

Role of Skilled Female Construction Worker (Mason) In Post-  
Earthquake Reconstruction and Their Socio-Economic Changes:  
A Case of Gorkha Earthquake, Nepal

By

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A thesis submitted to BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Development Studies

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## **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**

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## Approval

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## **Abstract**

Women are seen as a vulnerable group in most of the disasters, but disasters do not only increase women's vulnerabilities; rather, it also makes women socio-economically empowered by giving opportunity in post-disaster reconstruction works. In 25<sup>th</sup> April 2015, Nepal was struck by major earthquake with magnitude of 7.8, which causes huge damages in housing. This earthquake has emerged a huge necessity of manpower in reconstruction. Skilled construction workers was in need for reconstruction process. So many women started to come out to join mason training to reconstruct their houses. The main aim of this study is to find the role of women in post-disaster reconstruction and socio-economic empowerment after the work. This study uses both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. One hundred and sixty two female who are working as masons were surveyed and two Focus Group Discussion and two Key Informant Interview was conducted. The result shows, even though women have started working outside the homes, they still have to manage the household responsibilities. The household responsibilities have not been changed after working outside the homes. They finishes the works in the households early and then goes to the work. This masonry work have brought social and economic changes in the lives of the women. The women have started to go out in the market than before. The women have more respected in the family and they have more decision making power than before. The women are also going out and participating in the social, political and religious organizations. The women also have more purchasing capacity. It shows that disaster not only makes women vulnerable it also increases the women's empowerment in the society

**Keywords:** Women empowerment; Disaster

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

*“A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform.”*

- Diane Mariechild

This study examines the role of women in post-earthquake reconstruction in Nepal. It is fundamentally argued that disasters do not only increase women's vulnerabilities; rather, it also increases the opportunity for women to be socio-economically empowered by participating in post-disaster reconstruction works. Nepal has the total population of approximately 26.5 million as per 2011 census and is estimated to be 28.9 million people in 2016/2017 whereas women population is about half of the total population of Nepal with 13.65 million number of women in 2011 (UN, 2019). Nepal is known as one of the disaster-prone countries in the world. It falls in the top 20<sup>th</sup> list as a disaster-prone country and ranks 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> in terms of climate change, earthquake and flood respectively (Dangal, 2011). In 25<sup>th</sup> April 2015, Nepal was struck by the worst earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8Mw, epicentre in Barpak, Gorkha District followed by other many aftershocks. A major after aftershock of 7.3Mw was again struck after 17 days of the main earthquake. The total death toll was more than 9000 and the people displaced were three times more. Disaster is not natural, it is created by different activities of human. Hazards are natural, but that in general disasters are not, and should not be seen as the inevitable outcome of hazard's impact. The stress here is on the condition of people which makes it possible for a hazard to become a disaster (Cannon, 1994)

There are many research on the natural disaster and their impacts but the study on gender have always been neglected. This type of negligence results in gendered blindness in different

disaster-related studies (Elaine Enarson & Phillips, 2008). Enarson gives more preference to the gender-related issues in disaster planning and response.

## **1.2 Statement of problem:**

In Nepal, women have played a more extensive role in both inside and outside households but their role has always been underestimated. The roles of women are more confined in households and even if they work outside the home, they are not considered as economic activities. Women are more engaged in household works like cooking food, cleaning, feeding cattle, collecting waters and many more. Women of Nepal have higher work burden (16 hours) than the global average as these women have more reproductive roles because the home is the center of nurture and socialization (Asian Development Bank, 1999; UNDP, 2004). They have to maintain the household work which is highly work-intensive and the participation of women in Nepal in “productive” activities is one of the highest in the world.

Most of the construction sites is male-dominated in Nepal, women are very rarely seen in this field. Women are only seen doing simple labour works like carrying bricks and shifting sands. After the Gorkha earthquake 2015, most of the NGOs and INGOs are breaking the trend and giving women masonry skills to build earthquake-resistant buildings.

As NGOs and INGOs in Nepal giving skills to women which generates income to the women, the status of women and women’s empowerment in the society are still in question. Therefore, this study focuses on to study the social and economic changes in women after taking the role of mason and breaking the trend.

## **1.3 Objective**

- a. To study the role of women masons in the development of community after Gorkha earthquake
- b. To study the socio-economic empowerment of women after their work as mason

- c. To study the problems they faced while joining the workforce

### **1.3 Research Question:**

- What is their role as mason in development?
  - How they started to work as masons?
  - What are their roles in home?
  - What are their roles in work?
- What problems they have faced while working?
  - How community people see their work?
  - How family member see their work?
- How this work changed their status in community?
  - How this work changed their social status?
  - How this work changed their economic status in community?
  - How capable they have been after this work?

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

From an academic viewpoint, the researcher tries to study how the masonry work has given women a new opportunity to start working outside the homes and generate income and contribute it to household activities. It will also study how economic opportunity has given women social and economic empowerment. There are very few studies on the empowerment of women after taking masonry work in post-disaster recovery, the findings of this research will help NGOs, government and society to rethink the development of Nepal through women empowerment and breaking the stereotype and reconsidering women in the construction of other major infrastructures.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The following literature review shows the multiple unique roles of women and their problems in their life after working outside the home. The literature also explores the role of women in post-disaster recovery. This includes the different gendered roles in the household, differences with men regarding physical and decision-making process. This literature review also explores the nature and extent of patriarchy and its impact on women's work in both public and private spaces in Nepal. After the disaster the role of women in the household might also change, their decision making power, working patterns will also be affected. They can take major household decisions and expenses by themselves.

The literature reviews below give the detailed secondary information to help conceptualize the three objectives of the research i) Multiple roles of women ii) Women empowerment issues iii) Challenges women faces in everyday life relating to their work and empowerment.

### **2.1 Women and Their Multiple Roles**

Women play multiple roles in their life. They have a different role in work and at home. Arlie Hochschild (2003), in her book "The Second Shift", explains that even though both husband and wife work, wife's will have a second shift at their home and these multiple roles are beneficial for them in different aspects of life like mental health, physical health and relationships (Hochschild & Machung, 2003). She says that the quality of role is very important than the number of roles they take or the amount of time they spend on the role.

During the disaster, women will have three major roles to play: Productive roles, reproductive roles and community roles (Ariyabandu & Wickramasinghe, 2003; Drolet et al., 2015; Fothergill, 1999).

- Productive roles are the roles and responsibilities which give women economic payment for their labour which can be manual, professional, casual or it can also be subsistence action or part-time work.
- The reproductive roles are those which are done within the household or in family-like bearing, nurturing and caring of children, cooking, cleaning, fetching water and this roles also include the agricultural works they do for their own stock and the other works related to livestock in the home.
- The community roles are those where they maintain the relationships among families, religious activities, ceremonies, social relations, etc. (Ariyabandu & Wickramasinghe, 2003).

Women's role increases manifold in the aftermath of a disaster which includes many labour-intensive jobs such as completing daily household chores like fetching water, fuels and food from the natural resources which are disrupted due to disaster (United Nations, 2004).

Women give more time and have more responsibilities at home. It is found that during the 1997 Grand Forks flood, women played the three most important roles that are mostly volunteering in the community, caregiver in family and employee in the workplace. They had to full fill all three works simultaneously. They had to do the community work, family roles and their regular jobs. Having performed these multiplied tasks, women found themselves more confident and capable of handling multiple roles and responsibilities (Fothergill, 1999)

The high rate of male migration abroad adds another dimension that affects women's role in society. One out of eleven Nepalese is currently engaged in foreign employment (Rajkarnikar,

2017). Nepal ranks third in the world in terms of the remittance-receiving with 29.2 percentage of the country's GDP (The World Bank, 2016). Women in Nepal have more roles to play due to the absence of male members. The women have to take up the roles and responsibilities that are left behind by the men as the men migrate for work. In families with less restriction, the women will take more roles and responsibilities which were previously done by men. They will also have more freedom, access and control over household resources (Palmer, 1985). But it will not happen in every society. The societies which are more patriarchal and have more restrictive norms, the women left behind will become more vulnerable and as a result, they go to public spaces very less and maintain their status of being "good wives" (Menjívar & Agadjanian, 2007).

During a disaster, the women of Nepal have to take extra roles than the normal days. Lack of men in the reconstructions obliges women to move out of the house to take care of the reconstruction works. Hence, it is clear that women have more roles than men during and post-disaster (Drolet et al., 2015). The women play very important roles in post-disaster reconstruction. Drolet et al. (2015) demonstrate how women take extra burden during flooding in the Bodin district of Sindh, Pakistan. Besides many social and cultural restrictions on women, they require to take additional roles in the reconstruction of society as well as their own building.

One of the main objectives of this study is to examine how women perform multiple tasks both at home and outside, particularly during the reconstructive phase after the disaster. The literature review above clearly shows the different roles that women perform centring on the disaster. However, most studies identify these tasks as household and community reconstructive activities, lacking the economic role that women also perform during the post-disaster reconstruction. This study will highlight these issues and the literature review

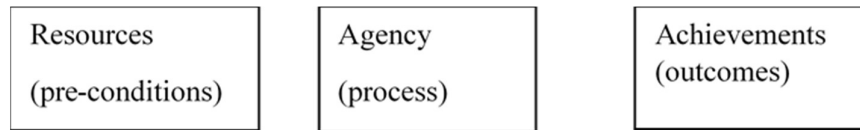
illustrated above will better help conceptualize women's holistic and multiple roles during a post-disaster context.

## **2.2 Women empowerment**

“Empowerment” is one of the very important terms to be defined and contextualized in this study. Various scholars have different perspectives on empowerment. It is defined differently in different socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. Arundhati Chattopadhyaya (2005) defines empowerment as “multi-dimensional and refers to the expansion of freedom of choices and actions in all spheres (Social, Economic and Political) to shape one's life. It also implies control over resources and decisions” (Chattopadhyaya 2005 cited in Mandal, 2013, p. 19). Kabeer (2008), defines empowerment as a power to make people more capable to make choices that they were not able to or to do the things they never thought they were capable of (Kabeer, Eyben, & Cornwall, 2008). Empowerment is basically all about power but women's empowerment is not about taking the powers taken previously by men but about distributing and transforming the nature of power equally (Hasan, 2013). Women empowerment is very important to promote justice and reduce the risk. Women must be empowered in all levels as a disaster decision-maker along with men (E. Enarson & Fordham, 2001).

According to Naila Kabeer (1999) employment has three interrelated dimensions: Resources, Agency and Achievement (p. 437). Resources are those pre-conditions for employment, it refers to not only economic resources but also human and social resources like health, education, job opportunity etc. Agency refers to the ability to define one's goal and act upon them. Agency can be like decision making, negotiation, deception and manipulation. Resources and agency constitute achievements. Sen (1999) refers to capabilities which are the potentials people have to live their life as they want (Sen, 1999).





*Figure 1: Women Empowerment Framework*

Economic Development and Women’s empowerment are interrelated. The development will bring the empowerment to the women and after empowerment, the women can have the ability to make the choices and bring decision making power to the women. The decision making has an adverse impact on development (Duflo, 2011). Women’s empowerment also has an impact on children’s welfare. It brings improvement on some aspects like health and nutrition in the children but at the expense of education.

There are various methods and frameworks to measure women’s empowerment. Mayoux 1998, has identified different criterion that can be categorized as the power in different levels (Mayoux’, 1998). They are like follows:

- The power within individual women with the will to change, this will increase women's confidence and assertiveness, when women will have the consciousness to challenge gender subordination and to take decisions about self and others.
- Power to individual women though increased capacity where the women will have increased access to income, productive assets, household property, and skills like literacy, markets and mobility. They will have a reduction in the burden of domestic work and improved health and nutrition
- Power over the difficulties to change at household and community level, control over loan income, other household productive assets and activities and increased ability in decision-making and ability to defend against violence.

- Power with other women for change with increased solidarity, networks in times of crisis or in times of gender inequality, participation to defend other women against abuse and other feminist movements.

Women empowerment can be categorized into five different parts: Social, Political, Economic, Educational and Psychological.

- Social empowerment refers to strengthening women's social relations and their place within society so that they are respected and recognized. In social empowerment, the empowerment comes from the people where they develop a sense and capacity of agency (Kabeer et al., 2008).
- Political empowerment is the participation of women in the political and other decision-making fields. It is a very important tool for women to participate in the political field for employment.
- Educational empowerment is considered to be the most important tool for socio-economic and political transformation.
- Psychological empowerment helps women to build self-confidence and allow them to take control over their resources, income and body.
- Economic empowerment refers to the economic power where the capacity of women is enhanced through employment. The women will earn money and it will enable them to become 'bread earners' and contributing to the household with a strong sense of their economic independence (Mandal, 2013).

This study is constructed on the two types of empowerment Social empowerment and Economic empowerment to analyse the social and economic changes in the lives of women. In social empowerment, there are different social factors associated with feminism. These studies show that the social factors help women to have improved confidence, negotiating skills, ability

to make decisions in certain household decisions with men after they started to work (Ferguson & Kepe, 2011). Valsamma Anthony defines empowerment of women as a multidimensional process which will enable women or individual to gain their full identity and power in all sphere of life. It can be equal rights, status and freedom of self-development with men (Valsamma 2006 cited in Mandal, 2013).

Economic empowerment means the economic power an individual holds. Women can earn money through employment which will help them to become an economic contributor in the household as a 'bread earner' with their own money independently. The economic empowerment will help women to fight against poverty and become more powerful in society. The economic empowerment will also help to improve the social empowerment of the women. When women become more economically independent, they will get higher respect in the family ("Types of Women's Empowerment," n.d.). The women will not only get higher respect but will also have decision making power in the households and have access and control over the incomes that come in the house.

The main objective of this study is to study the empowerment of women in terms of social empowerment and economic empowerment. The above literature review shows that women have different kinds of empowerment women gain after they start to work. Work will bring economic empowerment in the women like access and control over incomes, economically independent, these will lead to social empowerment where they can improve confidence and ability to make important decisions in the household. In this study, these issues will be focused and this literature review will help to study the women's social and economic changes after empowerment.

## **2.3 Challenges of Achieving Women Empowerment**

The major challenge women face in their work both outside and inside the household is subordination. Subordination means having less power than any other person in an organization or in a group. According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, subordinate means the act of giving someone or something less importance or power. In women, subordination means the inferior position of women in society or in the family. Women subordination refers to the position of women, their lack of access and control over the resources and decision making power in the family or society (Sultana, 2011). The powerlessness, discrimination of women and their limited self-confidence and self-esteem lead to their subordination. Women face subordination in every patriarchal society. They face subordination in different ways such as the form of discrimination, control, insult, exploitation, etc. in working areas, society or even within the family.

The social system in Nepal is based on the Hindu patriarchal philosophy which empowers men and allows dominance over women (Luitel, 2001; Upadhya, 1996). Women in Nepal are considered weak and they are dependent on the men. Women do not have their own social status in the society, neither have they got their social status from their father, husbands and sons. (Luitel, 2001). Some examples of women subordination are like discrimination of girls in terms of education, household chores, freedom and mobility, lack of property rights, male control over women's body, lack of job opportunities and many more. Due to subordination, women face many problems while working outside the home.

There are many challenges women face in work during the reconstruction period. One of the main objectives of this study is to identify the challenges women face during their work at the household level and as well as in the community and workplace. The study will be facilitated through the above literature review to identify the challenges women are facing in the study area.

# Chapter 3

## Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of this study both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. In the qualitative method, FGD, Key informant interview and case studies are conducted, whereas survey using a close-ended questionnaire was conducted to collect quantitative data.

### 3.1 Sample area:

As Nepal lies in the high seismic prone zone and the population has also been increasing rapidly with the unmanaged settlement in various parts of the country, it has brought many environmental degradations and climate change. These changes have brought many hazards like earthquake, flood, landslides, heat waves, cold waves, avalanches, etc. in different parts of Nepal (Government of Nepal, 2015). 31 districts of Nepal had a major earthquake effect. Among them, 14 worst-hit districts (Gorkha, Lamjung, Dhading, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Kavre, Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga, Sindhuli, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur Districts) and 7 districts (Rasuwa, Gorkha, Nuwakot, Dhading, Sindhupalchok, Dolakha and Ramechhap) had the major crisis. There were more than 600,000 homes destroyed in the earthquake.

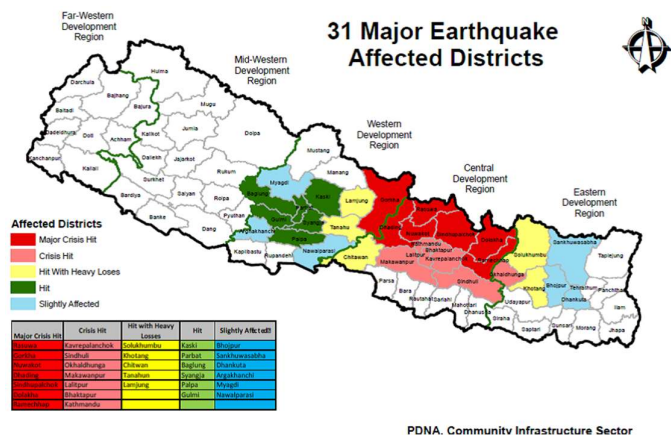


Figure 2: Major Earthquake Affected Districts

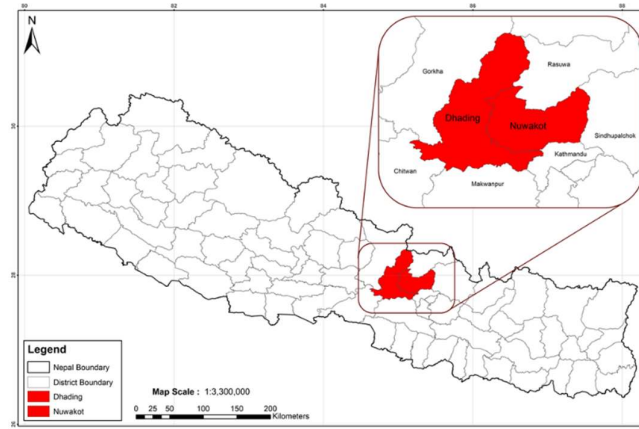


Figure 3: Study Area

Among the 14 districts which were affected the most, this study is conducted in 2 of the worst-crisis hit districts in Nepal, Nuwaot and Dhading. Different Municipalities and Rural Municipalities of these districts are selected randomly.

### 3.2 Population:

The population of this study is the female construction worker or the masons working at Nuwakot and Dhading districts. 162 respondents have been selected with 72 respondents from Nuwakot district and 90 respondents from Dhading district through random sampling. Women who are working as or got training for skilled masons were selected and interviewed for this survey.

### 3.3 Data collection method:

This study used both primary and secondary data collection methods.

**Primary Source:** Primary data related to the women’s empowerment, their socio-economic changes, the role as masons of the female masons and overall changes in the community after their work are collect from female construction worker or masons. For Data collection regarding these issues in this study, various methods such as Survey, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII) are used.

Survey: The semi-structured questionnaire is coded in **Open Data Kit (ODK) platform through KOBOTool Box** in both Nepali and English languages which was deployed in Android mobile phones.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD): Two Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with the women who are currently working as masons in Nuwakot and Dhading districts. Each FGD had 5 women in a group.

Key Informant Interview (KII): Two Key Informant Interview (KII) was conducted in each district. KII was done with the district coordinator working in Baliyo Ghar program.

**Secondary Sources:** Secondary sources this study uses are Journal articles, working papers, books and organizational reports.

### **3.4 Data Analysis:**

The quantitative data collected for this study have been analysed using the software IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23 and Microsoft Excel 2013. To have better analysis and holistic understanding, quantitative data have been supplemented by qualitative data.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to know the roles of the women played at different levels during the post-disaster reconstruction in 2015 Gorkha earthquake of Nepal and their social and economic empowerment as a result of such participation in work outside the home. The quantitative analysis of this study is conducted in the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23. The study will answer the following questions:

- What is their role as a mason in the post-earthquake reconstruction?
- How this work changed their status in the community?
- What problems did they face while joining the workforce?

#### 4.1 Demographic Results:

The participants of this study are mainly from Tamang community ( $n= 64$ , 40%) followed by Dalit ( $n=44$ , 27%) Brahmin/ Chettri ( $n= 23$ , 14%), Magar/Gurung/Ghale ( $n=16$ , 10%) Newar ( $n=12$ , 7%). The educational qualification of the women in this study have informal education ( $n = 71$ , 43.8%) followed by literate with formal education ( $n = 58$ , 35.8%) and illiterate ( $n = 33$ , 20.4%). The women were asked about their marital status, most of the women were married ( $n = 150$ , 93%) and remaining were unmarried ( $n = 8$ , 5%) and widow ( $n = 4$ , 2%) The women were also asked about their main occupation before 2015 Gorkha earthquake, women had agriculture ( $n = 109$ , 67%) followed by housewife ( $n = 44$ , 27%) as the main occupation. Only one female was working as a construction worker before the earthquake. The demographic results of the women are shown in Table 1



		<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>N %</b>
<b>Age</b>	Less than 20	4	2%
	21-30	42	26%
	31-40	68	42%
	41-50	37	7%
	Above 50	11	7%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Tamang	64	40%
	Dalit	44	27%
	Brahmin/ Chettri	23	14%
	Magar/ Gurung/ Ghale	16	10%
	Newar	12	7%
	Others	3	2%
<b>Educational Qualification</b>	Literate	58	35.8%
	Illiterate	33	20.4%
	Informal Education	71	43.8%
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	150	93%
	Unmarried	8	5%
	Separated	0	0%
	Divorced	0	0%
	Widow	4	2%
<b>Main occupation before the earthquake?</b>	Agriculture	109	67%
	Not working/ Housewife	44	27%
	Labour Work	5	3%
	Tailoring	2	1%
	Construction work	1	1%
	Business	1	1%
	Service	0	0%
	Social Mobilizer	0	0%
	Teacher	0	0%

*Table 1: Demographic Information*

The women who were married were asked about the main occupation of their husband before and after the earthquake, the major occupation before the earthquake was agriculture ( $n = 66$ , 44%), construction work ( $n = 23$ , 15%), labour ( $n = 15$ , 10%). But after the earthquake the occupation of the husband has changed, they changed the agricultural work to construction work. Before agriculture was 44% but after the earthquake, it is 36% and construction work was 15% before the earthquake but after the earthquake, it is 21% (Figure 4).

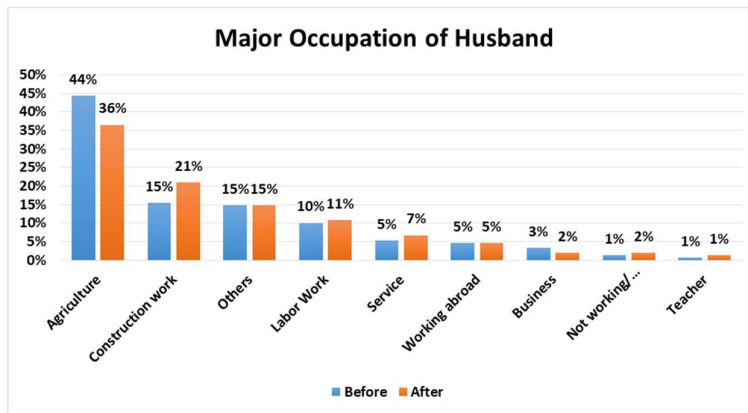


Figure 4: Major Occupation of Husband

## 4.2 Roles of Women:

Every woman has different roles and responsibilities in their home, even if they have started to work or not. All most all women have started to work after the earthquake struck in Nepal in 2015 ( $n = 160$ , 98%). When the women were asked about their major reason to take the mason training and to work as a mason, the majority of the women's answer was to come out to take the training and work as a mason to rebuild their own house ( $n = 120$ , 74%), followed by to gain new knowledge ( $n = 109$ , 67%) and to support reconstruction of community ( $n = 65$ , 40%) and to earn money ( $n = 59$ , 36%) (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Reasons to Take Training

*“My husband is working abroad, there was no one to build my house in the community everyone busy building their own homes, so with my husband’s*

*permission I took the training to make my house and to help others to build their homes.” – Sarita Lamtel, Dhading*

This study shows that the major roles and responsibilities of women is in almost every household works both before and after the earthquake. The major five work responsibilities are on food preparation, feeding cattle, cleaning homes, collecting firewood and grass and collecting water. There was not much change in these responsibilities but the most changes have occurred on the selling farm products. Before the earthquake, 62% of the participants had this role but after the earthquake, it has increased by 10% with 72% of women participating in the selling farm products (Figure 6). The increase in the selling farm product shows that women are having more access to the market where they can sell their farm products.

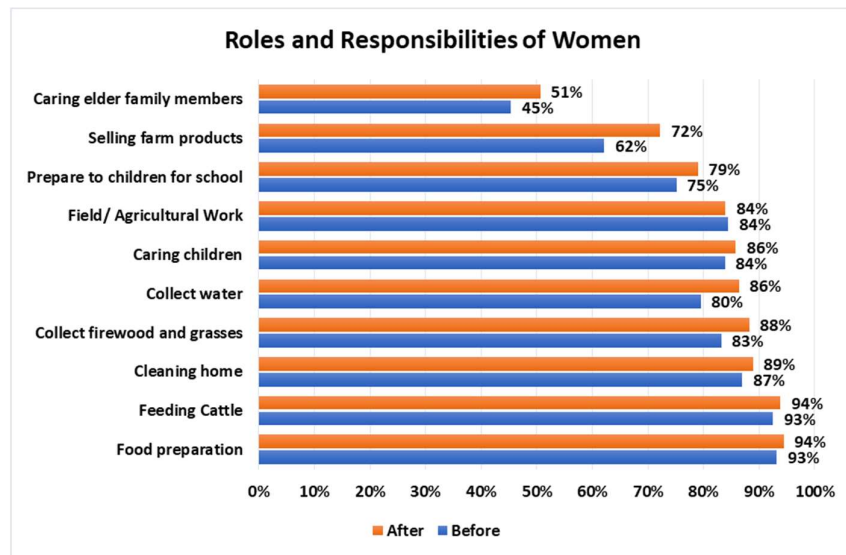


Figure 6: Role and Responsibilities of Women

With the same roles and responsibilities in the household before and after the earthquake, the women have many difficulties in managing both household roles and responsibilities and work. The women of Nepal have to do all the household works by themselves. When the women were asked how difficult it is to manage the work and household responsibilities 1 being Very difficult and 5 is not difficult, the response was on average 2.8. This shows that it is very difficult for women to manage both work and household roles and responsibilities. But most

of them (62%) says that the family member helps them in most of the household works while they go to work (Figure 7). But even if the family member helps them there are many works like feeding the cattle, collecting firewood and grass which are mostly done by women. Women in Nuwakot and Dhading both shared the same thing:

*“..... Work at home is always there but we (Female Masons) manage time to go to training and works by waking up early in the morning and finishing household works. We feed cattle, collect grass and firewood, clean our homes and prepare everything for the home and go to work.” – FGD, Nuwakot and Dhading*

The women’s role in the house continues to be the same even after they start working outside. Their household responsibilities did not change much. The women have to manage both household roles and responsibilities as well as working outside the home.

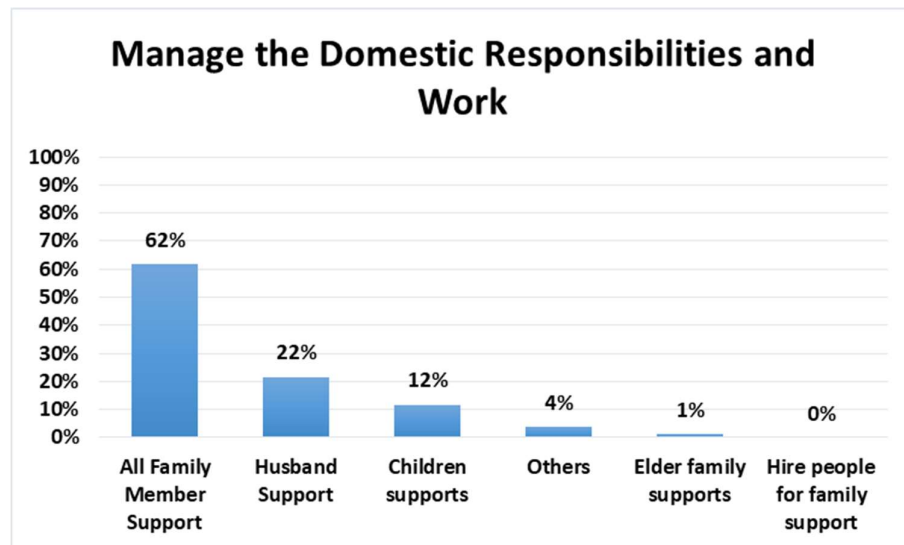


Figure 7: Management of Domestic and Work Responsibility

### 4.3 Socio-economic Changes

Although obtaining skills and working does not always mean that women will spend according to their wish and will bring social and economic changes in their lives, there are literature which suggest that when women start to work, they will have many changes in their social and

economic status which will make them more social and economically empowered. In this study to measure the social changes, the household assets they have accumulated, participation in social, religious or political organization, changes in their household sources, change in decision making and their voice in the household are measured.

## Social Changes

The study shows that, many women have started to participate in different organizations after the earthquake. For example, 60% of women have been participating in different social, political or religious organizations in their community (Figure 8). Most of the women have participated or are affiliated to the women's self-help groups in their community ( $n = 69$ , 70%) and saving and credit cooperatives ( $n = 18$ , 18%). These women who are participated in these organizations are mostly member of these groups or the board members.

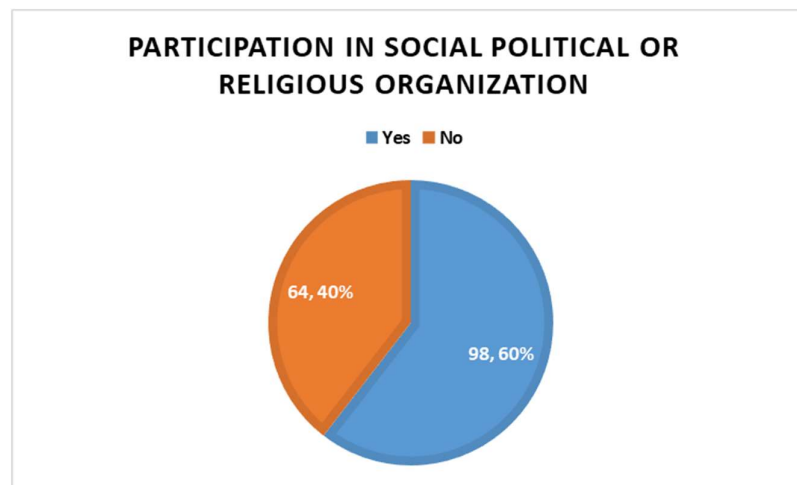


Figure 8: Participation of women in organizations

Many women also participated in different organizations outside their homes. When women were asked about their participation in decision making in their household, majority of them informed that they participated in the decision-making process in the household after the earthquake, which is demonstrated in the figure below (Figure 9). There has been a major increase in children's education, educational expenses (like stationary expenses), festivals and buying and selling large items for households with 14%, 12%, 9% and 8% increase

respectively. There was significant change in children’s education ( $p\text{-value} = 0.00$ ) and educational expenses ( $p\text{-value} = 0.02$ ). This shows that the decision making of women has increased in the financial as well as social aspects of the children’s education. As the women head mason Anita Tamang says:

“..... After taking the work, now I have money for my children when they need copy and pencils. I don’t need to rely on my husband’s money to buy these things. I can give money to my children for their tiffin and snacks too.”

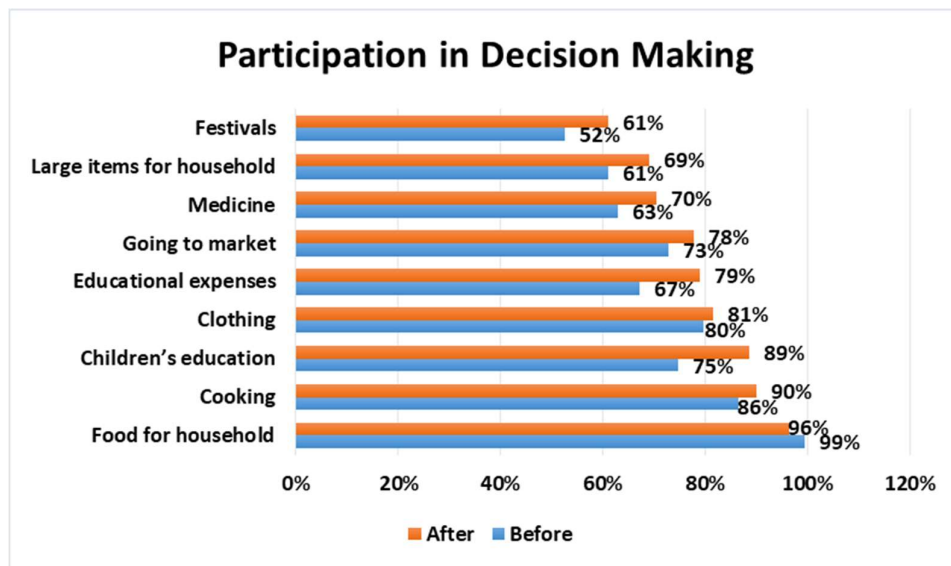
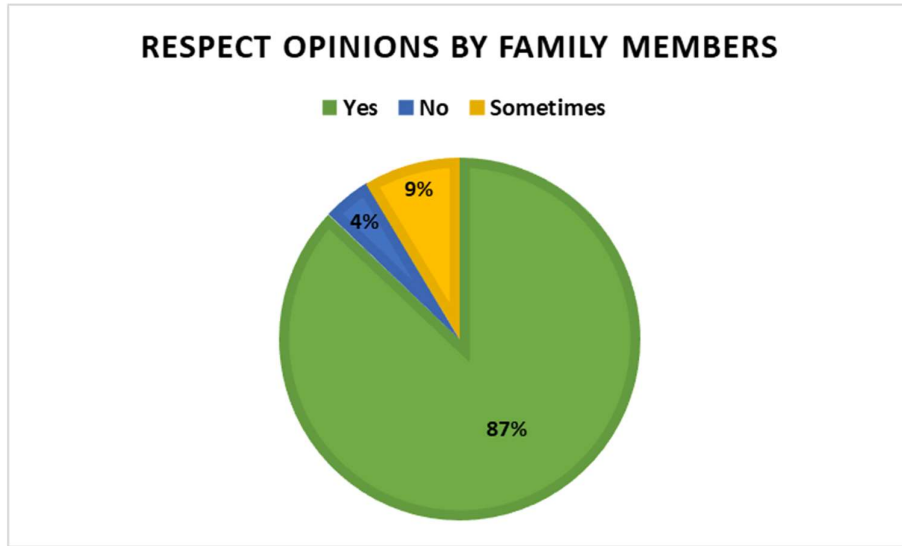


Figure 9: Participation in Decision Making

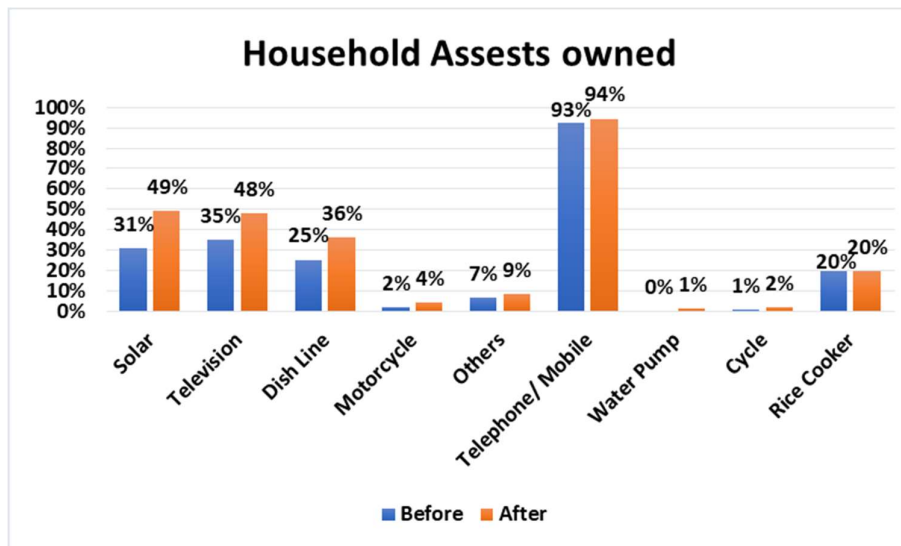
One indicator of women empowerment is whether they have a say in the family and their opinions are respected. When women were asked about if their opinions are heard and respected after taking the work, 87% ( $n = 141$ ) women said their opinions are significantly respected and listened in the family member ( $p\text{-value} = 0.00$ ) (Figure 10). Findings of this study suggest that working women often express their opinions in their households ( $n = 114$ , 70%) followed by sometimes ( $n = 35$ , 22%) and rarely ( $n = 10$ , 6%).



*Figure 10: Opinions Respected by Family Members*

## Economic changes

The women in this study have accumulated many household assets after work. The most accumulated assets were in entertainment and electricity. As figure 11 shows, they have owned a television (13% increase), television cable line (11% increase) and solar power (18% increase). There is significant increase in solar power (p-value 0.016). There is less accessible electricity in these rural places of Nepal that is why priority is given to solar for electricity.



*Figure 11: Household assets owned*

Not only accumulation of the assets, but working women have also contributed changes in the quality of life which eventually contributed to overall health and hygiene of the family members. For example, the main source of water for most of the women in their household is pipeline (54% before, 65% after the earthquake), but before the earthquake, many women used river, streams, ponds and open water sources (27% before and 15% after the earthquake) for the drinking water. Many of them have shifted to the pipeline supply in homes after the earthquake. For many women, before the earthquake, the main source of fuel for cooking was woods (86% before, 70% after), but many working women after the earthquake have changed to a gas cylinder (2% before, 22% after). The structure of the houses of these women have also been changed. Before earthquake most of the women's had brick/stone and mud houses ( $n = 160$ , 99%) but after earthquake they have changed to brick/stone and cement ( $n = 36$ , 22%) before there used to be no brick/stone and cement buildings. These have become possible due to their changes in economic capability.

As a result of their socio-economic upliftment, many women's purchasing capability has also increased. When asked about their expenditure on food, education of children, medical, entertainment and other social events like festivals and different occasions, many respondents told that their expenditure has increased. The mean of total expenditure before the earthquake was 20859.91 whereas the mean of total expenditure after the earthquake is 28905.15. There is a significant difference in before and after the earthquake, the mean difference is -8045.25 ( $t = -6.29$ ,  $p$ -value 0.00). Findings of this study suggest that the purchasing capacity of women has increased after they started to work after the earthquake.

So far it is evident in the findings that women are more empowered than before. There are various ways to measure empowerment of the women. Women empowerment is seen as the power to make women more capable of decision making, mobility, contribute to the household assets, income and participate. Women who are working as a mason have given them more



social and economic power. This study shows that women are more socially and economically empowered. The women have more decision making power than before, their decision-making power has significantly increased in the children's expenses mainly on education. This shows that women's empowerment also has an impact on their children's welfare and education. They have more purchasing capacity than before which makes them one of the 'bread earners' in the home which gives them more respect in the family.

#### **4.4 Challenges women face in their workplace**

This study has found out that women had to face various difficulties while working both at home and outside. As a construction worker or mason, women had to work out of their home for a longer period of time which have brought many problems in their family. Women faced problems from the starting of the training to working in the community and at home. Women's had to work on an average of 7.2 hours per day. 8% of women reported they faced problem in enrolling in the training as a mason, out of those women, 54% of women said that their family did not support, and another 46% said the community did not support their work. The reason why the family did not support working outside is the understanding that this will negatively affect the completion of household works. In a patriarchal society in Nepal, women are still considered to shoulder the responsibility for the household work which is believed to be their first priority. The community people also did not take it well that women work outside home as there is still a predominant belief that working outside requires strong physical strength which women do not have. As Thuli Maya Lama has commented:

*“We were given chances to build the home but still when it comes to putting the roof they don't allow us to put the roof as there is a saying that the female should not put the roofs and that is one of the reasons not to get work in the community”*

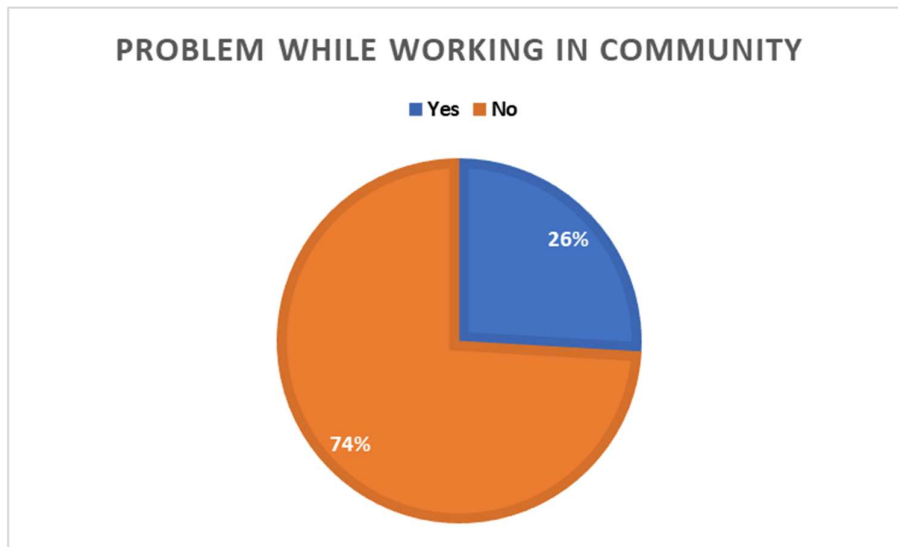


Figure 12: Problems While Working in Community

Not only within the household, but women also had to face problems in the community while working as a mason ( $n= 42, 26\%$ ) (Figure 12). Majority of the women said that they were not trusted by the community people. The reason behind such belief is that working as a mason/ construction worker needs physical strength and was usually done by the men. So women are not believed that they could also work as a mason and thereby not accepted by the community people. The works like building houses are seen as a work of men rather than women. Women also faced male domination while working in the community. They were hired less compared to men in the community. Even though there is a strict rule to give women equal wages, they were given fewer wages than males for the same work they have done. The men are given 1000 to 1200 per day but women are given 700 to 900 to the same work. Since the post-earthquake reconstruction works are almost done in most of the parts of Nepal, women will have to lose their jobs, as Hari Ram Pathak, District Coordinator, Baliyo Ghar says:

*“The reconstruction phase is ending soon. The reconstruction of the houses in these areas are also almost finished, so the women have to travel longer and further to get works.”*

Rupa Nepal from Dhading also adds:

*“..... We don't have much work here in our community almost all houses are finished reconstruction. We have to walk for hours to another village in order to work. That is also very rare. Only a few works are given to us.”*

It has been quite evident in the above discussion that women face many problems and challenges in their workplace. Despite these challenges, they still continue their work. Majority of the women's problem is to manage the time at home and work. The concept “second shift” appears to be very useful to demonstrate how women in Nepal work doubly both at home and outside. Due to their household chores responsibilities, women have to leave the workplace earlier or they join work late which makes their wages less than men. However, the major challenge women face is that their work is not sustainable. The post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction works are almost over which leaves very less work opportunity for women in the village as the new construction work is very few. In order to get jobs, women have to walk for hours to the neighbouring villages. This makes the management of time at home and works very hard.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Women's vulnerability multiplies during any disaster across the world and no exception in the case of Nepal. This study, however, focuses on the other story of the disaster which narrates that women could also be empowered by ensuring work opportunities for them in post-earthquake reconstruction. Although there are many problems and challenges women face while working as a mason, which is believed to be the space and work for men due to the strength and stamina required for this job, this study suggests that women continue to work by overcoming such cultural stereotypes and achieve significant socio-economic changes in their life. This study examines the different roles that women play during the post-earthquake reconstruction and how this work opportunity enhances their socio-economic condition in everyday life.

This study finds out that women play multiple roles during post-earthquake reconstruction. However, despite working outside the home, their roles as homemaker and complete household chores have not been reduced. It has been more or less the same before they started to work. Women in post-earthquake Nepal continue to work both at home and outside, which corroborates the concept of "second shift". However, a significant change has been observed that women have become much more mobile than before, as many women have to either work outside home or to go to the market place to sell their farm products. This has to some extent challenged the long-held traditional Nepalese Hindu patriarchal norm that home is the place for women. Although women have to be overburdened by productive, reproductive and community roles, the post-earthquake reconstruction work opportunity has opened up a new space for women in Nepal to be empowered.

The resultant impact of economic empowerment through work opportunity has been reflected in positive changes in women's position in the family. Even though the roles in households have not been reduced, this study suggests that women achieved more respect in the family and their opinions were taken into consideration than before as they continue to contribute financially to the family. Women have also become empowered socially. Corroborating to the earlier studies (see for example, Kabeer, 1999; 2008; Ferguson & Kepe, 2011; Enarson & Fordham, 2001), this study also finds out that women in the study area are socially empowered since they can express their feelings, have decision making power in the home, and have more mobility outside the home to participate in socio-economic activities. As a reflection of their enhanced economic condition, this study has also found out that women's purchasing capacity has also increased after they started to work. They can now buy a gas cylinder for cooking to replace previously used fossil fuel which is hazardous to women's health, have the ability to install solar power system for electricity and could spend more on children's educational expenses.

These positive outcomes, however, are heavily dependent on the availability of work. The post-earthquake reconstruction works are nearly done and women are increasingly facing more difficulties in finding work. In the rural areas of Nepal, new constructions of houses are very few and men usually get these limited work opportunities than women. Women are only the second options after employing men. This study has reinforced the fact that women could also equally and usefully contribute to the post-earthquake reconstruction process. Women are readily available and employable, so why not utilize this pool of resource in other infrastructure development works in Nepal? The findings of this ethnographic study on the women mason workers in Nuwakot and Dhading districts would benefit both academics and policy planners in Nepal to realize that inclusion of women, who are skilled, experienced and willing to

contribute, would not only ensure infrastructure development but also expedite overall socio-economic progress of Nepal.

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