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Women’s Empowerment: Does the Increase in Gender Equity Upsurge Household Food Security in Subsistence Farming?

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Abstract

Despite substantial efforts from public and private institutions supported by bilateral and multi-lateral donors, food insecurity still prevails as a major challenge for millions of Nepalese. Its effect seems to be more chronic with women because of deep-rooted unequal distribution practice in traditional rural communities. Like other Asian and African countries, women’s overall socio-economic status is lower than its male counterpart. The low Human Development Index (0.48) has a great spatial variation and the Gender Development Index (0.46) is further exacerbated. This prevailing situation inspired to excavate the hidden myths of women’s empowerment in outskirts.

With versus without project evaluation approach was applied as a research methodology to analyse the contribution of project intervention to curtailing the gender differentiation in technology transfer, sharing resources, and labour allocation to farm household activities. A field survey was conducted to collect primary data applying multi-stage probability random sampling technique for 120 respondents and purposive sampling for 45 key informants. The generated cross-sectional data was analysed using descriptive statistics, econometric model and qualitative techniques.

The econometric analysis on institutional sustainability reveals an inverse relationship with men’s chairmanship and functional status of farmer’s group. Similarly, score ranking of institutional performance of different types of groups also reveal similar findings. Besides, women’s access to technology transfer enumerated by the Lorenz curve and GINI coefficients ascribed the positive relationship of project intervention to women’s empowerment. Women’s opportunities to participate in capacity building, natural resources management and social activities have been attributed to fewer hours involvement in household, whereas higher hours in farm activities is found to be significantly different ($p < 0.001$) between the groups. The reduced margin of wages differentiation between male and female labour has illuminated the economic potentiality of women to boom farms’ physical productivity.

The challenge of securing enough food at household level is easily obtainable if women’s labour gets streamlined in production process. Access to resources, most importantly capacity building should be approachable to both types to enhance their level of efficiency thereby to maximise farm productivity. Furthermore, the positive contribution of women to household economy stipulates the necessity of liberalising gender equity policies.

Keywords: Farm households, food security, project intervention, women empowerment