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## Desktop Study: Approaches to Empower of Women in Rural Areas of Nepal

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### Abstract

In demographic analysis of national census 2021 recorded 51.1 percent of women's population which is 2.2 percent higher than the male counterpart. The total population of Nepal is 29564178. Extensive prior research has been conducted on women's empowerment in Nepal, including a wide range of initiatives. Particularly in Nepal, there is fervent discussion on women's empowerment and rural poverty. Nepal government managed for inclusiveness in governance, still there are gaps to have equal rights found but effort is going on for equal participation in all walk of life as men, Following the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals, gender equality and women's empowerment have emerged as critical topics. This strategy views women as both the workforce and the development aim. Women experience societal oppression, gender inequality, and the burden of dowry and child marriage, among other criminal activities. Enhancing women's lives in both urban and rural regions, avoiding crimes against them, decreasing domestic abuse, and producing a host of other social and economic advantages are all made possible by women's empowerment.

**Key Words:** Approaches, Development, Economy, Gender, Women Empowerment

**Declaration:** There is no any conflict of interest.

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**Problem statement**

The patriarchal structures of Nepal restrict women's access, involvement, and representation in public life. Geographic location has a profound impact on the lives of Nepali people. The region has a lot of different terrain, from the Himalayas to the plains. There are physical geographic disparities between urban and rural areas. Caste system further divides societies. Gender-based and sexual violence are prevalent in Nepal, particularly among spouses. Social, political, and economic values, practices, and norms suppress women. persistence of cultural norms and patriarchal views that limit women's rights, opportunities, and workplace discrimination, including lower rates of participation in the labor force and uneven compensation when compared to males. In a same vein, there exist obstacles to healthcare and education, and women are disproportionately underrepresented in positions of political leadership. Gender-based disparities and access to human rights, including clean water, good education, preventative healthcare, human trafficking, and sustainable economic growth, pose obstacles to women's empowerment in Nepal. Communities and collaborative partners are tackling these problems. There are resources at hand to help with these initiatives.

**Objectives**

1. To Study the status of women empowerment in rural Nepal
2. To examine the effect of social, political, economics to empower women in Nepal.

**Methods**

The study is based on qualitative data which are collected from different literatures, such as government reports, government programs, periodical, NGO/ INGO reports and publication, UN, Publications, and in general academic articles published in Google Scholars, SSRN, JHSWN, research journal published by different universities not uploaded in web, and published article in in Webs. The article are selected focused on women's empowerment issue with main focus of the status of rural Nepal. The out come of the research is presented qualitatively.



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## **Literature Review**

The literature review taken as part of secondary data of the study. It is carried as from the concept on empowerment of women, approaches of empowerment applied by different organizations and communities, case studies, reports and government initiative of Nepal to empower the women became the major areas of the study.

### **2.1. General concept of Women's Empowerment:**

Understanding women's empowerment has led to a variety of focus and agendas in discussions about women's empowerment, which has led to a greater agreement in the literature regarding its conceptualization. Options, choice, control, and power are some of the key issues that are most often included in defining empowerment. These usually refer to women's capacity to make choices and influence events that matter to them and their families. Having control over your own life and finances can be very stressful. Thus, there is frequent reference to some variant of the ability to affect one's own wellbeing and to make strategic life choices. Battliwala (1994) defines influence in terms of how much influence people have over external actions that matter to their welfare. Rowlands (1997) describes it as a process whereby women become able to organize themselves in order to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices, and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination. An element related to the notion of human agency, self-esteem, frequently appears in definitions of empowerment. Many definitions contain the idea that a fundamental shift in perceptions, or "inner transformation," is essential to the formulation of choices, drawing mainly from human rights and feminist perspectives. That is, women should be capable of defining their own interests and choices, and believe that they are not only capable, but also entitled to make choices (Baird, 1994).

Similar to that, Agarwal (2001) has provided a precise description of the issues where he asserts "thinking outside the box" and challenging the status quo. A useful definition of empowerment that captures what is common to these definitions and that can apply across the range of contexts that development assistance is concerned with is offered by Baxter (1993) Several important critiques and debates generated by the women's movement throughout the world during the 1980s emerged from several important critiques and debates generated by the women's movement throughout the world during the 1980s, when feminists, particularly in the Third World, were increasingly discontent with the largely In Nepal, rural poverty and female empowerment are among the most talked about topics (Acharya & Bennet, 1981). Nepal is one of the developing countries in South Asia and is one of the developing countries in South Asia.



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When feminists, particularly in the Third World, were increasingly discontent with the largely In Nepal, rural poverty and female empowerment are among the most talked about topics (Acharya & Bennet, 1981). Nepal is one of the developing countries in South Asia and is one of the developing countries in South Asia. According to National census survey 2021, the female population is recorded 1, 49,1,027 which is 51.13 percent of the total population. (NSO, 2023), the statics indicated the majority of people are female.

“A study conducted among female adolescents, youths and adults in eight districts of Nepal reported that more than one-third of married youths (20-24 years) experienced violence at home and result of the research found that More than half the women (51.9%) reported having experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. One-fourth (25.3%) reported physical violence and nearly half (46.2%) reported sexual violence. Likewise, one-third (35.8%) of women reported experiencing some form of violence in the past 12 months. No or little inter-spousal communication and low autonomy of women significantly increases the odds of experiencing violence among married women” (Lamichhane, Puri, Tamang and Dulal, 2011). Women are facing many kinds of obstacles, such as if they have a religious burden, social burden, and religious burden, mostly in rural areas.

According to Forrester (2000), women empowerment helps women promote education which leads to employment of a large number of populations. Actually, it is a social development as a whole. Women are provided with equity and equality in every aspect of life. That results in a more peaceful and secure environment for everyone around the globe. Forrester also insisted that empowerment enables women to take control of their own lives, set their own agenda, organize to help each other, and make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change. Giving power and authority to take decisions in every part of life is called empowerment. Empowerment of women can be viewed as a tool for reducing poverty. In Nepal, poverty has been a major issue. Apart from government and non-government organizations, it is important to alleviate poverty. In regard to that, women can play a vital role in those organizations

(Bhasin, 1998) stated that ‘Gender equality and women's empowerments have been major issues for women's empowerment since the Millennium Development Goals were determined’. ‘The issue of gender equality continues to dominate global society, leading to the highest returns and encompassing almost all the development possibilities’ (Batliwala, 1994). ‘Women in Nepal are still treated differently, considering them only for domestic duties at home, which affects the assumption that women are not allowed to work outside of their homes’ (Chitauru, 2004).



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‘Women in Nepal are still treated differently, considering them only for domestic duties at home, which affects the assumption that women are not allowed to work outside of their homes’ (Chitauru, 2004).

**Approaches of Women Empowerment.** There are different approaches to empower disadvantage women, some of the approaches are explored as given below.

**The Anti-Poverty Approach:** The antipoverty strategy emphasizes women's productive role and encourages them to work in order to boost their employment and there are different ways to empower women among them some of them are explained as ‘**i- Create a safe space:** Women should have a safe space together and talk own their issues and problems. **ii-Support independence and mobility:** Women in rural area of Nepal and India have to ask their husbands for permission to leave home. **iii-Teach women to read, iv- Increase savings and income, v- Teach job skills and seed businesses, vi- Build self-esteem and confidence, vii-Boost decision-making power, viii-Impact health, ix-Build networks, and x- Create public leaders.** In south Asia women in Bhutan are in public leadership role’ (Readglobal, 2024)

**A study was carried out by** L.M. Chaudhary &, R Sonar (2020) They have identified the empowerment approach as below.

**‘Welfare Approach:** This approach was 1950 and 60’s decade, the women were regarded as passive recipient of development aid considers women with a focus on their reproductive duties as mothers and homemakers.

**Equality Approach:** This concept was emerged during the UN decade of Women. The equity approach is based on the belief that women are behind in society and income-generating prospects. This method, however, does not address women's reproductive roles, nor does it identify social and cultural limits.

**The Efficiency or Instrumental Approach:** Women are considered as having untapped development potential that should be used more fully. The efficiency approach, on the other hand, ignores existing role patterns in society and assumes that women could easily accomplish additional work and that women's labor has not benefited national progress so far’ (Chaudhary and Sonkar, 2020).

### 2.3. Nepal government and its effort to empower women.

First of the empowerment should come from the super the other structure, without it the sustainability of the development. The constitutionally the empowerment of women are as “Rights of Women” as Fundamental Rights, Citizenship with identity of descent and gender by the name of mother or father, 33% of Federal Parliament Seats reserved for women, Women’s representation in State Body Ensured, President or Vice-



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“They were confined within the narrow boundary of their household, they could not come out of the houses also at that time. Because those women who got out of the house, they could not stay outside in the nights... but “Yes, it is improving more than in her time. Because people are treating their daughter in law like their own daughter nowadays. Back in her time this was very different. To treat her this way is a great improvement of the society and they also have more opportunities now” (Schenk & Schroder, 2018).

‘According to the report published by the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen (2024) are drastic improvement in life expectancy at birth rate it was 27.1 while men was 28.5 in 1852/54, it has surpassed the life expectancy of women 67.9 while men found 65.5 in 2011’ (MoWCSC, 2024)’. ‘In May 2024, the average life expectancy increased to 71.9 (Macrotrends, 2024)’. “The rise in life expectancy for women has been even steeper than the overall increase, and it is further explained by the fact that the fertility rate per woman was found to be 4.6 per woman in the age group of 15 to 49 in 1952/54, but it has sharply declined to 2.1 in 2021. This increase in life expectancy is the result of improvements in living standards, access to healthcare, and education. The percentage of literate people also grew significantly. In 1952–1954, 5% of women and 10% of men were literate. By 2021, that number had risen to 84% male and 69% female, but women were still less literate than males in this situation.” (MoWCSC, 2024)



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**2.4, UN Conferences on Women’s empowerment:** The major conferences And Convention are list as below. All of these conferences were directed to empower the women.

“1-World Conference of the International Women's Year: This was the first of its kind was organized in Mexico City. It was conducted from 19 June to 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1975.

2- World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace Copenhagen (14 to 30 July 1980)

3-World Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace Nairobi (15 to 26 July 1985)

4- Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace (UN, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch>, 2024)4-15 September 1995 - Beijing, China

5- Five-year Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing + 5) held in the General Assembly, 5 - 9 June 2000.

6- Ten-year Review and Appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly held during the forty-ninth session of the CSW, from 28 February to 11 March 2005

7- Beijing 15 Years + 1-12 March 2010: This was 15 years + review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) and it was From 1-12 March 2010” (UN, 2024),



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‘The results of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, as well as the execution of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, were examined by the Commission on the Status of Women for fifteen years. The goal of all these gatherings and conversations was to empower women in many fields. By identifying the gaps and the continents on which they exist, the governments were advised to take appropriate action. At the Fourth World Conference on Women more than ten years ago, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were endorsed by the 189 United Nations Members. In the Declaration, nations reaffirmed their political commitment to advancing women's empowerment and gender equality. In twelve "critical areas of concern," the Platform for Action detailed strategic goals and initiatives’ (UN, 2024 Retri,)

‘The report following a ten-year review It was found that "Continuous problems in all regions include unequal access to social and economic resources such as education, health care, and productive assets; inequality in employment and economic opportunities; and the low representation of women in decision-making in both the public and private sectors." Environmental concerns with a gender equality component are still not given enough attention. Domestic abuse is one type of violence against women that still poses a serious problem. In certain areas, women have disproportionately high rates of poverty; in addition, women who experience extra disadvantages because of their age, ethnicity, or handicap may experience even greater rates. Concerns including sexual assault in war areas, the exploitation of underage laborers, and the trafficking of women and girls were identified (UNO, 2024).

**2.5. Indicators of Women Empowerment** Many theorists have contributed greatly to making women empowerment understandable to scholars. The eight empowerment indicators developed by Syed Hashmi (1996) include mobility, financial stability, and the ability to make small purchases, the ability to make larger purchases, involvement in major decisions, and relative freedom from family dominance, political and legal awareness, and participation in public protest

“The Women’s Empowerment Index (WEI) is a composite index that measures the level of women’s empowerment across five dimensions: life and good health (two indicators); education, skill-building and knowledge (two indicators); labor and financial inclusion (two indicators), participation in decision-making (three indicators); and freedom from violence (one indicator)” (UNDP, 2023) Detail of these indicators are in the box below.





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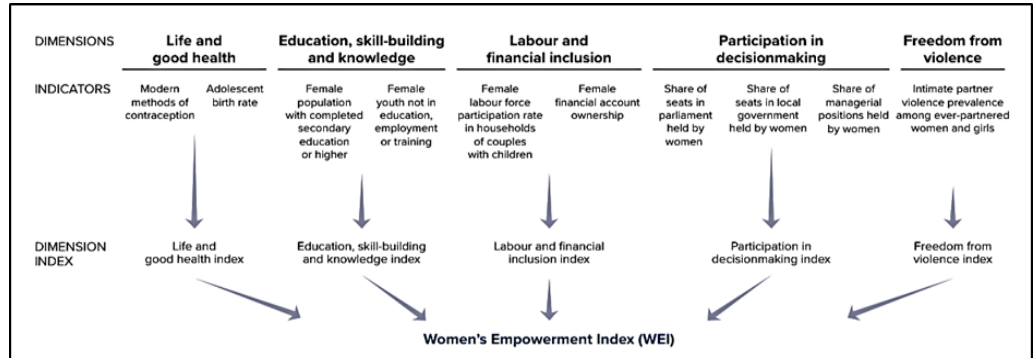
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These indicators could be varied but need to consider when developing the indicators, different countries has developed their indicators own their own ways also, while developing their empowerment indicators. Social consequences are partially addressed in the indicators of women empowerment highlighted by UN guideline.

**Social consequences:** The most common offence is rape, dowry, sexual harassment, kidnapping, cruelly by husband, relatives, assault on a woman, and sex trafficking. There are numerous rights and safeguards for women in the numerous enterprise programs and laws made by the government. Women empowerment can be achieved through education.

Women are made aware of their rights and authority. Empowerment refers to the development of individuals and communities spiritual, political, social or economic power. Raising women's traditionally disadvantaged economic, social, and political standing in society is crucial for empowering them. The empowerment of women is important for society's development. As a result, empowerment refers to a concern for actual social influence, political power, and legal rights, as well as a psychological sense of personal control or influence.

### **Methodology.**

The research is based on the secondary source of the information on the women empowerment. It is a qualitative research method. The data source was published journal articles, government reports, UN reports, dissertations, seminar reports, periodicals and others. These sources are analyzed during the time of literature review, these articles were drawn from different web pages nationally and international levels. Mostly used web sources to identify the journal articles were Google scholars, SSRN and the web page of Nepal government, Nepjol, Jhsw and others.



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### Research Findings and discussion

Rural poverty found 6.32 higher than the urban poverty, it has different consequences to rural women, such as fertility, economic, social, health, and decision-making level, low education attainment, life expectancy and quality of life as well (NDHS, Rijal, MoWCSC). Rural poverty and women's empowerment are two of the most discussed issues in the present world, especially in Nepal. Gender equality and women's empowerment have been major concerns since the establishment of the Millennium Development Objectives (UN-MDG-5, Batliwala, 1994).

Women are considered a workforce and a target for development in this approach. The previous research on women empowerment was extensive and covered many different forms of women empowerment in Nepal. Gender equality and women's empowerment have been major concerns for women in poverty alleviation since the establishment of the Millennium Development Objectives. Women empowerment welfare approaches consider women to be the workforce and target for development.

Women's mobility also restricted and not allowed to stay out of home, this was found in any part of Nepal and India, now, it is improving. 'They were confined within the narrow boundary of their household, they could not come out of the houses also at that time. Because those women who got out of the house, they could not stay outside in the nights.' (Maximilian Schenk & Kim Schröder, 2018). It has been happening due to lack of professional education also.

International organization are more concern on the issue of women's empowerment, it was more intensified since the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace (UN, 2024) 4-15 September 1995 - Beijing, 189 United Nations Members. In the Declaration, nations reaffirmed their political commitment to advancing women's empowerment and gender equality. In twelve "critical areas of concern," the Platform for Action detailed strategic goals and initiatives' (UN, 2024 Retri.) China. After this the national governments also developed their own agenda to empower women in different sectors.

The approach to empower women is not an issue of minor reform in education, and so on, it should be empowered from the governance itself, the women should take parts in decision making process, therefore Nepal has prepared its constitution for inclusive governance in all sectors, the quota is being designated, if there are no women candidate, the quota will remain vacant, until suitable women candidate is not available. It has clearly indicated in the constitution of Nepal.



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The approach to empower women is not an issue of minor reform in education, and so on, it should be empowered from the governance itself, the women should take parts in decision making process, therefore Nepal has prepared its constitution for inclusive governance in all sectors, the quota is being designated, if there are no women candidate, the quota will remain vacant, until suitable women candidate is not available. It has clearly indicated in the constitution of Nepal. National Women Commission as a Constitutional Bod, Economic evaluation of contribution and work for the maintenance of children and family as the State Policy, Special Opportunity through affirmative action in education, health, employment and social security, Identity and special provisions for gender and sexual minorities, Equal pay for equal value of work" (MoWCSC, 2024). "In the Gender Gap Index 2022, "Nepal scored a 0.692 for gender parity.

There are different approaches identified to empower women, UN has developed 5 areas to find out the women's development parity known as (WEI). "In the Gender Gap Index 2022, "Nepal scored a 0.692 for gender parity. In all approaches to empower women they have concentrated on education, health, economy, governance, Syed Hashmi (1996) include mobility, financial stability, and the ability to make small purchases, the ability to make larger purchases, involvement in major decisions, and relative freedom from family dominance, political and legal awareness, and participation in public protest. These are also the part of the Indicators of the women's empowerment.

Nepal still lacking in appropriate representation in all sector of development, still skill gaps are prevalent in the rural areas, behind in higher education, education is being only for marriage purpose not for competency development. 'The main unfinished agendas are to increase the enrolment of women in technical and vocational education and training, address disparities in education outcomes and improve the quality of education' (NPC, 2017).

This international, ongoing process that is cantered in the local community and involves mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation gives people who don't share equally in valuable resources greater access to the control over them. Because this ability cannot be explicitly measured, economists investigate whether factors like education, contraceptive use, and asset ownership are correlated with high female empowerment. The relative mobility of a woman's body, financial stability, decision-making abilities, freedom from domestic violence, and political engagement has been cited as indicators of empowerment. The degree of control over microcredit loans is another important determinant of autonomy, which is defined as the degree of control over microcredit loans.



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A study of the factors that influence female autonomy in India found that a woman with a higher level of education has more bargaining power, as measured by her ability to move around the house. Even after controlling for caste and religion, the same study finds that culture significantly increases bargaining power when measured by state fixed-effects. Female education is a proxy for bargaining power and bargaining outcomes like freedom of movement and improved maternal health, according to evidence from India. Women who have access to outside employment, a high level of political participation, or a spousal age ratio that is higher than average are more likely to have greater bargaining power. Therefore, access to outside employment, physical mobility, and political participation are all signs of a high level of empowerment. Capacity to leave the household without permission, which reflects physical mobility, and participation in weekly village council meetings, which measures political participation, are the corresponding dependent variables we use to reflect high levels of female autonomy.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Empowerment for women helps them discover their worth, potential, and influence in all areas of their lives. The main components are economic, political, social/cultural, personal and familial. Each dimension is crucial, as the real empowerment of women can only be achieved when a woman has full access to financial resources, more strength and courage to enter the power structure, more involvement through social/cultural connections and participation, more motivation and self-assurance, and more say in family affairs. In the 21st century, women empowerment has become one of the most important concerns. Several rights and protections for women have been taken by the government. The greatest tool for empowering women is education. It raises awareness of women's rights and authority. If women are empowered, the nation will benefit. The country will be free of a large burden of illiteracy, unemployment, and curse.



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### Recommendations

- Nepalese women have been lagging behind in all sectors of development, therefore they should have given special effort in education.
- Patriarchal concept in working places, home should be eradicated by conducting special programs in between man and women.
- Nepalese women should be have empowered economically so that they will be a equal wheel to move the family affairs.
- Child bearing should be in the conscience of both male and female, it should not be taken as an heir of their family.
- In the community, they should be felt safe to move, special program on safety of women at home, work places and in mobility should be protected, community and the government should be vigilant all the time.
- Special reporting unit should be established in the community, their identity should be kept secret during the time of investigation also, due to cultural taboo.
- Rural women focused development program should be implemented such as income generating activities, skill enhancing, child care facilities made available in village level as well.
- Still the women has lagging behind in education and taking up competitive positions despite the quota selected to them



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