaged in vegetable farming. I do not ask my husband for small amount of money. I always have some money in my pockets.” One participant in FGD2D said, “We may have struggled in the beginning, but today we are confident in dealing with production and marketing of vegetables. We are increasing our production.” FGD3A said, “I think women are more empowered than men these days.”

DHOA said, “Women today are actively engaged in vegetable productions. You can see many women are coming to markets and selling vegetables. Some women even

successfully called their husbands back home from India and involved them in vegetable farming.” Observing women’s emerging roles, WDOD shared her experience: “I can see many women are engaged in vegetable production these days. Women are selling vegetables and supporting their livelihoods without hesitation. Their activities are highly appreciated by families and communities.” Reinforcing WDOD’s comments, INGOD said, “Women’s engagement in various income generating programs is viewed as a role modeling act. Women are fully engaged in many decision-making processes at households and communities.” She added, “Women who are economically strong tend to have better respect in the community.” When asked how she views women’s emerging roles in HVCCA and women’s decision-making ability and empowerment, NGO1D stated:

“Women are empowered today. For example, in one village women formed three groups. These three women’s groups formed a cooperative. They have developed a proposal to establish tunnels for vegetable production in their community. They applied for a funding from our office, but the proposal was turned down. They applied for second time and again it was rejected. They did not give up. In their third attempt, their proposal was approved. They received NPR 3.4 million. Initially, many male members including their husbands mocked them for their attempts to get funding from the NGO. They used to say you cannot even handle NPR 30,000 forget about millions of rupees. The problem with men was they never believed women could accomplish such goals. These women proved everyone wrong. They built plastic tunnels by themselves and, in fact, they helped other women in different communities to establish similar tunnels. Currently, these women are operating 25 tunnel houses and producing a lot of tomatoes. They are generating good income. Interestingly, now their husbands are also supporting them.”

She added, “The amazing part of these women’s story is that they needed to travel to Nepalgunj (one of the major cities mid-western region) to sign the contract. Two women from the group travelled to Nepalgunj with their own expenses.” She continued, “These are

the same women who initially could not even write their names and were hesitant to mention their husbands' names. Trainings and active engagement in vegetable farming has significantly contributed to their risk-taking ability and overall empowerment.” Confirming significant increase in women's efforts to seek funding opportunities, DHOA said, “Around 90 percent women come to our office for support of various agricultural activities. Only about 10 percent men come. All the official works are done by women. Women have also opened bank accounts in their groups names.” He added, “Women today are greatly interested to engage in vegetable farming.”

UNK said, “Some argue that since many male members have gone abroad, women in communities have moved to the leadership positions and are actively engaged in decision making-processes at household and communities.” However, she also added that there is no real data to support that claim. In a similar notion INGOK said, “We always see male migration negatively, but I think this is a good opportunity for women to engage in community matters. For example, if the male member is not home, the woman must attend social functions.” She also believes mandatory inclusion of women in various activities has significantly contributed towards women's active and increased role in major issues in the communities. She said, “Although, as compared to their male counterparts, women do not get much opportunities to speak, their participation in such major forums and events eventually leads towards women's empowerment.” Asserting INGOK's assessments, INGOD said, “I think positive reservation for women has made a great impact in terms of increasing women's participation in various development activities. Women who receive trainings pass knowledge to other women in their communities.”

ACDOA said, “Many women can be seen selling their products in the markets. Women’s participation in various trainings have increased. Even in the villages, women are vocal and actively engaging in programs and projects.” He added, “These are very encouraging signs in terms of women’s empowerment, but there is much to be done. The long absence of elected representatives at local levels, for example at VDCs and Districts, has decelerated the pace of many affirmative programs targeted at women’s empowerment.”

WDOA said, “Many women today are educated. They are engaged in various kinds of entrepreneurial activities, for example, vegetable farming. They are forming women’s groups and engaged in cooperatives and are successfully launching income generating programs.”

She added, “Women are organized against social stigmas like *Chhaupadi*. Because of these organized efforts, for example cooperative movements, women have learned to be leaders. Consequently, in recently held elections significant numbers of women contested and won leadership positions.” The significant change she noticed is that the women who were shy and could not speak are now taking leadership roles in the community. Reinforcing WDOA’s comments, INGOD said, “Many women who were engaged in cooperatives have been elected as political leaders in their communities. They become elected representatives.” She added, “These are the same women who were shy to speak some years ago, now are the elected leaders in their communities.”

LDOD said, “Women are actively involved in development programs. It is true that they are actively participating but in terms of the main role in these activities women still lag behind men.” He added, “I must acknowledge that due to limited budget, the government’s programs are not sustainable. Some of the projects initiated by government never complete.”

A participant in FGD1D said, “Yes, you can argue women have more freedom these days

and it may indicate women are empowered, but they are still in transition, or, actual transformation is still to come.” She added, “However, I must say, women’s thinking and dealing capacity has drastically changed. You can see these changes in local election. You have seen many women emerging in leadership positions at local level.”

CDMDDL who was recently elected as deputy mayor of her town presented a different view of women’s empowerment:

“The development agencies are empowering women which is good, but they are not telling them to take their responsibilities as women in the family. The divorce cases are increasing among young couples. These trainings have helped make women aware about their rights, but they are also creating harm by making these women drift away from their social responsibilities. These girls and women who have passed school leaving certificates are looking for autonomy, their own agency but they are not being responsible for family issues. This is missing in women’s empowerment programs. This is creating problems in families and disturbing social structure.”

One participant in FGD3DA said, “A lot of girls who have passed high school and have college degrees do not have employments. They cannot work hard enough in the farms. This is a major challenge.”

Many study participants are convinced that women’s engagement in economic activities and increased household income have significant positive impacts on women’s overall empowerment. CDMDDL said, “I also used to think that I will spend my life on someone’s earning but when I started earning income it changed my perspectives towards my life. I feel a great sense of empowerment.” She continued, “So, I would say economic empowerment is essential for women. But, to me, being empowered is more responsibility for my family.” Highlighting the importance of economic empowerment, UNK said, “Economic empowerment is the essential component for women’s empowerment. If women

have income in hand, husbands tend to listen them. Her comments are supported by

RISMFPD:

“Initially, we observed that many women have faced violence from their husbands because they were involved in our programs. But as vegetable production started generating income, husbands started respecting their wives. We have one lady who is a treasurer had faced serious violence from her husband in the beginning but now her husband calls her Madam. The income generation has given power and position to her.”

In a similar notion, KIFGDDH said, “I think the economic empowerment is real empowerment for women.”

Change process

Study participants expressed many changes in women’s lives and that there are more people, mostly women, engaged in vegetable farming. When asked how exactly that change has happened, H8A said, “I think people learn by imitating each other. Observing what other people are doing is the most effective means of rapid change, although it does not go like a fire.” W6A said, “The main thing is one must have a very supportive husband.” Reinforcing H8A, H8D said, “When one person starts to listen to his wife, another woman sees that, and she also wants her husband to do the same. I think this is how change take place.” He added, “I needed to teach my wife in the beginning but now she tells me how things need to be done.” Positive changes are also contributed by women’s collective efforts and knowledge sharing. For example, the participant of FGD1A said, “Whatever we learn from trainings we share among the women in the community. Women see each other and imitate good things from one another.”

About the change, H3A has expressed his observation: “I think this is the demand of the time. Our grandfather had to bear oligarchy Rana regime, we had a Panchayat the

monarchy but today we have the democracy.” He added “Change does not come from outsiders. No leaders can bring change in our communities. America (The United States of America) *Belayat* (The United Kingdom) cannot bring change here. The change happens automatically.”

Some participants think education is the driving force for change. H6D said, “Women are more educated these days. Women are capable enough to engage in vegetable farming. For example, they can use insecticides and feed the necessary vitamins needed for vegetables.” H3D sees economic necessities as the main driving force for women’s increased engagement in vegetable farming: “I think there is no other employment opportunities and men drink alcohol. Such situation is compelling for women to look for alternatives. So, they are exploring vegetable farming as household income opportunity.”

NGO1D said, “I think change takes place slowly. Even for people like us, it is difficult to get rid of many negative beliefs. The old generation is very rigid. They do not want to change. We must respect old people and do not force our freedom upon them.” She added, “I think the new generation is completely different and the clichés and beliefs like *Chhaupadi* and others will be abolished.” Echoing NGO1D, KIFGDK said, “Radical change contradicts with culture. We must not ignore culture. For example, agencies demolished *Chhaupadi* huts, but women rebuilt them, or they went to huts that are far from their homes. Or, they are spending nights in even more dangerous places. We cannot force change in all context.” She added, “We cannot put all women in one basket. We talk about *Chhaupadi* in mid hills of Far West, but this practice is deeply prevalent in Kathmandu, too. We must understand the social background.” W1A argued, “If all the educated women in communities

come out against all kinds of bad social clichés and stereotypes against women, this will make a big difference.”

Theme 5: What Are Husbands’ Perceptions and Responses to Their Wives’ Initiatives to Achieve Shared Decision Making in Efforts to Succeed in HVCCA?

Most husbands communicated that they have full support for their wives for their engagement in HVCCA. Many appreciate their wives for their good contribution to increased household income and great responsibilities they undertake to the overall wellbeing of the family. This theme is further organized in two sub-themes: husbands’ support and husbands’ perceptions and attitudes.

Husbands’ support

Most women reported that their husbands were highly supportive of their engagement in HVCCA. They also shared that their husbands are always encouraging. Husbands listen to their wives’ advice on household strategies, and decisions are mostly made based on mutual understanding. Praising her husband for his support, W2D said, “Although we have small children, my husband always encourages me to participate in trainings and learn more about vegetable farming. I have been out of the village for trainings on several occasions.” Her husband, H2D, acknowledging his wife’s description, added, “In the beginning, my wife was shy to sell vegetables. But as I have given more opportunities and encouraged her to fully engage in vegetable production and marketing activities, her shyness has subsided significantly.” He added, “In the beginning, women may not be able to bargain prices in the markets but later they can. If more responsibilities are given, women can work even better. I have seen my wife become very active in vegetable farming.” Reinforcing W2D’s comments, W7A said, “My husband is very supportive. He plows land, he also digs field, pulls weed and often plants vegetables by himself. He is making all kinds of support for me.” Her comments

are supported by her husband, H7A: “I always encourage my wife to engage in vegetable production and marketing. I tell her ‘even if I am not home you can do it by yourself.’ I always try to teach her. We both work together in the farm.”

H6A expressed his feelings: “I have full support for my wife. She is not only active at home but in the entire district. She is a General Secretary of the Farmers District Agriculture Union. She is working hard to help other vegetable producing farmers, especially women.” He continued, “My wife and I have very good understanding. During the day, I take care of goats she takes care of children at pre-school in our community. We spend most of our time together in vegetable farms.” He added, “I am very proud of my wife and will always support and encourage her.” In a similar tone to H6A, H4A said, “I have always supported my wife. I always listen her. She is the one who takes most of the production activities. I continue to encourage her to take the main role in selling as well.” Reinforcing her husband’s great support and understanding, W4A said, “My husband is always supportive. He tells me not to lift heavy stuff and use vehicles to transport vegetables.” Generally, in the study area, women still carry vegetables from their farms to nearby markets to save money. She added, “He never tells me to eat less but eat more and good food and he also says wear good clothes. He always listens to me. What else can I expect? I have no problem.” Her statement ‘never eat less’ reflects a severe food insecurity situation and coping strategy for survival in the study area. Many families in the study area still struggle to meet daily needs. Getting enough food to eat is an indicator of love and care from husband and increased social status.

Praising her husband’s trust, W8A said, “My husband never opened an account in the bank. Even when we purchased land, he put the land in my name. My father suggested that my husband should keep land rights in his name, but he refused and said if there is no wife,

land has no use.” She added, “This house and land around the house is in my father-in-law’s name. But whatever we newly purchased is in my name.” Keeping land in the wife’s name is an extraordinary gesture of trust and support for one’s wife. Many women in the study area do not have any land rights. W5A said, “My husband supports me all the time. Since I travel a lot for trainings, he is always taking care of the family and supporting me in many activities. He always wants to be in the farm.” She added, “Most of the time, my husband takes care of the family. He cooks tea in the morning. He is more than supportive. I get more often sick and he thinks I cannot do work, so he is always supporting me.” Her statement that he cooks tea for her is very significant. Wives are expected to make teas for their husbands, especially the first tea of the day. There is a widely believed perception that women must wake up early. Serving tea to one’s wife is a departure from traditional norms and for such a gesture, husbands could be tagged as *Joitingre*.

H1A regrets that he has not been able to support his wife as much as he wanted. He said, “Men are mostly out of home. Before leaving home for a nearby market, I often assure my wife that I will have a tea and come home soon, but I end up spending the whole day mostly playing cards and drinking alcohol with friends.” He added, “My wife always thinks about family. She spends a lot of time with our children and takes care of farming activities as well. I have a great respect for my wife.” W1A confirmed that her husband sometimes plays cards. and drinks alcohol. But she also spoke very highly of her husband. She stated that her husband supported her to continue her education, and he continues to encourage her to take part in many trainings and capacity building programs in different towns and cities. She added, “Even if I need to spend nights for trainings in towns away from village, my husband always supports me. He always defends me against any community ills pointed

towards me.” She continued, “When I return home in dark, I worry about ghosts and society but not about my husband.” H3D, who is in his sixties, feels sad that despite his continued efforts he could not inspire his wife to take literacy classes and make her more engaged in overall HVCCA. Even today some women are still hesitant and shy to take training opportunities, especially if they are illiterate. For example, W3A, who is illiterate, said, “Although my husband always supports me to attend training, I am always hesitant. I do not know much about these kinds of activities. I do not even want to attend training. My days are gone.” She added, “My husband is great. He always listens to me a lot. If I tell him to go to forest to bring fodder, he brings. I tell him to take care of goats, he does. He never fights with me. But I must obey him.” Her statement “I must obey him” is a suggestion that the stereotype that women must listen to their husbands is prevalent, at least in the mindset of elderly and uneducated women.

However, not all women get full support from their husbands. W4D said, “I do not expect any support from my husband.” In a disappointed tone she expressed her frustration: “A person who does not support, how then can I expect?” She added, “I am okay. I hire people to plow my land.” However, she acknowledged that sometimes her husband takes tomatoes to markets. When I asked her husband why he does not support his wife in HVCCA, H4D confessed that he has not been able to support his wife’s activities in vegetable farming as much as he wanted. Although he has no negative perceptions about his wife’s engagement in HVCCA, he is concerned about lower prices she receives. He argued, “Men who do not have regular jobs are always there to support their wives. I know vegetable farming is one of the reliable sources of incomes.” He added, “However, it is not true that I

do not support her. I take tomatoes to markets. Mostly, I am busy looking after my retail shop I newly started.”

W4D and H4D’s situation is best described by SHO2K’s comments. He said, “If the household is totally dependent on vegetable production, couples work hand-in-hand. But if the husband is engaged in other business and wife is engaged in cash crops, she does not receive much support from the husband.” He added, “However, in many cases, husbands are very cooperative with their wives.” But this is not true in the cases of W2D and H2D. They both work hand-in-hand. H2D is a full-time school teacher but it does not hamper his support for his wife. Further, H5A and H1A are also full-time teachers but they are also engaged in vegetable farming and provide great support and encouragements for their wives’ endeavors to further the activities. In general, most husbands have a positive view about their wife’s engagement in HVCCA. One FGD3A participant has a slightly different opinion about husbands’ support to their wives: “Those who work and support their wives support in every work, for example, fodder collection and carrying fertilizer. But those who do not support do not do anything. I think most of the couples and families in this community are working together.” She added, “Everyone is competing against everyone to sell more vegetables and to earn income, so mostly men and women work equally and together in our community.” DHOA also confirmed that many women in the districts engaged in vegetable production and marketing receive good support from their husbands.

Husbands’ perceptions and attitudes

Husbands’ positive perceptions and responses to their wives’ initiatives to achieve shared decisions and increased role in HVCCA are found to be very important. Further husbands’ positive perceptions also help wives to negotiate negative community attitudes.

Appreciating husband's good support, W6A commented, "My husband never raises questions when I return home late. His unwavering support gives me great confidence to travel anytime and anywhere. It also provides me courage to challenge anyone that tries to point a finger at me." Her husband, H6A, said, "People say that I support my wife a lot and they see my wife's frequent travel to markets or other towns as a problem, but I do not care what they have to say." W8A also expressed that she is grateful to her husband for his carefree attitude and great encouragement. Her husband, H8A, said, "I am very happy and proud that my wife is engaged in vegetable farming and she knows many things about it." When asked whether people gossip or criticize negative things about him for his positive attitude and good support for his wife in HVCCA, H8D replied, "No, I have never heard any negative things personally. It is between my wife and me. We do not listen to what villagers say. But I believe the society is changed."

On a follow up question, when asked his reaction when people in the community used to sarcastically label his wife a 'leader', H2A responded, "People said that because they had lack of awareness. Some people may still say such words, but I do not really care." He added, "Nearly 15 years ago, a government led program failed to find a woman health volunteer in our community. People did not want their wives to engage in social work. They did not want their wives to travel out of the village." He continued, "When they did not find anyone, I encouraged my wife to take the role. Now she not only engages in vegetable farming but also is active in development programs and travels a lot. I am proud of my wife." Asked how he feels about his wife's overnight stay out of the village, he replied, "No problem. It is good for her. She stays sometime 1 to 2 weeks in Mangalsen, the district headquarters, and I have never said anything but always encouraged her." Recognizing her husband's very positive

attitudes towards her active life, W2A said, “My husband is great. He always supports me. But initially, he was also concerned and hesitant regarding my travel outside of the village. But these days there is no problem for me to even spend many nights out of the village.” She added, “He always tells me not to listen to what the community says. He encourages me to focus on work. He always listens to me. He is a very good husband.” Although H2A claimed that he encouraged his wife from the beginning to engage in social work and travel outside of the village, his wife’s description reflects the couple’s negotiation processes and transition to present attitudes. Further, when asked how the community reacts if she comes late in the evening from the markets, W2A said, “Generally, I go to markets and return on time. But sometimes, I get late. I really do not care what people say. I just engage in my work. More importantly, I always have my husband’s support.” She added, “My husband always fought against negative comments about women in our community and he knows me well.”

When asked whether he ever faced any challenges from the community or extended family members when he sent his wife to the markets, H8D said, “No. Never. It is between my wife and me. We do not listen to what villagers say. I have never heard, personally. Society has changed. Whenever there is a need, my wife should go to the markets.” He added, “There used to be a time when husbands beat their wives. Mine is an inter-caste marriage. Marriage is a commitment. This is God’s creation. We should work together, and we should always listen to each other.” Regarding his perceptions of his wife’s engagement in HVCCA, H8D indicated that he has always been encouraging his wife to participate in trainings and learn more about vegetable farms. When asked whether there were any cultural reservations about letting her engage in HVCCAs, W4A said, “My husband has been very supportive in rooting out all kinds of bad cultural practices in communities; for example, he

initiated toilet programs, told people not follow *Chhaupadi*, and so on.” She confirmed that since her husband was against all types of prevalent social ills, he always encouraged her to fully participate in all types of vegetable farming activities.

Most husbands have very positive perceptions towards their wives’ engagement in HVCCA. But some are still skeptical and possess a traditional mindset. Regarding his view of his wife’s overall engagement in HVCCA, H3A laughed and said, “They get easily cheated. In some places, they get NPR100 per kg but other they just give free, almost free of cost.” He elaborated: “Once my madam went to sell vegetables in the market and one person purchased vegetables from her and he gave her NPR 100 while returning change to him she gave NPR 200. That man was good to return her money.” He added, “Things have changed now. She recognizes the difference between NPR 5 and NPR 1000.” Further, when asked whether literacy programs and trainings would change that situation, he mockingly replied, “What do you do by providing trainings to women? *Barha barsha kukurko puchharma theluwa hale pani puchhar bangai* [dog’s tail will not get straight even if it is kept inside the bamboo internode for 12 years]. Nothing makes a difference even if you give trainings to them.” Such generalization to women represents the strong vestiges of the pervasive patriarchal system in the study area. When we followed up, he said, “I did not mean all women. We do not have many educated women. We have some, but they aspire higher and do not carry vegetables to markets. Women with no or poor literacy are the one who carry and sell vegetables.” His argument that educated women are hesitant to carry vegetables to markets is further supported in W1A’s statement. W1A, who has an intermediate level of education, suggested that she never carried and sold vegetables herself, instead she sends her

niece. But many other participant women who have high school level education in the study area are not hesitant to carry and sell vegetables in the markets.

Husbands who have positive attitudes towards their wives and are always willing to listen to their wives are often not appreciated by the broader community. They are portrayed as weak and submissive to their wives. A participant in FGD1D expressed her experience: “Society does not want to see husbands strongly supporting their wives; this is still true. If they do so they are criticized as weak husbands.” The statement made by FGD1D is recognized by HD8: “In the past, I used to hear people calling *Joitingre* to husbands who provided good support for their wives. People in my community used to tell me that I am my wife’s son (derogatory term) because of my strong support for her.” He added, “But these days everyone listens to their wives and supports them, so I do not hear such criticisms.” One participant in KIFGDK said, “I think men are portrayed as doers, but women are viewed as receivers. Normative manipulations make some men more aggressive towards their wives.” She added, “Although many husbands have very positive attitudes towards their wives and are willing to support, society tags them as *Joitingre*.”

Summary

This chapter detailed participants’ responses under three main themes: Theme 3—What are the specific attitudes of women and men in smallholder farm families and communities regarding women’s involvement in HVCCA? Theme 4—What is the current state of women’s changing status and emerging (negotiation) roles in HVCCA? and, Theme 5—What are husbands’ perceptions and responses to their wives’ initiatives to achieve shared decision making in efforts to succeed in HVCCA? Study findings suggest that there have been significant changes in extended family, community and husbands’ perceptions and

attitudes towards women's involvement in HVCCA and their travel outside of the villages for that. Government agency and development organization representatives acknowledged that there is a significant positive change in the overall status of women. Women are actively engaged in many decision-making processes at household and community levels. Key informants suggested that women today are empowered and possess the ability to calculate risk for positive change. Unlike in the past, women today are viewed as the family's bread winners. Their role in the household economy is widely accepted and praised. They enjoy increased freedom of movement and are comparatively empowered.

CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to understand household level decision-making processes of couples involved in high-value cash crop activities (HVCCA), with particular focus on women's existing and emerging roles, position/status, and empowerment. This research also sought to explore and illuminate the influence of the extended family, community members and government and development extension support on couples' decision-making processes, women's engagement in HVCCA (producing vegetables, travelling to markets and selling). The literature indicates that women's empowerment is a complex phenomenon that it requires micro level analysis in a specific context, geography, and culture. It also suggests that the influence of socio-cultural belief systems and practices in the community have not been adequately studied. Hence, this study was shaped by four fundamental questions:

1. What are the key enabling or inhibiting factors in women's empowerment in decision making regarding production and marketing of high value cash crops?
2. What are the specific attitudes of women and men in smallholder farm families regarding women's involvement in high value cash crop production and marketing?
3. How do women negotiate emerging roles in high value cash crop production and marketing in relation to their spouses and other family members? in relation to their community members and institutions? in relation to agents and organizations outside their community?
4. How do husbands of smallholder women farmers respond to their wives' initiatives to achieve shared decision making in efforts to succeed in high value cash crop activities? in relation to their community members and institutions? in relation to agents and organizations outside their community?

This study found that economic hardship and high unemployment rates in their communities are the main reasons that many couples engage in HVCCA. Decisions to engage in vegetable production and marketing is mostly a joint initiative for many couples and is an important strategy to achieve household economic wellbeing. They see HVCCA as an important means to complementing other sources of household income to meet the family's basic needs (food, clothing, children's education, health care, weddings, important rituals and building new homes). The primary stimulus is based on smallholder couples observing others within and outside of their communities. Growing markets closer to their homes, expansion of road networks to towns and major cities in the region and extension support and encouragement from government agencies and non-governmental organizations further enhanced couples' motivation.

Prior to starting commercial vegetable farming, many participant women relied heavily on their husbands for even very small amounts of money. Women engaged in HVCCA now freely travel to markets, sell their vegetables, have continuous access to cash and support their family's overall wellbeing and feel genuinely empowered. Although there are some persistent noticeable influential inhibiting cultural practices against women and infrastructural and technical difficulties, together with their husbands' most women make important decisions to further HVCCA, enhance household income, savings and future investments. Husbands' and community members' encouragement for women to engage in HVCCA is rapidly increasing. Government agencies and non-governmental organizations that promote HVCCA and women's empowerment support policies and programs in which women have central roles. Most women who are engaged in commercial vegetable farming activities are perceived as role models in their communities and their districts.

Women with higher levels of education feel more comfortable travelling to markets, engaging in training outside of the districts and are relatively at ease in most decision-making roles in HVCCA. However, all husbands reported that they always include their wives in the most important decisions. Hence, in terms of decision-making engagement in the household from husbands' perspectives, education level and age have minimal impact. However, women with no education or poor education tend to have less confidence in engaging with their husbands in important decisions such as selling vegetables, buying fertilizer, selecting appropriate crops, etc. They feel shy and often prefer not to travel to markets. They are also more likely to listen to their husbands and contribute less to decision making in HVCCA, especially generating creative ideas. Compared to older women, younger women are more vocal and persuasive in decision making. However, as women get older, they have more say in household matters, especially concerning daily expenditures and investment in important future activities, for example buying land or building a new home.

Women who initially struggled to participate in training programs outside of their villages and engage in vegetable production and marketing are now receiving tremendous support from their husbands. Despite initial opposition from husbands and extended family members, some women took the risk to start HVCCA. As these women started to earn income, their status in the household changed. Some husbands respectfully started to call their wives 'madam.' Some women successfully convinced their husbands to return from working in India to engage in HVCCA. These initiatives are well appreciated by these husbands. Some husbands now regret that they were not providing enough initial support as their wives engaged in HVCCA. These dynamics suggest that couples' engagement in HVCCA not only generates household income, creates a conducive environment for

women's empowerment but also helps enhance mutual understanding between husbands and wives. Contrary to much previous research, surprisingly, none of the participants reported that there was any conflict in the household due to increased income.

Many participants suggested that they have received extensive training support and exposure visits from government agencies and development organizations. Even the women who first initiated HVCCA received good support from these institutions. In many cases, participants reported that the absence of employment opportunities and poor cereal crop production motivated them to start HVCCA to cope with economic hardship. Although some communicated that they had learned some skills from their parents and relatives, this study cannot determine whether they were more progressively inclined than others to engage in HVCCA. Some who are engaged in HVCCA have jobs, and it is possible that non-agricultural income played a role in starting vegetable production. However, many did not have jobs or savings to engage in HVCCA. Initially, they started producing vegetables in a small portion of their land and expanded as they began to earn income from HVCCA.

This study was not intended to compare findings from the two districts. However, we observed that since Dadeldhura was connected to road access almost three decades earlier than Achham there are more communities engaged in HVCCA. Dadeldhura has received relatively more external support to advance HVCCA. In terms of women's decision-making roles in HVCCA, there is no significant difference between the two districts.

The findings of this study are based on in-depth interviews with women and their husbands, focus group discussions with members of various women's groups, prominent women leaders and representatives of government agencies and development organizations. From the participants' responses to the principal questions outlined above, five major and

relatively distinct themes emerged. Evidence regarding these themes was presented in a detail manner in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. In this chapter, I relate the study findings to the literature and theories discussed in Chapter 2.

1. Factors Enabling Women's Empowerment in Household Decision-Making Processes in HVCCA

It has been long identified that farmers in the mid-hills of Nepal's Far Western region struggle to produce enough food from cereal crop farming. But from a cultural perspective, production of cereal crops such as rice, wheat, finger millet, and lentils is considered to be 'genuine' farming activity. These struggles motivated some smallholders to initiate HVCCA for which technical and financial support and infrastructure are still being developed. Government agencies and development organizations have established numerous policies and programs to encourage and support these activities among smallholders in the study area, particularly practices that promote and empower women producers. Consequently, commercial vegetable farming activities are increasing, and many women are actively engaged. HVCCA is a viable option for enhancing household income and bettering a family's overall wellbeing accounting all those who participated in this research.

Burdened by extreme poverty and with very few employment opportunities in their communities, most smallholder women and their husbands are constantly under pressure and are busy exploring household strategies to improve their livelihoods based on subsistence agriculture. Their prime goals in life are to achieve household food security, educate their children and perform important rituals. Most household decisions made by study participants are made jointly and there is a high level of mutual understanding and respect between husbands and wives. Surprisingly, the household strategies and decisions made by smallholder couples are not guided by pervasive male dominance or gender-based work

divisions as suggested by previous research (Basu 2006; Kafle 2015; Mayoux 2001; World Bank 2009; Quaye et al. 2016). Instead, they are based on the family's priorities to overcome extreme poverty and meet basic household needs. These important aspects of rural households' economic strategies are also highlighted in several studies conducted in recent decades (Reejal 1981; Miller 1990; Ransom and Bain 2011 and Doss 2018). From husband's perspectives, whether the wife is educated or illiterate, her views are very important in all household decisions. However, I do not suggest that women experience no discrimination or subordination or that all women have the same decision-making roles. There are still many cultural-based practices which negatively impact women.

Discussion about the enabling factors that emerged from interviews regarding women's decision-making processes/roles in HVCCA at household are organized in three main topics: shared decisions, women's organizations and collective efforts, and programs and policy interventions.

Shared decisions

The HVCCA generally involve husbands' and wives' mutual understanding and cooperation. Regardless of education level, knowledge about HVCCA or age, most wives play important roles in household decision making. Husbands often seek their wives' consent about crop selection, land selection, production, using fertilizer, harvesting, marketing, expenditure and investment of income earned. In a similar manner, wives also do not make important decisions without their husbands' consent. If the couples live in a joint family, sometimes decisions about HVCCA and use of earned income are made based on advice obtained from their fathers- and mothers-in-law. Wives play as important a role as their husbands. These findings contrast with those of Baba et al. (2015) and de Brauw (2015), who

suggested that women only have minor roles in HVCCA. However, I must acknowledge that there are some husbands who often insist on having a final say on some important household decisions. These husbands often make the final decisions. This tendency is more prevalent among older husbands and among husbands whose wives are illiterate. Women who have high school and intermediate level of education, training, and exposure tend to play bigger roles in important household decisions. Behrman, Julia, et al. (2012) and Akotey and Adjtey (2016) also identified that education and skill development training enhance women's decision-making roles in cash crop production and marketing. Husbands' or wives' influence over each other's decision making across the age groups largely depends on the level of knowledge they hold about overall HVCCA. Many past studies suggest that women's poor access to productive assets such as land property negatively influence their decision-making. However, in the study area, most productive assets are registered in the husband's name and, interestingly, this has no noticeable negative impact on women's active engagement in important decision making in cash crop activities as suggested by Zakaria (2016).

Most husbands fully trust their wives' full engagement in cash crop activities. Many husbands acknowledged that their wives have better skills for cash crop activities and are better negotiators for obtaining good prices in markets. Hence, they often encourage their wives to engage in selling vegetables. These ideas are supported as husbands believe that their wives save almost 100 percent of the income from selling vegetables. Some husbands confessed that when they go to town to sell vegetables, they are easily tempted to spend hard earned income on alcohol, playing cards and paying friends' bills for similar activities. Even if husbands sell vegetables, they ask their wives to keep income earned from HVCCA, suggesting that the latter are rational money managers. They believe that their wives

prioritize their family's wellbeing. The finding that income in women's hands is consistently devoted to their family's wellbeing is in line with the assessment of Villamor et al. (2014) and contrasts with Oduol et al.'s (2017) suggestion that cash crop activities in developing countries are controlled by male farmers. Women are equal partners in every aspect of HVCCA. Women's active engagement in HVCCA has positively contributed to increased household income and family's wellbeing. More importantly, women who have engaged in vegetable production and marketing actively engage in many training sessions and often travel outside of their villages; this mobility contributes to their increased awareness level and decision-making power and empowerment. Hence, these findings from this study are very similar to what Chant (2016), Hill and Vigneri (2014) and Zakaria (2016) described in their studies.

“She does not even buy a piece of candy,” “I really trust my wife,” “My wife knows about my daily expenditure and she gives to me,” and “Even if I spend NPR 5, I always share with my husband and he also always tells me how he spends money” are some of the common statements made by couples that reveal the depth of trust and understanding about the household expenditure between husbands and wives. Important household expenditures are mostly made jointly. Almost all wives tend to report every expenditure made to their husbands. But many husbands often do not share minor expenditures with their wives. Some husbands rely entirely on their wives for even small amounts of money such as pocket money. Many wives buy their clothes and jewelry themselves, but they seek prior approval from their husbands. Contrastingly, most husbands report their wives when they make large expenses only. The major decisions such as further investment in HVCCA, purchasing land, building new homes, buying domestic animals such as cows, bulls, goats, water buffalos and

taking loans from banks, are always discussed. These decisions most often take place during the leisure time, for example, after lunch or dinner.

Consistent to Sikod's (2017) analysis, as women start earning income their overall decision-making role and bargaining power in household matters increases. Further, they earn more respect from husbands, extended family members, and community members. With income in hand and being able to contribute to the family's overall wellbeing, many women feel a great sense of freedom, satisfaction, and empowerment. These findings are closely aligned with Haile et al.'s (2012) earlier assessments. Suggestion that women's work is undercounted, their contribution to household income is undervalued and their decision-making roles are underappreciated in developing countries (Twyman, Useche, and Deere 2015) sharply contrast with this study. Many husbands readily acknowledge their wife's economic contribution to the household and openly advocate for more roles and opportunities for them.

Women's organizations and collective efforts

In contrast to earlier findings of Alkire et al. (2013) that women in developing countries face limitations in engaging in women's group activities, surprisingly, women in the study area do not face such issues. Women research participants do not have restrictions or limitations on involvement in women's groups. Consequently, there are many women's groups actively working to advance women's decision-making power and empowerment. Mothers' groups, mother's health groups, women forest user groups, women farmer groups and women cooperative groups are examples. These women's groups are often initiated by government agencies and development organizations to implement their programs. Women's

groups are instrumental in enhancing women's decision-making power in the household as well as in the community. In some cases, women are self-organized.

Women farmers groups and women cooperative groups are essential for women engaged or opting to engage in HVCCA. These groups are very supportive, especially for new beginners, by providing them counselling, trainings, and links through their networks to the markets. Although women regularly visit nearby towns and attend trainings and workshops at the district headquarters, they may require permission from their husbands and extended family members if they wish to take part in similar activities and exposure visits outside the district. Getting permission may include lengthy negotiations. In such situations, women's groups reach husbands and extended family members (fathers- and mothers-in-law and other in-laws). They explain the importance of the programs and convince them to allow women to travel and take part in such programs. Further, through collective efforts, women's groups are also very helpful in convincing families and negotiate cultural attitudes restricting women's travel. They reach out to senior male community members to create a fear-free environment for women to engage in vegetable production and marketing. Bandura's (1994) Theory of Self Efficacy and Bronfenbrenner's (1974) Socio-Ecological Model have explained why it is important to have external factors to moderate individuals' personal struggles to overcome some inhibiting factors that are beyond their ability and scope. In this case, women's groups through collective efforts can help moderate individuals who are struggling to convince families and overcome cultural backlashe to continue engaging in HVCCA actively. The World Bank (2009), also identified women farmer groups' collective efforts as important in diminishing cultural structures, easing travel restrictions and expanding economic networks. Oxfam (2013) also highlighted the importance of women's

group's collective actions in organizing trainings, enhancing smallholder farmers' position in the markets and increasing bargaining power and strengthening overall economic activities. These initiatives bring tremendous confidence for women and facilitate household decision-making processes.

In collaboration with government extension services and development organizations, women's groups identify various problems faced by vegetable growers, take initiative to resolve those problems and propose new programs to advance women's role in HVCCA in their communities. Through women's cooperatives, they persuade women involved in HVCCA to engage in mandatory savings and credit programs. These initiatives provide important financial security to many poor women producers and their husbands. More importantly, these are important venues for women to share their experiences and learn from other community members. Cooperatives also organize exposure visits and trainings for women. Hossain and Jaim (2011) identified that women's engagement in credit support programs provides better opportunities and reasons for them to travel outside of the home which, over time, contributes to their increased 'voice' in family decision making. Cooperatives' minimum interest rates also help couples invest in HVCCA and productive asset creation such as buying bulls, cows, buffalos, goats, and even land. Many husbands praised women's farming groups and cooperatives. Therefore, consistent with Watson's (2008) assessment, I conclude that enhancing women farmers' group networks and organizations helps women to promote their cash crop activities and generate business opportunities. These exposures ultimately contribute to women's enhanced decision-making power and empowerment at the household as well as community level. As WDOD and NGOD1 suggested, some women engaged in women's groups and cooperative activities are

becoming active social change agents in their communities and some of them have successfully run in local elections and gotten elected. A few women who were initially with cooperatives (not the direct participants in this research) from the study area became member of federal parliament.

Unlike Oxfam's (2013) assessments, this study did not find women's groups collectively engaged in negotiating market prices. Although the actual reason for this is not known, I speculate that since the vegetable production capacity of the couples is still very low, the vendors often do not come to their communities. In this scenario, women's groups are not presented with opportunities to negotiate prices collectively. Secondly, many participant couples have personal relationships with vendors in the markets and they often prefer to sell individually. In some cases, maintaining relationships with vendors is more important in a market with fluctuating prices and a narrow scope. Thirdly, those who reach markets early often get better prices for their products. Individual producers, often women, are seen in towns selling vegetables early in the morning. However, the actual reason why women's groups are not taking initiatives for collective bargaining for better prices is not known and this could be an area for future research.

I must acknowledge that not all the women's groups formed are currently functioning. Some women groups were formed just to receive funding and they never served their objectives. Often, when programs are phased out, some of these groups become dysfunctional. Leadership positions in these women's groups and cooperatives are often held by educated and well-off women in the communities. Some groups are biased against some of their community members, especially weak and poorer members. They also recommend their close acquaintances and members of well-off families for trainings and exposure visits.

Some do not fairly distribute development aid to community members in an equal manner. These types of group dominance and attitudes are well reported by Doss and Bokius-Suwyn (2012) and World Bank (2009). Their studies warned that women's groups can marginalize the most vulnerable, being controlled by financially well-off women. These group dynamics have negative impacts on women's collective efforts, bargaining and negotiation power, decision making and empowerment.

Programs and policy interventions

In the study area and throughout Nepal, government agencies and development organizations are implementing affirmative action practices favoring women producers. Women are encouraged to organize in groups, inform programs of their needs and those of their communities. In some cases, women receive 70 percent subsidies in various types of vegetable production activities. Mostly, these subsidies are given to build plastic tunnels, irrigation support, pest management, seeds, and fertilizer. Many husbands are happy that their wives can receive good program subsidies. Apart from direct support, women also get opportunities to travel to major towns and district headquarters to complete paperwork to receive subsidies, they meet government extension officials and development representatives and have extensive interactions. Through these exposure visits and interactions, they learn many new things about vegetable farming and share with their husbands and extended families. These types of activities have very positive impacts on women's decision-making power and empowerment. Recently, government has initiated crop insurance for vegetable producers with special attention to women which also contributes to women's confidence to engage in HVCCA.

Women's roles in many leadership positions in program implementation users' committees are encouraged. There are many trainings, capacity enhancement programs and exposure visits specifically designed and focused on women's empowerment in vegetable production and marketing. These programs have helped women's increased role in household decision making and contributed to leadership development. The external agencies are also making sure that women's leadership positions and representations in users' committees is guaranteed. The user's committees formed to implement development programs and are accountable for funding transparency and public audits. As women take part in various meetings with senior male members of the community and development actors, their confidence level to speak and share their thoughts gradually evolves. They are becoming less shy and more vocal. Their active engagement in these groups contributes to their overall decision-making power and empowerment.

Representatives from government agencies and development organizations often reach out to husbands, extended family members, and community members to encourage women's active participation in HVCCA. Such initiatives have very positive impacts on husbands' and extended family members' decisions to allow women to freely engage in vegetable production and marketing. To avoid cultural clashes and backlash, government agencies and development organizations often designate female staff to organize trainings for women. Exposure visits outside of the districts are also organized under the leadership of female representatives. These initiatives help build trust between development actors and community members. More importantly, women producers benefit the most.

Initially, in the past, programs were only designed for women participants and are conducted by female facilitators. These days, training and capacity enhancement training

programs are designed for men and women. As communities are more accepting of women's active involvement in HVCCA, women participants feel more confident to take part in these programs. Most of them do not fear speaking with male strangers. These days, trainings are also facilitated by male and female representatives. Through being in those programs, women start gaining more confidence and become more active in household decision making and feel a sense of empowerment. However, some women are still hesitant to speak when there are senior male members taking part in the programs.

There are not only positive aspects to these external support systems. Some people are critical of these programs as they fail to serve in an unbiased manner. One participant was forced to reveal his political party affiliation to receive aid. Another was asked to pay a commission for receiving subsidized tent houses for vegetable production. In some cases, organizations intensified vegetable production in a few communities and promised to sell their vegetable, but they did not keep their word and perishable vegetables got infected. Participating couples suffered big losses from vegetable production. These activities negatively impact women's empowerment in HVCCA. Many farmers, especially older people, continue to believe in cereal crops. When participants fail to sell their vegetables, they hear harsh words and discouragement from their fathers-and mothers-in-law. Further, subsidies allocated for women do not always reach the target beneficiaries. Participants, especially women, experience many difficulties such as completing the paperwork and receiving subsidy programs in a timely manner. ActionAid International (2011) identified that culturally perceived and defined rights and responsibilities of men and women and the current global economic model fail to recognize women as equal partners in households' farming strategies in many developing countries. As government agencies and many

development organizations have focused their program priorities on enhancing women producers, I suggest that the statement made by ActionAid International does not match the findings of this study.

2. Factors Inhibiting Women's Empowerment in Household Decision-Making Processes in HVCCA

Although women engaged in HVCCA in the study area enjoy many encouraging and enabling factors, they also struggle to overcome some deep-rooted cultural beliefs and practices. Discussion of factors inhibiting women's empowerment in household decision-making processes in HVCCA are organized according to six main traits: *Ijjat* and household decision making, patriarchy and expected roles, many roles of women, *Chhaupadi* and decision-making, knowledge gap and limited markets and storages.

***Ijjat* and household decision-making**

Despite strong support from their husbands, extended family members, women's groups, community members, government agencies and development organizations, women find it difficult to deal with culturally embedded ideas. For example, most women feel guilty if they do not follow their husbands' advice. Not listening and respecting one's husband is broadly linked to the household's *Ijjat*. Miller (1990), in his study conducted in the Western mid-hills of Nepal, highlighted that *Ijjat* (despising/shaming) is very important to rural farm households. The *Ijjat* concerns not only what people say about one's 'action' but how they 'think' about and 'perceive' it. Even if the extended family members and community members do not make direct comments about women's freer travels and decision making with their husbands in HVCCA, they often worry about what other people 'might' or 'will' think about their actions. This applies to every belief system that women attempt to break for example *Chhaupadi* and women plowing land. Their efforts are often hindered by the

mindset of *Ijbat* and what others ‘might’ or ‘will’ think about them. Consequently, husbands who wish to let their wives freely engage in all forms of HVCCA decision making are largely affected by invisibly operating cultural norms. Further, some couples face direct verbal backlash from extended families and community members for breaking down traditional belief systems. Prevailing belief systems hold that families must not sell vegetables, should produce cereal crops, women must stay home, and husbands must have all time control over their wives. Verbal criticism or behind-the-back gossip about women’s engagement in HVCCA are increasingly rare events these days. Husbands also rarely face backlash for their relaxed behavior towards their wives and support for them. Yet, some women continue to live with the burden of long practiced cultural beliefs. As identified by Bandura (1994), women’s self-efficacy is somehow limited against strong traditional belief systems and need factors moderate and ease the situation.

Subconsciously, the idea of *Ijbat* also influences husbands’ overall attitudes towards their wife’s decision making and empowerment. Most husbands are keen to see their wives fully involved in HVCCA and take every opportunity to advance these activities and improve their household’s dire economic situation. But they are also constantly thinking and assessing what community members ‘might’ or ‘will’ think’ of their actions, for example, providing more freedom for their wives to travel markets and not admonishing them when they return home after dark. Their decisions to let their wives fully engage in HVCCA would require strong attitudes and will power. This phenomenon is well explained by Ajzen’s (1985) Theory of Planned Behavior. Husbands or wives’ desire for joint decisions in HVCCA are contingent on their ability to overcome external influences. Their increased awareness, self-

efficacy, and level of understanding about the importance of joint decision-making in HVCCA may be ineffective against deep rooted and quietly operating social belief systems.

Patriarchy and expected roles

The patriarchal system is very influential in household decision making and women's empowerment. In general, men's attitudes towards women's active engagement in HVCCA in the study area remain skeptical. As identified by Basu (2006) and Kafle (2015), most people believe that men are the breadwinner in the family and women should take care of household work and depend on their husbands. If most or all members in the community are involved in HVCCA, they have great appreciation for women as equal contributors to household income. However, the patriarchal system still imposes certain rules that most men and women follow. The roles and responsibilities are defined as men's and women's work. There are no written rules, but people tend to follow them sincerely. For women, plowing land is inauspicious and is punishable. Almost all women still fear that they can be expelled from the village if they dare to plow land. Most participants believe that if women plow land, serious consequences will take place and the community will have to face nature's curse or God will punish, often with prolonged droughts and famine. On the other hand, for example, men are not supposed to carry fertilizer in the field, at least, not in a *Doko* (basket made from bamboo). *Doko* is a women's tool and should only be used by women. Interestingly, there are no bad consequences for men performing women's tasks other than social backlash and disgraceful comments.

Husbands who make every effort to support their wives are labeled as *Joitingre* (one who is submissive to his wife's orders). There are many derogatory words and clichés about men not being dominant over their wives and performing tasks at their wives' will. Other

domestic work such as fetching water, cooking food, washing clothes, rearing children, etc. are labeled women's work and should be performed by women alone. These types of defined role specifications have negative impacts on advancing women's empowerment at the household. In line with Bradshaw (2013) and Lambrecht's (2016), this study also suggests that without addressing long held social beliefs and norms that restrict women, it is very difficult to enhance women's empowerment. It is imperative to understand societal norms, rules and perceptions and their consequences on individuals' actions.

Many roles of women

"I have many other priorities at home, for example taking care of animals." This statement from a woman reflects many women's work drudgery at home. Women in the study area work about 18 hours a day. Doss (2018) suggested that many program interventions focused on enhancing agricultural productivity failed to identify women's work drudgery in the rural farm household in developing countries. Similar to Doss's (2018) assessments, women in the study area are often overwhelmed by multiple roles they need to perform. Women nourish young children, fetch water from great distances, collect firewood and take care of animals. Work drudgery negatively impacts women's full involvement in HVCCA. Most external support programs designed for enhancing women's decision-making power in households and communities fall short on addressing women's multitasking burdens. Socially constructed gender work division and role specifications discussed earlier are also stumbling blocks to their husbands fully supporting their wives.

***Chhaupadi* and women's decision-making**

Chhaupadi is widely practiced in the study area. Many women continue to believe that not following *Chhaupadi* strictly can seriously harm their family's overall social and

mental wellbeing. Extended family members and community members can directly use verbal criticisms if they find women during menstruation sleeping inside their homes, cooking food or fetching water from community taps. Families encourage women to not follow the practice face serious backlash from community members. Deeply entrenched by subconscious fear, most men and women do not dare to break the *Chhuapadi* norm. Most women believe that if they sleep inside their homes during menstruation, a ‘tiger’ will come and take their animals, or their animals will die abruptly. It is widely believed that not following *Chhaupadi* can even harm husbands’ and other family members’ health. Women should not have body contact with anyone but young children. During menstruation, many women do not touch and irrigate vegetables which many believe will get infected and die. They do not touch vegetables if it is raining. Many believe that rain worsens the condition of vegetables. Although this study did not follow up questions about how women manage their vegetable farms during menstruation, the practice does have some negative impacts on women’s decision-making processes and empowerment in HVCCA. Most participants communicated that important decisions about HVCCA strategies take place during bed-times or leisure times but during menstruation women do not sleep with their husbands. Also, during menstruation, women do not travel to markets. Crossing rivers and streams using bridges or suspension bridges during menstruation is punishable by God and Goddesses. Streams and rivers are considered holy. Women often carry vegetables to markets and they need to cross these streams and rivers. However, the actual impacts of *Chhauapdi* on HVCCA needs further exploration.

Knowledge gap

Many farmers, especially women, lack detailed knowledge about HVCCA. Many women are illiterate and lack proper trainings and exposure. Consistent with previous research, lack of education and skill development training negatively impacts women's roles in cash crop production and marketing (Akotey and Adjasi 2016; Ferris et al. 2014). However, it is not only women who lack proper knowledge in HVCCA. Many men are also barely educated and continue learning skills about HVCCA. In contrast to Enete and Amusa (2010), there were no noticeable attitudes and beliefs that women having limited knowledge about cash crop production and marketing should be subordinated to their husbands. Instead, almost all husbands and wives work hand in hand to advance their HVCCA. They make most decisions together.

Limited markets and lack of storage

Markets for vegetables are limited in the study area. Many smallholders in the mid-hills and the mountains of the far western region cannot afford to buy fresh vegetables. These farmers often grow some types of vegetables seasonally for household consumption. Couples often produce seasonal and highly perishable vegetables such as cauliflowers, tomatoes, cabbage, radish, etc. Since markets are limited and there are no cold storage facilities, producers are often forced either to sell cheaply to vendors or vegetables to rot. There are many cases when couples have dumped vegetables. Due to lack of proper infrastructures such as tunnel houses and irrigation facilities, most farmers produce seasonal vegetables only. Local markets are undermined by imported vegetables. Indian vegetables are low in quality and contain higher amount of pesticides. With heavy government subsidies and backed by advanced research and technologies, the Indian farmers bordering the study area

can produce vegetable more cheaply. Local producers cannot compete with Indian vegetables. India and Nepal share an open border and there is no restriction on Indian goods coming into Nepal. The government of Nepal is aware of the situation, especially chemical-laden vegetables that come from India. Poor people in the region do not have the luxury of buying fresh vegetables produced locally, as they are expensive compared to Indian vegetables. This situation impacts couples' enthusiasm about vegetable farming. This can particularly impact women's active involvement in HVVCA and their empowerment. Previous studies indicated that more income in women's hands increases their decision-making roles in the family and contributes to overall empowerment (Haile et al. 2012).

However, some interviewees and extension officials argue that most producers in the study area do not calculate their production costs. They often seek higher prices. For example, H4A said that if farmers calculate their production cost, they can sell at a lower price and can compete with vegetables coming from India. Surprisingly, many participants did not complain about vendors. Instead, they said they have personal relationships with vendors and they trust them whatever price they set. But not all agree with such statements. Some are frustrated that vendors always try to seize opportunity to lower vegetable prices. Since vegetables are perishable, farmers do not have options but to sell at lower price. There is no market system to fix the price. However, there is no gender discrimination in the price paid for vegetables. Most say women do not receive lower prices for vegetables just because they are women.

3. Specific Attitudes of Women and Men in Smallholder Farm Families and Communities Regarding Women's Involvement in HVCCA

General perceptions and attitudes towards women engaged in HVCCA has been rapidly improving. Taboos against producing and selling vegetables are fast eroding and

many see these activities as important means of household income. Extended family members and community members praise women for their active and creative roles in enhancing household income through HVCCA. Participant women today are viewed as capable as men of earning income and meeting the family's basic needs. Derogatory comments against women in the study area are declining. Further, women are not viewed as weak and helpless but important and integral parts of rural household livelihood strategies. Women's travels to markets and exposure visits outside of their districts are accepted norms although some still have reservations. Specific attitudes of women and men in smallholder farm families and communities regarding women's involvement in HVCCA are discussed in two main topics: risk takers and role models and mock leaders to genuine leaders.

Risk takers and role models

Many couples who have initially started HVCCA faced some level of criticism from extended family members and community members. Producing and selling vegetables was considered a social disgrace. There was a widespread belief that farmers must produce crops and vegetables for self-consumption only. Determined to find ways to enhance household income at home, some early starters and risk takers initiated HVCCA in their respective communities. The history of commercial vegetable farming in the study districts is less than 35 years. In Achham, it is less than 20 years for most producers. These early starters have observed successful commercial vegetable farming outside of their districts. As expansion of road networks closer to their communities started, they observed fast emerging new towns. These towns started to bring freshly grown vegetables from major cities. Such activities gave confidence to some farmers and they started to contact government agricultural extension offices. Government agencies provided trainings and exposure visits. Later, development

organizations focused on promoting commercial vegetable farming. Many early starters are viewed as role models in their communities and people have great respect for them. They are economically relatively well-off.

Many newcomers followed their footsteps. Observations of others involved in HVCCA, trainings, exposure visits and community support systems have significant impacts on farmers' decisions to engage in HVCCA. These factors influence both husbands' and wives' attitudes towards HVCCA and their overall decision-making processes for these activities. Women receiving support from their husbands, extended family members, women's groups, community members and external agencies are more likely to engage in detailed discussions about HVCCA with their husbands and other extended family members. They are very likely to fully and freely emerge in these activities. These findings reflect many important elements of three theories: Theory of Planned Behavior, Self-Efficacy Theory and Socio-Ecological Model discussed in this study. Individuals' (husbands' and wives') beliefs and actions are influenced by external forces, in this case, extended family and community members' attitudes and statements. Their encouragement and support enable women to counter cultural practices that limit women's activities and significantly strengthens their overall decision making and empowerment in HVCCA. At a broader level, creation of a conducive environment for women to fully engage in HVCCA is contingent on external agencies affirmative action policies and programs. In line with previous research (Chant 2016; Hill and Vigneri 2014; Zakaria 2016), this study finds that women's active engagement in cash crop activities and enhanced decision making significantly contributes to household income and family's overall wellbeing, but their success is dependent on continued support, especially from extended family members and community members.

Women can be easily distracted by backlash from these immediate agents in their communities. Continued affirmative programs (World Bank 2009) and policies are also important to continue women's advancement in HVCCA.

Mock leaders to genuine leaders

Initially, many participants women were mocked for their active engagement in various empowerment activities in their communities. As some women started to take leadership positions in important community affairs with male members in their communities, many men and some women sarcastically started to call them 'leaders.' These were outliers who stood against pervasive belief systems, who never gave up. Government agencies and development organizations joined to help them through various empowerment programs such as trainings, exposure visits, and literacy programs. With increased subsidies and other incentive program interventions, women were further encouraged to engage in HVCCA to generate household income. Women's group efforts were strengthened through cooperatives. Although calling women 'leaders' is still perceived as an insulting word, many women have emerged as genuine leaders as they were elected in various leadership positions in recently held local level elections. Perceptions of women have changed. Many men and women in the community view women's engagement in HVCCA as an encouraging and important activity to enhance household income.

Positive attitudes and solid support from extended family members and community members significantly contributes to women's confidence in decision-making, empowerment and furthering HVCCA. W6A's statement, "They (father- and mother in-law) never question my integrity even if I come home a little late," suggests that women are conscious about how their family members perceive their travel to markets and how they view their interactions

with others outside of her community. Many extended family members and community members today encourage women to travel outside of their districts to take part in trainings and exposure visits. Neighbors and community members are appreciative of what early risk takers and role models have done for HVCCA in their communities. They give full credit to women who have fought all negative perceptions against them in the beginning. Men acknowledged that women are the true producers of vegetables and increased household incomes. Many husbands say that they see no negative community attitudes towards their wife's active engagement in HVCCA. However, this is not true for all women. Some women still need to engage in lengthy negotiations with their husbands and extended family members to get travel permission, especially if it is outside of their district. There are still many people in the study area who strongly believe that women should not be travelling alone outside of the district, at least not without accompanying family members. Unlike 10-15 years ago, community members today do not say any negative things about women directly, but they do express their dissatisfaction behind their backs. Women also need to be cautious when they speak in front of male community members who still expect women to speak in a low voice.

Even if women are highly educated and working for professional organizations, families expect them to travel with female colleagues. Women working for non-governmental organizations shared that they need to travel with women colleagues. They are not comfortable traveling with male colleagues, even if it is within the vicinity of their working district. Additionally, they say it gives room for people to talk negatively. As a male researcher, I faced difficulties to interview women for this research despite the fact that I come from the region and am fluent in local dialects. I was also skeptical of approaching

women for interviews. I might have found women to sit with me for interviews and it would have been culturally appropriate, but I was not mentally prepared to persistently think about potential community backlash. Hence, I had to hire a female research assistant to conduct interviews with women. However, with very high unemployment rates, small landholdings and poor yields from cereal crops, many women are stepping up to pursue HVCCA. Economic security and the family's wellbeing are their main priorities that continues to inspire many smallholders.

4. Current State of Women's Changing Status and Emerging (negotiation) Roles in HVCCA

“Sometimes, I think and compare the situation that we used to have in the past and today, and I feel like the whole era has elapsed. It is entirely a new world.” This FGD2A participant's statement tells the story of many women's current status. As many women have access to cash any time and have received more trainings and exposure visits, they are becoming more confident in travelling alone, reaching government agencies and development organizations for programs to further HVCCA and the household economy. As identified in previous research, economic security is an important aspect for women's increased decision making and empowerment. However, this study sharply contrasts with Mason and Smith's (2003) assessment that women's higher attainment in economic activities does not necessarily contribute to their increased role in family decision-making. Women's increased role in HVCCA and income generation significantly enhances their decision-making roles in households.

The findings of this study also do not align to Deshmukh-Ranadive's (2003) argument that sometimes such income generating programs may contribute to increased tensions within households. None of the study participants reported that because of the

increased income there is any tension in the family. Instead, most of these women today are perceived as role models in their communities and they continue to bring more women together through various types of group activities and cooperative movements. They obtained great respect from their husbands and family members. They are increasingly confident to negotiate to continue HVCCA. Some of them even can write new program proposals and bring new funding to their communities to improve irrigation facilities and build infrastructure to advance HVCCA. However, at least one key informant suggests that as women become empowered and have equal voices in the family, some marriages are falling apart. Her suggestion is that many program interventions focused on women's empowerment should have also focused on their family responsibilities.

Women are also playing active roles in motivating their community members to use compost fertilizer and find local solutions for pest control. They are spreading the word among their community members that excessive use of chemical fertilizers and insecticides damages the soil quality and harms health. Some of these women are capable of convincing their husbands, extended family members, and community members for their continued and active roles in HVCCA and travel outside of the districts. They are also not hesitant to speak with males in or outside of their communities. "I have full support for my wife. She is not only active at home but in the entire district. She is a General Secretary of the District Farmers Agriculture Union. She is working hard to help other vegetable producing farmers, especially women in many communities in the district." This quotation from H6A explains the roles that some leading women are playing.

Observing women's increased roles in many domains of household and community affairs some community members comment, "This is women's kingdom." Women are

producing vegetables, traveling to markets, selling vegetables, earning income, saving money, investing and contributing to family overall wellbeing. Many women confessed that merely 6-7 years ago many women were hesitant to leave their homes even to small towns in the vicinity of their villages. These women also noted that not long ago, they literally had to beg to their husbands and extended family members to attend workshop and trainings related to HVCCA, even if it was within their districts. They just inform their husbands and family members these days to attend similar events. These women are organized and collectively fighting against any possible social backlash.

Many give due credit to government agencies and development organizations for women's improved status. The World Bank (2009) recognizes affirmative action laws as crucial measures to reduce discriminatory cultural attitudes and practices. This assessment was found to be consistent in the case of women in this study. The government of Nepal has launched numerous policies in favor of women. The government also initiated positive discrimination programs for women farmers. Also indicated by the Socio-Ecological Model, these measures are found to be helpful in advancing women's decision making and empowerment. The Socio-Ecological Model outlines the importance of positive policy formulation at the macro levels and in this case referred as national level. Many women are educated today, and numerous studies have indicated that education has a positive correlation with women's increased decision making and negotiation power in the households. Women with higher level of education tend to have more leadership positions in the community and are relatively more empowered.

Some argue that in recent years, many male members from the community have gone abroad for employment and in the absence of their husbands' women attend many important

meetings in the community. These mandatory meetings have also contributed to women's enhanced decision making and empowerment in general. However, this notion must be further researched.

5. Husbands' Perceptions and Responses to Their Wives' Initiatives to Achieve Shared Decision Making in Efforts to Succeed in HVCCA

As women started earning income for the household, their husbands started calling them madam (a form of respect). Contrary to Deshmukh-Ranadive's (2003) analysis, income under women's control seems to have increased status in the household. Many husbands have tremendous respect for their wives. Most husbands make every effort to encourage their wives to take part in capacity enhancement trainings, learn and actively engage in HVCCA. None of the husbands said that they do not allow their wives to travel outside of their district for trainings. Husbands are increasingly willing to stand with their wives and defend against any cultural backlashes. Many women acknowledged that husbands' support is crucial to fully engage in vegetable farming and they receive such support. Wives appreciate their husbands for nourishing small children as they attend trainings and other HVCCA related programs. Some husbands are willing to support their wives in carrying fertilizer, collecting fodder and fetching water although these are culturally identified as women's works. Many husbands seem to disregard community members calling them *Joitingre* because of their good support for their wives. Consistent with Collett and Gale's (2009) finding, some husbands believe their wives are better negotiators in the markets and often encourage them to sell vegetables.

Some husbands acknowledged that their wives are more knowledgeable than themselves when it comes to overall HVCCA. In a culturally contested patriarchal society such as Nepal, it is a radical and revolutionary gesture from a husband to acknowledge that

his wife is more knowledgeable than himself. This reflects that women in the study area today have solid support from their husbands. Further, some husbands are registering fixed properties such as land and homes in their wife's name. "My husband never opened an account in his name in the bank. Even when we purchased land, he registered the land in my name. My father suggested that my husband should keep land rights in his name, but he refused and said if there is no wife, land has no use." This statement from W8A indicates that some husbands are making extra efforts to empower their wives. "He cooks tea in the morning for me." This quote from W5A suggests another extraordinary act of support for his wife. All over the study area, wives are expected to cook tea, especially the first tea of the day. But some husbands are challenging that norm and preparing morning tea for their wives. Wives greatly appreciate these gestures.

Despite strong support and encouragement from husbands, some women do not want to take part in trainings and other exposure visits. They suggest that since they are illiterate, they are not confident to travel outside of their villages. They also do not want to go to markets to sell vegetables. This tendency is more prevalent among older women. Their husbands are frustrated by how little interest their wives have in literacy programs. At least one participant suggested that she does not receive support from her husband. Her husband has his own profession and does not fully engage in HVCCA. He has a small shop in his village. Some key informants of this study suggest that if the husband is not fully engaged in HVCCA, there is less chance that he will support his wife. The reason her husband stated for not supporting is that he is frustrated with how hard his wife works and how little she earns from vegetable production. Contrary to his wife, he does not agree that HVCCA is helping

the family to make money. However, he wishes to support his wife more in HVCCA but just cannot manage the time.

Results in Relation to Theories

Three theories discussed in this study were applied as a guiding theoretical framework. The constructs presented and defined in the theoretical framework have contributed to a better understanding of how couples' behavior and attitudes in relation to decision making in HVCCA are influenced by their broader environment—for example, extended family members, internal (peers, women's groups, community elders) and external institutions (government agencies and development organizations).

Consistent with Ajzen (1985), Okun and Slone (2002) and Manning's (2011) assessments, husbands' subjective norms and perceived behavioral control were significant indicators of whether they fully engage their wives in important decision-making roles in HVCCA. Sometimes extended family members and community members do not appreciate husbands' inclusive approaches and strong support for their wives. Some husbands face criticisms from the community and can be branded as submissive to their wives. This characterization is supported by a participant in FGD1D who expressed: "Society does not want to see husbands strongly supporting their wives; this is still true. If they do so, they are criticized as weak husbands." Given such a scenario, a husband would require great efforts, strength and will power to overcome such criticisms to actively support his wife. Despite possible backlash from extended family members and community members, some husbands suggest that they disregard derogatory comments about their extensive support for their wives. For example, H6A commented, "People say that I support my wife a lot and they see my wife's frequent travel to markets or other towns as a problem, but I do not care what they

have to say.” Such determination to encourage one’s wife in HVCCA is also reported by many other husbands. It is interesting that none of the husbands said that because of backlash from community members they restrict their wives from actively engaging in HVCCA. Husbands’ strong attitudes to support their wives are crucial to women’s increased decision-making roles and empowerment in HVCCA. However, participants in FGDs, our field observations and informal interactions with extension officials and some community members suggest that some husbands are still very concerned about what society will think if they listen to the advice of their wives and fully support them in all HVCCA. Consequently, continued affirmative policies and awareness programs about women’s rights and empowerment have significant impacts on women’s attitudes to seek more roles in household decision making and husbands’ positive attitude change for shared decisions. As identified by Bronfenbrenner’s (1970) Social Ecological Model (SEM), husbands’ positive attitudes towards their wives are shaped by internal and external support systems in their immediate communities.

The study found that husbands and wives share decision making and critical activities. Many couples had already been making many important household decisions based on mutual understanding and consensus prior to engaging in HVCCA. Using Bandura’s (1994) terminology, shared decision making in this study is considered as ‘performance accomplishment.’ He suggested that couples preexisting conditions can be enhanced through ‘vicarious experiences’ or by imitating others doing similar activities in more efficient ways in the communities. Many respondents communicated that they were motivated to engage in HVCCA by seeing their fellow community members earning cash and improving their household economy and wellbeing. For example, H8A said, “I think people learn by

imitating each other. Observing what other people are doing is the most effective means of rapid change.” Similar views were expressed by H8D: “When one person starts to listen to his wife, another woman sees that, and she also wants her husband to do the same. I think this is how change take place.” By seeing their peers actively engaged in HVCCA, travelling to markets, attending various capacity enhancement trainings and competently making important decisions, many women become encouraged and feel an enhanced sense of self-efficacy. However, some couples are still consistently concerned about societal norms such as predefined roles for men and women. For example, women must stay home and rear children. In such a scenario, strong support from extended family, women’s groups, community members and other institutions working to enhance women’s decision-making roles, self-confidence and increased shared decisions at the household is very important. These same agents also moderate women’s constant fear about possible cultural backlash for engaging in HVCCA. Further, positive environment and stimuli created for women’s engagement in HVCCA free of fear also strengthen husbands’ attitudes towards their wives’ active roles in HVCCA. Women with enhanced self-efficacy are in a better position to engage in shared decision making, travel to markets, sell their vegetables and contribute to family wellbeing. These women also feel a great sense of empowerment.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1970) Social Ecological Model (SEM) suggests that individual actions and decisions are often influenced by many factors present in their immediate communities. SEM identified various layers of influential factors such as individuals’ extended family, peers, community, traditional norms and belief systems and policy interventions. Couples’ successful shared decision-making endeavors are contingent to how all these vital components facilitate women’s engagement in HVCCA. Women’s groups

present in the community and their collective efforts to encourage women to engage in HVCCA have very positive impacts on women's increased decision-making roles in the household and their overall empowerment. As restrictive cultural practices are still prevalent, some women face challenges to travel outside of their villages. Although some people in the community do not always verbally communicate their views about women's actions (such as travelling alone to markets and returning home late and their husbands carrying fertilizer to the field), women live in constant fear of 'what others will think.' Women are concerned about their and their families' *'Ijjat.'* In such scenarios, women's groups provide tremendous moral support. They reach out to their husbands and extended family members and convince them to allow and support their wives' travels. For example, H1D shared, "When women need to go out of the villages, women's groups use their connections and networks and facilitate such programs. They also provide encouragement, counselling, and guidance to women, particularly to the new comers."

At the national level, the government of Nepal has launched a series of policies which favor women vegetable producers. ACDOA suggested that the government is providing up to 75 percent subsidies to women for the purchase of modern equipment. These programs have positive impacts on enhancing women's self-confidence. Further, programs also help many husbands to realize women's important roles in household decisions.

To understand women's household decision-making roles and the complex nature of empowerment in HVCCA, I suggest that integration of the three theories was vital. Various constructs utilized in these three theories provided an effective lens to understand and explain couples' position in the community and influence of cultural practices on their attitudes and increased shared decision making in HVCCA. Theories also provided good insights

regarding the attitudes of extended family members and community members towards couples shared decisions and women's changing roles, status and empowerment. Further, these theories are helpful in understanding the implications of policy and intervention programs. However, given the relatively small number of women participating in HVCCA, it is somewhat premature to conclude that these stimulus factors contained in the three theories are the only reasons for women's enhanced decision-making roles and empowerment in HVCCA. While these theories explained how behavioral attitudes are influenced to increase shared household decision making, they provide little insight regarding variation among individuals and households. Some women and their husbands are clearly risk takers. In joint consultation, some started HVCCA with little or no external extension support nearly 27 years ago; external donor led development interventions in the region started more rigorously after the restoration of democracy in 1990. The elements that have differentially shaped individuals' attitudes is not adequately explained by either the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) or the Theory of Self-Efficacy. In future research, Roger's (2003) Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT) may provide insights about why some people in similar communities have stronger disposition to become involved in HVCCA, provide more decision-making authority to wives and encourage them to take part in crucial roles while others lag far behind (Rogers 2003).

There are pertinent group dynamics and hierarchies within women's groups and cooperative movements in the communities. Some participants complained that more affluent members in their community benefit most from external support. Government agencies and development organizations also have some biases and inefficiencies in implementing support programs. These attitudes and behavioral dynamics, as well as the effectiveness of broader

program interventions, are not well explained by the Social Ecological Model (SEM). Future research could build on results from this dissertation to examine these phenomena and yield useful insights and recommendations.

Conclusion and Future Research

Applying a qualitative case study approach, this study attempted to explore women's micro level decision-making processes in high-value cash crop activities (HVCCA) at the household level in a rural setting of a developing country, Nepal. The study employed multiple tools of qualitative data collection methods, for example, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, document reviews and field observation notes to understand these key decision-making dynamics and processes of rural women's empowerment.

The couples engaged in HVCCA in rural farm households work together to manage their livelihoods. Decisions concerning production and marketing of vegetables, income use and strategies to advance their HVCCA are jointly performed by wives and husbands. Most wives are trusted to keep income and household expenditures. Educated, illiterate, old or young, women engaged in HVCCA are significantly involved in all types of decision-making processes in the household. Couples' prime goal is to secure the means to meet their household's basic needs and enhance overall household economic wellbeing through HVCCA. Therefore, traditional cultural attitudes and behavior restricting women reflected in 'male dominance' have little impact on their determination to improve their livelihoods. Wives and husbands make shared decisions, have common goals and operate as a unit. Hence, women engaged in HVCCA can be considered to be relatively empowered.

Participants in this research—wives, husbands, key informants, women's groups in the research communities and prominent women leaders—believe that women's active

involvement in HVCCA enhances their decision making at the household and community levels. Their successful involvement in commercial vegetable farming has earned them great respect from their husbands, extended family members, and community members. Most women freely travel to markets, take parts in various types of capacity enhancement trainings and exposure visits without fear from their immediate families and community members. They receive extended support and encouragement from their husbands and women's groups present in their communities. Extension support systems also play crucial roles in encouraging these women and their husbands to continue HVCCA programs. As they become empowered, some women take leadership roles in organizing collective efforts to reduce cultural taboos and practices that restrict women in their communities. They also motivate other women in their communities to engage in various support programs to engage in HVCCA. These women are perceived as role models by many in their communities. Further, they are economically self-reliant and less vulnerable to effects of negative cultural belief systems. They are also less dependent on their husbands and extended family members. However, since most smallholders have less than 0.5-hectares of land, to be economically self-sustained they must continue and intensify their activities.

In the recent past, negative attitudes towards women engaging in HVCCA in the research communities have significantly declined. For women, engaging in vegetable production and marketing is becoming normal and widely accepted behavior. Encouragingly, it is becoming a new norm for positivity and income generation. However, some women still find it difficult to overcome entrenched and embedded cultural orientations which hold that women must come home before dark, they must not interact with male strangers, etc. These women often find themselves feeling guilty for speaking with unacquainted males. Most of

them also live with fear of returning home in dark, even if it is from work related travel. They know that their husbands and extended family members do not overtly object, yet they live with that deep fear insight.

Couples' positive and progressive behaviors reflected in everyday life can significantly influence their children, especially their male children to use more inclusive approaches that respect women's increased decision making in many important household matters. Further, as couples succeed in earning higher levels of income through HVCCA, educating their children in better schools offers opportunities for these young people to be exposed to more egalitarian thoughts and behaviors. It is expected that these children further advance women's empowerment issues in their communities and beyond.

With the modest resources and time frame available, this study attempted to identify major factors influencing women's decision making and empowerment in HVCCA in a specific geographic location and context. Women's empowerment is complex and there are many factors that could influence initiatives to enhance women's decision making. Despite strong support from husbands, extended family members and community members, some respondents cited limitations to freely engaging in HVCCA. Pervasive cultural practices that mostly restrict women are still highly influential and remain to be fully addressed. Women engaged in HVCCA are still very few in number, and it is possible that the majority who are not yet involved continue to struggle to overcome restrictive social norms and practices. Hence, future program interventions focused on overcoming these practices can be useful.

Previous research literature focused on women's decision making and empowerment in Nepal identified that there is great variation in terms of women's decision-making roles in households and in communities. Participants of this study represent predominantly

homogeneous Brahamin and Chhetri communities which are often identified as less tolerant to women's free movement and equal decision-making roles in rural households. There is also variability in women's achieved empowerment in similar communities depending on geographic locations. The mid hills of Nepal's far western region tend to follow traditional cultural practices more strictly compared to other parts of the country. Therefore, policies and programs aimed at enhancing women's decision making in HVCCA must identify these shortcomings and design programs to address them.

This research presents evidence from context specific cases of women's decision-making processes and empowerment and is purposely narrow in scope. I acknowledge that this study has attempted to understand many possible factors that influence women's empowerment dynamics within a specific timeframe and with limited resources. Nevertheless, I believe that this research is an extremely valuable first step to developing scientific evidence about rural women's context specific empowerment processes. The purpose of this study was never to generalize the findings widely, but to contribute to existing literature and provide useful suggestions for future research. Future empirical research involving comprehensive mixed methods research design is essential for examining and understanding the multiplicity of factors that enable or inhibit women's decision-making processes at the household.

Despite continued efforts from government agencies and development organizations, there are at present a modest number of couples engaged in HVCCA. The smallholder couples engaged in these activities are earning good income and living decent lives. Road networks are rapidly expanding and markets for freshly produced vegetables are increasing within and outside of the study districts. However, most smallholders continue to grow cereal

crops knowing that they produce food that hardly lasts for 6 months of their consumption needs. With a staggeringly high unemployment rate and most people living below the poverty line in the study area, HVCCA offers a better option for improving rural household economic livelihoods and wellbeing. Importantly, since HVCCA also contributes to rural women's enhanced decision making and overall empowerment, it is imperative to investigate further why many farmers are still hesitant to engaged in HVCCA. Further, most results in this study align with major constructs of the three theories discussed. Husbands' attitudes favoring their wives' roles in decision making, enhancing self-efficacy, broader community initiatives and affirmative policy interventions seem to have played significant roles in enhancing women's decision-making responsibility and empowerment. Future research might usefully focus on why these efforts have so far encouraged only a relatively small number of women and their husbands to engage in HVCCA.

Analysis in this study indicates that almost all women engaged in HVCCA are highly active in every decision-making process in the household and are genuinely empowered. Since this study was only focused on couples engaged in HVCCA, it is not known whether women who reside in the same communities but are not engaged in HVCCA also contribute equally to household economic activities and are similarly empowered. I suspect that an array of factors such as the introduction of television, FM radios, cellphones, internet, women's advocacy groups have also contributed to women's enhanced decision making and empowerment. It would be prudent to conduct a comparative study of women who are engaged in HVCCA and those who are not.

Many husbands indicated that they ask their wives to keep and manage the income earned. They also stated that their wives are rational spenders and only spend money on

family wellbeing. Some even stated that their wives would not spend a penny without asking them. This questions whether women are trusted because they are loyal to their husbands or because they are empowered and have the ability to convince their husbands that they should keep and manage household income. This needs to be further explored.

Some women suggested that they advised their husbands to engage in HVCCA. Some even claimed that they encouraged their husbands to return home from abroad to engage in these activities. Although many women participants suggested that by engaging in HVCCA they become empowered, it would be worthwhile to investigate whether it is women's empowerment that leads them to engage in these activities or their empowerment is contingent on the latter. Finally, I believe that there will be additional value in conducting comparative studies among couples engaged in HVCCA across different mid-hills districts in the country and see how women in different cultural and linguistic communities are progressing with their decision-making processes and empowerment in HVCCA.

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APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202
Ames, Iowa 50014
515 294-4566

Date: 6/27/2017

To: Ramesh Bahadur Balayar
2311 Aspen Road Unit 102
Ames, IA 50010

CC: Dr. Robert E Mazur
318 East Hall
Dr. Stephen Sapp
320 East Hall

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Rural Women in Production and Marketing of High-Value Cash Crops in Nepal

IRB ID: 17-254

Approval Date: 6/27/2017 **Date for Continuing Review:** 6/26/2019

Submission Type: New **Review Type:** Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- **Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study**, when documented consent is required.
- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.
- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. **Approval from other entities may also be needed.** For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. **IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.**

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 202 Kingland, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.

APPENDIX B. LETTERS OF CONSENT**Letter of Introduction – Smallholder’s Wife**

Research Topic: Women’s empowerment in high value cash crop activities in the rural hills of Nepal

Principal Investigator: Ramesh Bahadur Balayar

Research Assistant: Samjhana Sharma, Researcher Assistant

Department of Sociology, Iowa State University

Cellphone Number in the USA: +1 515-509-5213, Cellphone Number in Nepal: + 977 9802033842

Participation

I am here today to discuss the focus of my dissertation research—smallholder households’ High-Value Cash Crop (HVCC) Production and Marketing activities. I am interested in understanding the experiences of couples (wife and husband), their challenges and opportunities, and decision-making processes in production and marketing of HVCC activities. I will also ask about past and present local practices, and local and outside support for HVCC activities. These are the principal topics: history and types of HVCC production and marketing activities, current situation of HVCC, women’s and men’s involvement in household HVCC decision making in production and marketing, and husband’s and community attitudes regarding women’s roles in these activities.

As a smallholder/smallholder farmer’s wife engaged in HVCC production and marketing, I would like to discuss with you these issues during an in-depth one-hour interview. Your husband will also be interviewed about the same issues. In addition, approximately 29 other couples who are currently engaged or have dropped out from HVCC

activities will be identified and included for one-hour in-depth interviews regarding their experiences concerning decision making in production and marketing. These interviews will take independently among men and women, and a female researcher will interview women participants. The men will be interviewed by the principle (male) researcher. Further, similar interviews will also be conducted among farmers, women's and other group members, government officials and donor agencies working in HVCC.

Voluntary

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Feel free to ask any questions at any time. You may refuse to answer any question and may stop at any time without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this study. There is no immediate direct benefit to you from participating in this study. Information gained about smallholders HVCC activities, women's role and shared decision-making may benefit households and society by identifying approaches to enhance yields and incomes.

Confidentiality

Individual information obtained through this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. The information will be stored in a locked cabinet and only accessed by members on the research team. The United States Government regulatory agencies, the project investigators, Iowa State University's Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) and the United States Agency for International Development may inspect and/or copy records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-

4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011, USA.

Consent

By freely giving your consent to participate in this research project, you are acknowledging that all information in this Letter of Introduction was read to you and that you understand its contents.

Letter of Introduction – Smallholder’s Husband

Research Topic: Women’s empowerment in high value cash crop activities in the rural hills of Nepal

Principal Investigator: Ramesh Bahadur Balayar

Research Assistant: Samjhana Sharma, Researcher Assistant

Department of Sociology, Iowa State University

Cellphone Number in the USA: +1 515-509-5213, Cellphone Number in Nepal: + 977

9802033842

Participation

I am here today to discuss the focus of my dissertation research—smallholder households’ High-Value Cash Crop (HVCC) Production and Marketing activities. I am interested in understanding the experiences of couples (wife and husband), their challenges and opportunities, and decision-making processes in production and marketing of HVCC activities. I will also ask about past and present local practices, and local and outside support for HVCC activities. These are the principal research topics: history and types of HVCC production and marketing activities, current situation of HVCC, women’s and men’s involvement in household HVCC decision making in production and marketing, and husband’s and community attitudes regarding women’s roles in these activities.

As a smallholder/smallholder farmer’s husband engaged in HVCC production and marketing, I would like to discuss with you these issues during an in-depth one-hour interview. Your wife will also be interviewed for the same issues. In addition, approximately 29 other couples who are currently engaged or have dropped out from HVCC activities will be identified and included for one-hour in-depth interviews regarding their experiences in the

field that includes decision making in production and marketing. These interviews will take independently among men and women and a female researcher will interview women participants. The men will be interviewed by the principal (male) researcher. Further, similar interviews will also be conducted among farmers, women's and other group members, government officials and donor agencies working in HVCC.

Voluntary

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Feel free to ask any questions at any time. You may refuse to answer any question and may stop at any time without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this study. There is no immediate direct benefit to you from participating in this study. Information gained about smallholders HVCC activities, women's role and shared decision-making may benefit households and society by identifying approaches to enhance yields and incomes.

Confidentiality

Individual information obtained through this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. The information will be stored in a locked cabinet and only accessed by members on the research team. The United States Government regulatory agencies, the project investigators, Iowa State University's Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) and the United States Agency for International Development may inspect and/or copy records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-

4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011, USA.

Consent

By freely giving your consent to participate in this research project, you are acknowledging that all information in this Letter of Introduction was read to you and that you understand its contents.

Letter of Introduction – Gov’t Ag. Ext. Officials & Dev. Agency Reps.

Research Topic: Women’s empowerment in high value cash crop activities in the rural hills of Nepal

Principal Investigator: Ramesh Bahadur Balayar

Research Assistant: Samjhana Sharma, Researcher Assistant

Department of Sociology, Iowa State University

Cellphone Number in the USA: +1 515-509-5213, Cellphone Number in Nepal: + 977

9802033842

Participation

I am here today to discuss the focus of my dissertation research—smallholder households’ High-Value Cash Crop (HVCC) Production and Marketing activities. I am interested in understanding the experiences of couples (wife and husband), their challenges and opportunities, and decision-making processes in production and marketing of HVCC. I will also ask about past and present local practices, and local and outside support for HVCC activities. These are the principal topics: history and types of HVCC production and marketing activities, current situation of HVCC, women’s and men’s involvement in household HVCC decision making in production and marketing, and husband’s and community attitudes regarding women’s roles in these activities.

As a government agricultural extension service official or development agency representative working to improve HVCC activities and women’s empowerment at local or national level, I would like to discuss with you these issues during an in-depth one-hour interview. Further, approximately thirty couples who are currently engaged or have dropped out from HVCC activities will be identified and included for one-hour in-depth interviews

regarding their experiences in the field that includes decision making in production and marketing. These interviews will take place independently among men and women, and a female researcher will interview women participants. The men will be interviewed by the principle (male) researcher.

Voluntary

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Feel free to ask any questions at any time. You may refuse to answer any question and may stop at any time without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this study. There is no immediate direct benefit to you from participating in this study. Information gained about smallholders HVCC activities, women's role and shared decision-making may benefit households and society by identifying approaches to enhance yields and incomes.

Confidentiality

Individual information obtained through this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. The information will be stored in a locked cabinet and only accessed by members on the research team. The United States Government regulatory agencies, the project investigators, Iowa State University's Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) and the United States Agency for International Development may inspect and/or copy records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011, USA.

Consent

By freely giving your consent to participate in this research project, you are acknowledging that all information in this Letter of Introduction was read to you and that you understand its contents.

Letter of Introduction – Focus Group Discussion

Research Topic: Women's empowerment in high value cash crop activities in the rural hills of Nepal

Principal Investigator: Ramesh Bahadur Balayar

Research Assistant: Samjhana Sharma, Researcher Assistant

Department of Sociology, Iowa State University

Cellphone Number in the USA: +1 515-509-5213, Cellphone Number in Nepal: + 977

9802033842

Participation

We are here today to discuss my dissertation research that focuses on smallholder households' High-Value Cash Crop (HVCC) Production and Marketing. Men and women in this community who participate in this study will share their perceptions, lived and observed experiences regarding women's and men's roles in these activities. These are the principal research topics: history and types of HVCC production and marketing activities, current situation of HVCC, women's and men's involvement in household HVCC decision making in production and marketing, and husband's and community attitudes regarding women's roles in these activities.

The community leaders, members of farmers groups, women's groups, other informal and formal groups that are directly or indirectly involved in HVCC activities in the community are eligible to be included in this research study. A maximum of seven people will be selected and asked to participate. They may take part in a 1½ hour focus group discussion. Further, approximately 30 couples who are currently engaged or have dropped out from HVCC activities will be identified and included for one-hour in-depth interviews

regarding their experiences in the field that includes decision making in production and marketing. These interviews will take place independently among men and women, and a female researcher will interview women participants. The men will be interviewed by the principal (male) researcher.

Voluntary

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Feel free to ask any questions at any time. You may refuse to answer any question and may stop at any time without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this study. There is no immediate direct benefit to you from participating in this study. Information gained about smallholders HVCC activities, women's role and shared decision-making may benefit households and society by identifying approaches to enhance yields and incomes.

Confidentiality

Individual or group information obtained through this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. The information will be stored in a locked cabinet and only accessed by members on the research team. The United States Government agencies, the project investigators, Iowa State University's Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) and the United States Agency for International Development may inspect and/or copy records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011, USA.

Consent

By freely giving your consent to participate in this study, you are acknowledging that all information in this Letter of Introduction was read to you and that you understand its contents.

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS

Interview Guide for Smallholder Farmer - Wife

1. Background

- a. What types of staple crops do you grow, and why?
- b. What are the major HVCC that you produce? why that/those?
- c. When did your family first start HVCC production for marketing?
- d. What was the main motivation for producing HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- e. What did you and your spouse discuss when deciding to grow HVCC?
- f. Could you describe your experience about growing HVCC?
- g. Have you been supported by local government, development organizations or any other programs for your HVCC initiatives?
- h. What types of support have you received? how many times and how often? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.

2. Production

- a. Please discuss the criteria used in selecting land for HVCC production.
- b. Who is involved in that decision?
- c. How far from home is the field(s) for your HVCC activities?
- d. Who decides on the types of crops to be grown? why?
- e. What specific types of work do you do in HVCC?
- f. What types of additional work in HVCC would you like to do? why?
- g. What types of fertilizer do you use?
- h. If you need to buy fertilizer, who decides and why?
- i. What types of problems have you faced in protecting your crops? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- i. How do you decide when the crop is ready to harvest? who determines that?
- j. What are some of the challenges that you have experienced in increasing your role in HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- j. What role can you play to increase your overall role in production of HVCC?
- k. What role can your husband play to increase your overall role in production of HVCC?

3. Marketing

- a. Who decides how much to sell? (of each HVCC)
- b. Who decides whether to sell in the village or market?
- c. Is there a process of bargaining or negotiating the price? If so, who is involved?
- d. Do you sell in groups or individually? What is your experience selling alone and/or selling as a group? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- e. Are there collection centers in the village? Who supported or operates these centers?
- f. What has been your experience with the collection centers?
- g. Do the vendors come to your village, or must you travel to the markets? How far is the market?
- h. Who travels to the market and why?
- i. As a woman, have you travelled to a market to sell the crops? If not, could you?
- j. How does (or would) your husband view your travel to markets?
- k. Could you share some of your experiences traveling and dealing with markets?
- k. What are some of the most pressing challenges in enhancing your role in marketing of HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- l. What role can you play to enhance your overall role in marketing of HVCC?
- m. What role can your husband play to enhance your overall role in marketing of HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- n. What role can the extended family members, community elders, women's groups play to enhance your role in marketing of HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.

4. Income use

- a. Does your husband keep all, most, some or none of the income earned? Please explain why.
- b. Which are the most important expenditures that your husband makes alone?
- c. Do you ask your husband about spending money? If so, how often?
- d. Which are the most important expenditures that you make alone?
- e. Which items and activities are the most important expenditures that you and your husband jointly make? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- f. How does your husband view it when you make your own decisions to spend money?
- g. Are there sometimes challenges for you to access household income? If so, please elaborate. Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.

- h. How do you try to convince your husband that y you need access to income? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.

5. Risks/challenges

- a. How do your extended family members view your roles in HVCC?
- b. How are your HVCC activities viewed in your community?
- c. How do community leaders view your roles in HVCC?
- l. Discuss some of the cultural practices and clichés against women’s involvement in HVCC in your community. Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- d. What are some of the risks for you in traveling to markets to sell crops?
- e. Have you (or anyone that you know) experienced problems? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.

6. Opportunities

- a. Are you a member of a farmers’ group? What does this group do? What does it accomplish? How?
- b. Are you a member of a women’s group? What does this group do? What does it accomplish? How?
- c. Are there other community organizations/institutions that are helpful to your HVCC activities? Which? What do they do? What does it accomplish?
- d. Discuss some of the best past or ongoing practices concerning women’s engagement in HVCC in your village. Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- e. What types of support are available from your peers, extended family members, relatives, community elders and other existing social networks? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- f. What types of support are available from women’s groups, farmers groups, cooperatives and other formal/informal institutions in your community? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- g. To what extend are these groups helpful in mitigating any negative attitudes about women’s involvement in HVCC activities? Please cite specific examples to illustrate your points.
- h. What do you personally wish that your husband, extended family members, community members, women’s groups and supporting agencies would do to enhance your role in HVCC? Please cite specific examples to illustrate your points.

Interview Guide for Smallholder Farmer – Husband

1. Background

- a. What types of staple crops do you grow, and why?
- b. What are the major HVCC that you produce? why that/those?
- c. When did your family first start HVCC production for marketing?
- d. What was the main motivation for producing HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- e. What did you and your spouse discuss when deciding to grow HVCC?
- f. Could you describe your experience about growing HVCC?
- g. Have you been supported by local government, development organizations or any other programs for your HVCC initiatives?
- h. What types of support have you received? how many times and how often? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.

2. Production

- a. Please discuss the criteria used in selecting land for HVCC production.
- b. Who is involved in that decision?
- c. How far from home is the field(s) for your HVCC activities?
- d. Who decides on the types of crops to be grown? why?
- e. What specific types of work do you do in HVCC?
- f. What types of additional work in HVCC would you like to do? why?
- g. What types of fertilizer do you use?
- h. If you need to buy fertilizer, who decides and why?
- i. What types of problems have you faced in protecting your crops? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- i. How do you decide when the crop is ready to harvest? who determines that?
- j. What role can you play to increase your wife's overall role in production of HVCC?
- k. What are some of the challenges that you have experienced in increasing your wife's role in HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.

3. Marketing

- a. Who decides how much to sell? (of each HVCC)
- b. Who decides whether to sell in the village or market?
- c. Is there a process of bargaining or negotiating the price? If so, who is involved?
- d. Do you sell in groups or individually? What is your experience selling alone and/or selling as a group? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- e. Are there collection centers in the village? Who supported or operates these centers?
- f. What has been your experience with the collection centers?
- g. Do the vendors come to your village, or must you travel to the markets? How far is the market?
- h. Who travels to the market and why?
- i. Could you share some of your experiences traveling and dealing with markets?
- l. What are some of the most pressing challenges in enhancing your role in marketing of HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- j. What role can you play to enhance your overall role in marketing of HVCC?
- k. What role can you play to enhance your wife's overall role in marketing of HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- l. What role can the extended family members, community elders, women's groups, farmers groups play to enhance your wife's role in marketing of HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.

4. Income use

- a. Does your wife have control over income earned?
- b. Who keeps all, most, some or none of the income earned? Please explain why.
- c. Which are the most important expenditures that you make alone?
- d. Which are the most important expenditures that your wife makes alone?
- e. How do you view it when your wife makes her own decisions to spend money?
- f. Do you ask your wife about spending money? If so, how often?
- g. Which items and activities are the most important expenditures that you and your wife jointly make? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- h. What role can you play to enhance your wife's access, control and her own decision making to spend some of the earned income?

- i. Discuss some of the specific challenges that you are facing to provide more access to earned income for your wife.

5. Risks/challenges

- a. How do your extended family members view your wife's roles in HVCC?
- b. How do community members view your wife's engagement in HVCC?
- c. Discuss some of the cultural practices and clichés against women's involvement in HVCC in your community. Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- d. What are some of your strategies to overcome negative clichés against your wife's involvement in HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- e. What are some of the best practices that you or other HVCC farmers have done to overcome bad clichés against women's involvement in HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.

6. Opportunities

- a. Are you a member of a farmers group? What does this group do? What does it accomplish? How?
- b. Are there other community organizations/institutions that are helpful to your HVCC activities, especially promoting your wife's role? Which? What do they do? What does it accomplish?
- c. Discuss some of the best past or ongoing practices concerning women's engagement in HVCC in your village. Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- d. What types of support are available from women's peer groups, extended family members, relatives, community elders and other existing social networks to enhance your wife's engagement in HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- e. What types of support are available for you and your wife from women's groups, farmers groups, cooperatives and other formal/informal institutions in your community? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
- f. To what extent are these groups helpful in mitigating any negative attitudes about your wife's involvement in HVCC activities? Please cite specific examples to illustrate your points.

Interview Guide for Key Informants

(local government and development organization officials)

1. What are some of the major HVCC activities in this village that your office has initiated? Please describe the goals, approach, training and support provided to date, and expected outcomes.
2. What are the most pressing needs or challenges faced by HVCC producers?
3. How do most husbands view their wives' roles in HVCC? Are there exceptions to that? Are there changes occurring during the past few years? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
4. What specific challenges have you observed for husbands to fully include their wives in all types of decision making in HVCC activities?
5. How do most people in the community view women's role in HVCC activities? Are there exceptions to that? Are there changes occurring during the past few years? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
6. What are some of the specific challenges for women to engage in HVCC? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
7. What changes have you observed in women's roles in HVCC activities? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your point.
8. What are some of the best enabling factors and practices that include women's full participation in HVCC activities in the community? How have these examples occurred? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
9. What role do women's peer groups and other social networks play in mitigating negative cultural clichés/attitudes against women, and in promoting their active and inclusive engagement in HVCC activities? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
10. What role do women's and farmers' groups and other formal or informal institutions play in mitigating negative cultural clichés against women's participation in HVCC, and in promoting their full and active engagement? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your points.
11. What are your organization's planned HVCC activities in the community? Please describe the goals, approach, training and support to be provided, and expected outcomes.

Discussion Guide for Focus Groups

(women's groups, farmers groups, community elders, women leaders)

1. What are the major staple food crops grown in this community?
2. What types of high value cash crops are people producing?
3. When did high value cash crop (HVCC) production start in your community?
4. What types of HVCC were first introduced in your community? When?
5. By whom were they initiated in this community?
6. What proportion of households in this community are producing one or more HVCC?
7. To what extent are households in the community selling any of their staple crops?
8. Is the market for HVCC within the community? or outside the community? How far away?
9. What division of labor in farm activities typically exists among men and women in HVCC production? In HVCC marketing?
10. Have there been changes in this gender division of labor during the past 5-10 years? How? Why? How is that viewed from a cultural perspective? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your point.
11. How do you view women having a major decision-making role in HVCC in the household - specifically bargaining, negotiating and selling products in the village and in the markets?
12. What are some of the challenges for women to engage in HVCC activities in your community? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your point.
13. What are some of the best practices where wife and husband together produce, market and use earned income for the best of their family's wellbeing? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your point.
14. What are the best examples where extended family members, community elders, women's peer groups, women's groups and farmer's groups support women's engagement in HVCC activities?
15. What types of external support programs have you observed to enhance women's role in HVCC in your community? Please cite a specific example to illustrate your point.

APPENDIX: D. NOMENCLATURE

ACDOA	Assistant Chief District Officer Achham
CDMDDL	City Deputy Mayor Dadeldhura
SDAOA	Senior Agriculture Development Officer Achham
SDAOD	Senior District Agriculture Officer Dadeldhura
DCDDL	Deputy City Mayor Dadeldhura
DHOA	District Horticulture Officer Achham
DHOD	District Horticulture Officer Dadeldhura
FGDA	Focus Group Discussion Achham
FGDD	Focus Group Discussion Dadeldhura
H1A – H8A	Husband1 Achham – H8A
H1D – H8D	Husband1 Dadeldhura – H8D
KIFGDDH	Key Informants Focus Group Discussion Dhangadhi
KIFGDK	Key Informants Focus Group Discussion Kathmandu
KIUNK	Key Informant United Nations Kathmandu
NGOA	Non-Governmental Organization Achham
NGOD	Non-Governmental Organization Dadeldhura
SHOK	Senior Horticulture Officer Kathmandu
RISMFPD	Raising Incomes for Small and Medium farmer Project Dadeldhura
W1A – W8A	Wife1 Achham – W8 Achham
W1D – W8D	Wife1 Dadeldhura – W8 Achham
WDOA	Women Development Officer Achham