



KEY FACTS

- Nepal's population is 50.1% female and 49.9% male. More than 90% of the population lives in rural areas
- The literacy rate for women is 25.0%. This is less than half the rate for men (54.5%)
- 90.5% of women are engaged in agriculture as against 74.9% of men
- Women have extensive work loads with dual responsibility for farm and household production
- Women's work is getting harder and more time consuming due to ecological degradation
- Women play an active role in livestock production and forest resource use
- Women contribute considerably to household income through farm and non-farm activities
- Women are active as informal traders

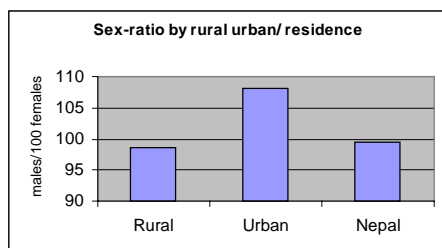
FACT SHEET NEPAL

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GENERAL PROFILE

Population

Nepal has a population of about 18.5 million in which the rural population accounts for 90.8% and the urban 9.2%. 42.4% of the population are under 15 years of age. The overwhelming majority of the people (86.5%) are Hindus, followed by Buddhists. There are 60 different ethnic/caste groups in the country. The population growth rate is 2.08% and population density is 125.6 persons per sq km. Women constitute 50.1% of the total population (CBS, 1995). About 13.2% of the households are female-headed. The total fertility rate is estimated at 5.1% (ESCAP, 1995).



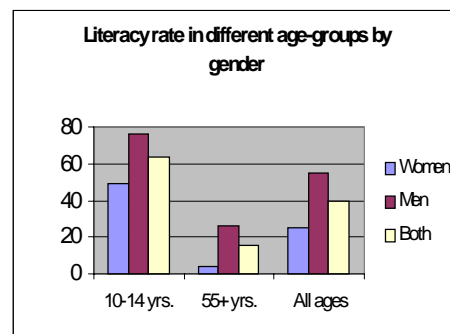
Source: ESCAP, 1995

The sex ratio in Nepal is 99.5, indicating an excess of women over men. Men outnumber women in urban areas, while the reverse is true in the rural areas. This is largely due to a bias in employment and education that favour men, resulting in large male out-migration from rural to urban areas. Nepal also has had a long history of male emigration with regional variation (ESCAP, 1995).

Education

In Nepal the literacy rate for the population of 10 years and above is 39.6%. However, the literacy for women is only 25.0% which is less than half the literacy rate for men (54.5%).

Among women a generation difference is evident in educational attainment. The literacy rate among females aged 10-14 years (49.3%) is nearly 14 times higher than that among women aged 55 years and over (3.6%).



Source: ESCAP, 1995

Labour

40.4% of women and 59.6% of men over the age of 10 are considered economically active. This indicates a lower economic participation by women as compared to men (CBS, 1996). This is due to the fact that activities such as weeding and harvesting, home gardening, livestock and poultry rearing, and fuel and water collection, which are almost exclusively performed by women, are not considered economic activities and hence excluded from surveys. The vast majority of the economically active population (81.2%), particularly in rural Nepal, is engaged in agriculture and allied industries. The proportion of the persons engaged in this sector was substantially higher among women (90.5%) than among men (74.9%). Personal/community service and commerce are the second and third largest sectors with a lower participation rate among women relative to men. The urban manufacturing sector employs a higher proportion of women (10.6%) compared to men (8.7%). An increasing number of women work in garment, matches, pharmaceutical, cigarette

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and food processing industries. (ESCAP, 1995)

The Human Development Index (HDI) rank of Nepal in 1997 was 130 out of 146 countries indicating a low life expectancy at birth, low educational attainment and low income. This demonstrates the difficult development challenges confronting Nepal in human resource development. The **Gender-Related Development Index (GDI)** rank of Nepal in the same year was 131 out of 146 countries. This shows that the human development gap is further aggravated by substantial gender disparities. The difference between **HDI** rank and **GDI** rank is -1, indicating that the country performs relatively worse on gender equality than on average achievements alone (UNDP, 1997).

AGRICULTURE

Nepal's agricultural production is characterized by diversity in farming systems influenced by differences in agro-ecological topography. Farming systems and crops vary widely depending upon altitude and climatic conditions. The agricultural sector contributed 40.22% to the Gross Domestic Product in 1995/96 (CBS, 1996). A large majority of households depend upon agriculture and allied activities such as livestock-rearing and forest product collection. As the agriculture sector is the key sector of the economy, determining economic growth and employment, the standard of living of the majority of the population depends on its development. Despite investment in irrigation and agricultural development projects, agriculture production is still largely determined by favourable weather conditions (EIU 1997).

In addition to routine domestic work, women play a significant if not a predominant role in agriculture production. One participatory research project found that women do more work in agriculture than men in the high mountain areas, equal to or more than men in the middle hills and slightly less than men in the *terai* (Sontheimer, Basnyat and Maharjan, 1997). Women, both as

participants and decision makers, share the responsibility of planting, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, carrying grains to the mill for grinding, including collecting wood, water and fodder (Axinn, 1977). Women's involvement is very significant in care and management of livestock and poultry, and kitchen gardening. However, they participate differently in hills and *terai* (Southern plain). In the complex social systems of the hills, women's participation in agriculture further varies tremendously across the social groups (Axinn, 1990).

Despite women's important role in agriculture, traditional social norms and customary laws which generally are biased in favour of men, are a barrier to women's equitable access to productive resources.

Gender Differentiated Involvement in Activities		
Activities	F	M
Agriculture	X	X
Fuelwood collection	XX	X
Water collection	XX	X
Grass collection	XX	X
Leaf fodder collection	XX	X
Food processing	XX	X
Cooking	XX	X
Other (Various Domestic work)	XX	X
F: Female; M: Male; XX/X: Relative Involvement		

Source: Based on Kumar and Hotchkiss, 1988

Crop production

Rice, wheat and maize are the major crops of Nepal. Farming systems and crop production in Nepal vary across the agro-ecological zones. Physically, the country is divided into four ecological strata: the southern *terai* plain; the southern mountain ranges; the central hill complex; the northern great Himalayas. Rice-based cropping systems, with wheat or maize as a secondary crop, are predominant in the *terai* and middle hills, whereas in the high mountains maize, millet, barley and buckwheat are cultivated. Tea, cardamom, ginger and coffee are the important cash crops of the middle hills. Likewise, wide ranges of temperate fruits in the high mountains; citrus in the middle hills; tropical/sub-tropical

fruits are also grown in the *terai* and middle hill valleys. Vegetable-growing in kitchen gardens is practiced at all elevations.

Nepalese women are equally involved in both field and post-harvest work in crop production. Ploughing is considered a man's job, whereas all other work, though shared by men, is mostly undertaken by women. Collecting and carrying compost to the field is normally performed by women (Katuwal, 1990). Women's involvement is more in producing major crops such as rice, maize, wheat, etc (Regmi and Weber, 1997). In both rainfed and irrigated agriculture time spent by women is higher relative to that of men. In rainfed areas women devote 12.36 hours per person per day, whereas men do only 9.03 hours. Similarly, in irrigated zones women put in 11.61 hours per person per day whereas men do only 7.85 hours (Sharma, 1995).

Forestry

The forests of Nepal which occupy 37.6% of total landmass (LRMP, 1986 in Basnyat, 1995), are a major natural resource. They supply about 90% of the total fuel and more than 50% of the fodder (CBS, 1995). Timber and herbs are other important forest products. Women use forest products for creating saleable commodities.

Explaining the complex and symbiotic relationship between hill farmers and the forests, Carson (1992) says that Nepalese farming communities and individual farm possess highly integrated and interlinked production systems. Simply, productivity of one system depends greatly upon the productivity of others. Women in rural Nepal have a very close relationship with forests. Collecting fuelwood meets 95% of the cooking-energy consumption (Denholm, 1991). Collecting fodder and other forest products is most tedious and tiring, which has traditionally and primarily been performed by women (Ojha, 1989, Tiwary et. al. 1988). Women's task of buffalo raising requires a great deal of daily care year-round. An improved buffalo eats about two headloads of fodder per day, besides prepared feed (Bhatt et. al. 1994). More than three-fourths

of household time spent collecting forest products is done by women (Kumar and Hotchkiss, 1988).

Fisheries

Fish culture is a relatively new practice in the country. Until recently, fishing from natural rivers and lakes was common. Fish culture is being gradually integrated as a new component in existing crop-livestock mixed farming system. Small-scale fish culture is largely concentrated in the *terai* and also in the middle hill valleys.

Normally, fisheries activities in Nepal are performed by men. However, with the promotion of aquaculture in the country, women's greater involvement can be envisaged. They will be increasingly involved in fish feeding and pond maintenance which require intensive daily management.

Livestock

Livestock is an important component of the Nepalese farming system providing food for humans, manure for plants, draft power for farms and cash income for farm families. Cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goat, pigs and poultry are the livestock species reared across different agro-ecological zones.

In Nepal, women are actively involved in livestock production. Fodder collection, grazing and milking are generally performed by both women and men, whereas activities like feed preparation, feeding, cleaning sheds and preparing milk products are women's domain (Acharya and Bennet, 1981; Katuwal, 1990). Women have a crucial role in detecting illness of the animal because of their close and frequent contact with them. Marketing of livestock is mainly done by men, but in consultation with women. Women have the right to own livestock in Nepal. Girl children also share the responsibility for herding goats.

ENVIRONMENT

The burgeoning population has extended cultivation on marginal land and

steep slopes leading to deforestation, soil erosion and landslides at an alarming rate (EIU, 1997). The degradation of the environment has already significantly affected women's lives. Continuing deforestation and degrading land fertility further jeopardize the livelihood of households in the community as it increases the daily tasks of women (Bhatt et. al., 1994). As deforestation advances and forest products become increasingly scarce, women are the ones who must walk further afield to collect fuel and fodder, adding hours to their already long work days. Where deforestation is high, time needed to collect one load of fuelwood increases by 75% and less time is allocated to agricultural activities (Kumar and Hotchkiss, 1988). Rural women are not only household managers but also, formally or informally resource managers. In the Garhwal region, women listed 145 species of plants lost due to deforestation and limestone mining. They were able to categorize the species systematically, according to their utility, spatial and seasonal occurrence, and fodder and fuel qualities (ESCAP, 1996). Women take care of farmyard manure collection and application which has an important consequence for soil fertility management. In certain parts of the country farmers including women motivated to maintain productive livestock have found innovative ways to manage and conserve wastelands allocated to them (Bhatt et. al., 1994)

RURAL PRODUCTION

Livestock, particularly dairy production, is a major source of income for women (APP, 1995) and sale of livestock and livestock products accounts for nearly 55% of total farm family income (Conlin and Falk, 1979). Trading in livestock, especially sheep and goats, and wool and woolen products, is the major livelihood strategy of hill and mountain people in Nepal as foodgrain production in these regions is inadequate. From the early days, weaving has been a part of daily life in the hills and mountains. People in these regions still produce their own version of rugs known as *radi*, *pakhi*, and clothing material known as *lukuni* (Shrestha,

1990). Women have a central role in such production. Women are also extensively involved in informal trade selling food, vegetables and snacks in roadside stalls and local market. Production credit for rural women has supported women's handicrafts as income generating activities such as rice straw paper making, agro-products and handicrafts.

FOOD SECURITY

The National Planning Commission estimates that 49% of the population are living in absolute poverty (EIU, 1997). Nutritional deficiency is thought to affect 40% or more of the population. Women are more vulnerable than men. They have a share of only 33% in total earned income in the country (UNDP, 1997). In a predominantly rural community that is involved in agriculture characterized by incidence of poverty, rural food security is a priority concern. Women as producers of food and livestock, as well as primary meal makers have an important responsibility to ensure household food security. As primary managers of livestock, women ensure a supply of high quality protein to the country. Women dominate home garden production and thus contribute to improved variety in the family diet. Women's role in fuel collection also has implications for household food security. Nepalese rural women's direct involvement in agricultural production and off-farm tasks contribute to the household food basket.

POLICY AND PLANNING FOCUS

In order to support effective and equitable agricultural and rural development, policy makers and planners in Nepal need to:

- ✓ collect gender-disaggregated agro-ecological production-system-based activity information through participatory approaches for local planning;
- ✓ conduct a gender-sensitive agricultural human resource census;
- ✓ formulate gender-sensitive policies

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- and plans based on gender-roles related to household livelihood strategies and rural poverty and household food security concerns;
- ✓ promote gender-disaggregated technology, training and input need assessment as a basis for agriculture and rural development policy development;
 - ✓ formulate policies and plans to provide women with access to and control over land, technology and other inputs, particularly credit;
 - ✓ formulate policies to provide support to enhance women's access to common property resources, to reduce workloads in fuel and fodder collection and livestock management, and to set up aquaculture activities.

PROGRAMME FOCUS

Agricultural and rural development programmes in Nepal need to include the following areas of intervention in order to achieve effective programmes that address both rural women's and men's poverty concerns and provide equitable opportunity for all:

- ✓ train field staff in gender-sensitive and participatory planning and programme implementation;
- ✓ make provision to support forest resource management, farm production and household resource management focusing on women as farmers, instead of merely viewing them as wives of male farmers;
- ✓ strengthen gender-equitable extension systems;

- ✓ identify and respond to women's needs for agricultural inputs and household technology in close collaboration with researchers, implementing agencies and grassroots workers;
- ✓ support women in their livestock and marketing activities by providing local market information, improved transportation and storage facilities, improved processing and packaging techniques, and enhanced credit facilities;
- ✓ launch adult literacy and credit programmes with particular focus on women; and
- ✓ support development of rural women's networks to strengthen women's programmes in remote mountain regions.

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