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EMPOWERMENT, LITERACY, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION:
A CASE STUDY OF SELF-HELP WOMEN'S GROUPS
IN RURAL NEPAL

A Dissertation Presented

by

SUSHAN G. ACHARYA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University
of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

February 1999

School of Education

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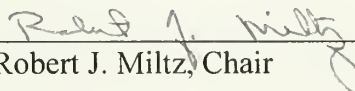
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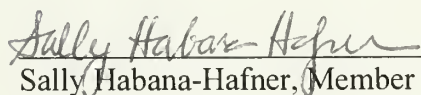
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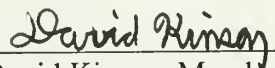
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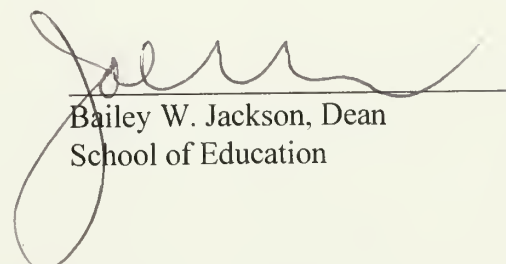
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ABSTRACT

EMPOWERMENT, LITERACY, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF SELF-HELP WOMEN'S GROUPS IN RURAL NEPAL

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This exploratory study, conducted in an integrated watershed management project in rural Nepal, was intended to explore elements that empower women as a group. The study also explores the contributions of functional literacy to the empowerment process.

Experiences of five different mothers' groups from both Brahman and Gurung backgrounds informed the understandings presented in this study. The women's experiences are different, partly due to cultural differences. Open-ended interviews, document reviews and observations are the main sources used to identify empowering factors.

Major factors which contribute to empowering women as a collective group found in this study include both programmatic and non-programmatic interventions. This implies that looking at empowerment of women in developing countries through one lens and drawing conclusions on that basis is premature. Women's lives are

influenced by political, social, cultural, economic, and educational situations.

Therefore, to consider one component in isolation is inappropriate if the objective is to achieve a multi-faceted goal like empowerment. The study implies that empowerment, which occurs at different levels at different points in one's life, is a fluid process.

Finally, several issues deserve further attention. Functional literacy, assumed to be thought-controlling and mechanical, can contribute to the empowerment process. Functional literacy, which promotes knowledge and skills needed for the learners' daily lives, raises motivation and participation in actions. Engaged in action which makes their daily lives easier and given opportunities, women find it useful to explore other possibilities to improve their situations. This trend keeps women engaged in action, reflection, and dialogue, enhancing their confidence, self-esteem, and ability to take charge of their situations.

Areas where the study showed investigation is needed include: how can positive socio-cultural traditions be built up to strengthen community-based women's groups? What roles and attitudes do men hold regarding women's participation in individual and community development processes? How can raising men's awareness about and participation in family health and sanitation issues be incorporated into the programs? How can a multi-caste group function as a cohesive unit? And how much do issues of caste, as opposed to economic conditions, affect the process?

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, rationale and significance and methodological design of this study. This section will also present an overview of the following chapters.

The movement in adult literacy development has been continually examined over the last few decades. Scholars engaged in issues of education and development both at the local level and national level have been constantly reformulating the definition, concept, application and the practice of adult literacy (Ahmed, 1989; Auerbach, 1996; Ilsley 1985; Stromquist, 1988; UNESCO).

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Governmental Organizations (GOs), university based scholars and field based practitioners, along with United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have been heavily involved in adult literacy around the world through activities such as, projects, research, publications, and regional and international workshops for the last few decades. Consequently, the adult education movements in the West have definitely influenced the literacy education programs for adults in other parts of the world as is reflected in the work of Schutze (1987), Jarvis (1988), Winking (1988) and Guo-Dong (1994). For instance, the influence of continuing education movement of the West can be traced in China and many other countries.

Similarly, in Nepal, vocational education, and post literacy are two major areas influenced by the fields of life-long education and continuing education, and as well as

the belief in the importance of technical skills and knowledge, that have emerged in the West. Additionally, the emergence of the notions of critical theory, participatory development, integrated rural development, gender equity, popular education and feminism, along with the works of revolutionary educators like Paulo Freire, necessitated an intense revision of the conceptual underpinnings, practices, management and goals of adult literacy around the world, including Nepal.

Given this, I chose specifically to focus on mothers' groups as the unit of study. The mothers' groups are involved in various community development activities in the villages in Nepal. In some communities mothers' groups already existed. In some cases, the mothers' groups formed by the Department of Public Health in the late eighties have been revitalized to implement their programs by various agencies. Where there are no such groups women are encouraged to form one. The mothers' groups were believed to be a way to sensitize and mobilize women about community and family issues, such as health. Where there are not many grassroots level voluntary groups or interventions as such, the concept of mothers' groups to reach women sounded a very viable channel. Given this and the continued effort by many NGOs and INGOs to better Nepali women's literacy level, I found it relevant to examine mothers' groups, and the literacy programs in which they participated, to explore my research question.

Statement of the Problem

The influence of the global change in the fields of literacy and development has not left Nepal untouched. Since many agencies are implementing literacy programs in Nepal one can find various trends of thought in how and when literacy programs should

be implemented in a given project. Similarly, the philosophical underpinnings of literacy programs are also influenced by diverse perspectives emerging from other peoples' work around the world. For instance, the literacy primers, "Naya Goreto", designed by the government of Nepal have been claimed to be based on the Freirean problem posing and key word approach, a methodology developed in Brazil. Also, as mentioned earlier, the idea of providing continuing education and technical training to adults in order to make them more productive citizens has been brought in by foreign agencies.

Literacy education has been viewed as a development challenge in Nepal since 1951 (UNESCO 1991). For the last 20 to 25 years, various Government Organizations, NGOs and INGOs in Nepal have been incorporating non-formal education and literacy in different development sectors such as health and nutrition, agriculture and family planning. In other words, literacy has been considered one of the most viable approaches to development efforts, as stated by Manandhar (1995) in the Population Monograph of Nepal,

Literacy is perhaps the most important single means of attaining social and economic development, and of opening for the individual, the door to innovative ideas and actions. Literacy enhances access to information that may be necessary to conduct various essential activities in daily life and work. it enables a person to improve his knowledge base, acquire education informally and make progress in life (pp. 375).

The literacy rate among Nepali women is very low, significantly lower than the rate for men. As a result, emphasis has been and continues to be given to female literacy. One of the most widely accepted reasons for the low female literacy rate is the common practice of dependency on child labor. Children, mostly girls, are needed for

household chores, for taking cattle to graze and for looking after younger siblings when parents are busy either with field work or working in the home. Thus, girls hardly ever get the chance to continue their schooling or do their homeworks. In the households that can afford to send one or two children to school, male children are given preference over female children because of the common beliefs that the public domain is to be the men's place and the common social norm that the ultimate goal for a girl is to get married, raise a family and be an obedient housewife. Moreover, since boys are supposed to support their parents in old age, take care of family and ancestral business, it is thought to make more sense to invest in a son's education than a daughter's. Additionally, formal schooling has not been able to serve the majority of the population because of its strict academic teaching and learning methods. These rarely represent the reality of average Nepalese lives and so inhibit attendance. Tuition and other expenses are also higher than a large segment of the population can afford to pay. If these factors make it difficult for men to continue their schooling, then they make it nearly impossible for women. Therefore, there is a huge gap between men and women's literacy rates in Nepal.

NGOs and INGOs, as well as the government organizations in Nepal, have developed their own strategies to provide literacy programs for women. In most cases a literacy program begins with a six to eight month basic reading and writing course. After women complete one or two cycles of basic reading and writing classes they are, depending on project resources, tied to some kind of income-generating activity. Most literacy programs claim their aim is to foster critical understanding, decision making power, community and personal development through dialogue, problem posing and/or

reflection. Similarly, most literacy programs specifically designed for women also claim to be assisting women to move towards transformative practices such as empowerment, critical awareness, decision making, and community participation. For instance, many literacy programs, by organizing their women learners into saving and credit groups, make an attempt to achieve their both women and development, as well as community development goals.

However, there is little research that explores whether and under what conditions literacy programs might lead women to transformative practices such as self-help groups, and/or community development. Most of the times, programs seem to be validating their strategy as the best one. Therefore, in most cases, the research or evaluation conducted by the programmers do not seem to offer much information regarding the specific factors- that may or may not be related to literacy- that contribute to the changes in their learners' lives. In other words, the program organizers tend to be ignoring the impact of other contextual factors.

Purpose of the Study

Despite a tremendous growth of literacy programs for women in Nepal, a systematic investigation has not been done to examine how and to what extent, they lead to a sustainable self-help women's groups at a grassroots level. There is a wide spread perception that when women learn literacy skills they are better able to take care of their families. Additionally, literacy classes increase their self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as their ability to make decision with regard to personal, family and community matters. Another concept "that enjoys much political currency today"

(Stromquist, 1992, p. 52) and is found in the agenda of most literacy programs is 'empowerment'. The word has gained a tremendous popularity among people who are involved in the literacy field. From a six month long legal literacy program to a six month long regular literacy program, to a nine month long post-literacy program, the intended outcome is usually empowerment.

In Stromquist's observation, in some situations the word "has been coopted by those in power to pretend that they seek change and social justice" (ibid.). Some researchers start their inquiry with the assumption that women's literacy programs do contribute to the empowerment of their participants. But very few explore what it looks like, nor which elements in that particular context, besides literacy intervention, may also contribute to the process of empowerment process. Given this, the main purpose of this study is to explore:

What are the factors that contribute to empowering women in rural Nepal as a collective group? and to what extent do literacy programs contribute to that process?

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Following the argument presented in the previous section, literacy and post literacy education for women in Nepal- whose goals range from enhanced health status to gender equity to economic growth- is bound by an overarching aim which is to foster transformative practices. However it is still not clear whether and how literacy programs enable women to move from mere reading and writing skills to transformative practices. In this light, the justification for this research is based on the following discussion.

There has been very little inquiry done to understand what is really involved besides literacy practices, in assisting women learners to move beyond their immediate and traditional practices and roles. Thus, this study explores the elements within and surrounding an integrated watershed management project that may or may not have contributed to the changes that women as individuals, and as a group are experiencing. This study seeks to add to the body of knowledge in the area of women, literacy and community groups.

According to the Research in Basic Education and Literacy: Report of a Regional Seminar (PROP, 1992) the research in literacy in Nepal indicates that:

- o Most of the literacy programmes were one-shot attempts, there being very little concern for follow-up programmes,
- o There is a dearth of materials for neo-literates,
- o Functional literacy messages are conveyed through the dialogue approach,
- o Only 34 per cent of participants in literacy programmes become fully literate,
- o There is a very little coordination among the organizations involved in literacy programmes,
- o There is no standardized measure of literacy or means of assessing learning acquired. (p. 29)

The report further identifies the following as priority areas for research in literacy education in Nepal:

- o Effective approaches to improve participants' rates, continuance, and learning achievement;
- o Identification of effective oral literacy programmes;
- o Assessment of literacy primers and post-literacy materials; and
- o Mobilization of the community for self-managed literacy programmers.

This indicates that in Nepal in the area of literacy research, a good deal still remains to be done. Not many organizations are involved in research in the area of literacy education. However, the research in academia is growing. Over the past few years several dissertations have been produced which offer perspectives on different aspects of literacy education in Nepal. Besides dissertations, some noteworthy studies on women and literacy in Nepal have also been conducted. One example is the Takukot-Majh Lakuribot 10-Year Retrospective Literacy and Empowerment of Save the Children US (1997). Currently two very interesting and comprehensive research projects are underway: The Impact of Maternal Schooling on Child Development in Kathmandu Valley by a team of researchers from the Harvard University and the Girls' and Women's Education Research Project by World Education Nepal. These projects begin to address some of the key questions, but there are still many areas in which research is critically needed.

My research is designed to address these needs. For instance, I will to some extent address the issues of effective approaches to improve participants rates, continuance, and learning achievement. I will also make an attempt to address issues around community mobilization to assist practices of literacy programmers and other community development activities.

In most developing countries literacy is known as a process by which one learns to read and write. It is very much so in Nepali society as well. However, when an external agency brings the literacy program to a community, the expectation of learners slightly expands. From just learning to read and write, the expectations increase to encompass economic and social benefits as well. To some extent, program organizers, in order to increase participation in their programs, implant such hopes and expectations. In reality, the initial literacy class which focuses on reading and writing, and some issues related to the learners' lives, are not always successful in addressing such hopes and expectations. Often this is simply because of the lack of time on the part of program organizers as well as the lack of opportunity for women to get exposure beyond the class room. Literacy classes in most cases are not enough for women to learn the appropriate skills and qualities that will lead to empowerment processes. There are not enough studies that explore these issues in detail. This study, undertaken within an integrated development project in a rural setting in Nepal, will explore some of these issues.

Organization of the Chapters

This section will present an overview of how the following chapters are organized and what they include. The second chapter briefly looks at the contemporary trends of scholarship in adult literacy. Followed by this is a review of selected contemporary literature on adult literacy and a synthesis of the conceptual underpinnings drawn from them. Women's literacy, community groups and issues of empowerment are also explored. The chapter has incorporated both traditional and non-

traditional perspectives on adult literacy. An attempt has also been made to integrate ideas advanced by both western and non-western educators.

The third chapter introduces Nepal with a brief overview of her geographic, demographic and administrative features. This will be followed by a brief discussion on community organization and community development trends; the status of Nepalese women; the policy and program issues of female education, and the development of mothers' groups in the context of Nepal. This chapter also includes an overview of the Upper Andhi Khola Watershed Management Project (UAKWMP). This section will include development activities of CARE Nepal followed by the literacy and community development strategies used in UAKWMP.

The fourth chapter begins with a discussion on the methods used to gather and analyze the information in this study. This is followed by the design limitations. The fifth chapter presents a brief overview of the geographical location, the population composition and a social overview of Bangsing Deurali VDC. This will be followed by the profiles of the three mothers' groups of the village selected for this study. The third section of the chapter presents a brief overview of the geographical location, the population composition and a social overview of Bange Fadke VDC. This will be followed by the profiles of the two mothers' groups of Bange Fadke selected for the study. The concluding section will discuss the literacy programs in these two villages.

In chapter 6, the information gathered from the interviews are organized under the themes that emerged from the data. An attempt has been made to cluster these themes within three levels: The self empowerment process, the group empowerment process and the community empowerment process. The seventh chapter identifies and

explores the elements that cut across or inform the categories developed in chapter six. The chapter is organized into two broad categories: programmatic and non programmatic factors. This is done in order to provide a holistic picture of the issues identified in the findings. The first section of the chapter will look at the factors within and outside of the UAKWMP intervention which impacted the empowerment processes discussed in the previous chapter. The arguments presented in chapter two are applied to support the discussion. This will be followed by concluding remarks and the issues for further research.

End Notes

1. Some of the dissertations produced specifically in the area of adult literacy in Nepal include: 1)Luitel, S. (1995). Empowerment? What being empowered means to Maithili women in Nepal. University of Alberta, Canada. 2) Meyers, C. (1996). Learner generated materials in adult literacy programs as a vehicle for development: Theory and practice in case studies in Nepal. University of Massachusetts, Amherst. 3)Smith, C. (1997) Women's acquisition of literacy skills and health knowledge in Nepal: A comparative study of non-formal education. University of Massachusetts, Amherst. 4) Tuladhar, S. (1994). Development of a participatory community video model as a post-literacy in Nepal. University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The first section of this chapter briefly looks at the trends in scholarship on adult literacy. Followed by this is a review of selected literature and authors on adult literacy and a synthesis of the conceptual underpinnings drawn from them. The Women's literacy, community groups and issues of empowerment have also been briefly explored. An attempt has been made to review both traditional and non-traditional perspectives of adult literacy. An attempt has also been made to integrate ideas advanced by both western and non-western educators.

The review of literature presented in this chapter provides a conceptual foundation for the study. An attempt has been made to present the major ideas from several conceptual foundations, such as critical, Freirean, participatory and functional perspectives. These conceptual foundations are presented because in many ways they inform the issues that have emerged within the scope of women's education. My interest is to examine how these different perspectives, have contributed to the empowerment process.

Given the fact that each individual's life is affected by her/his present and historical contexts, experiences and social relations, she/he holds different assumptions with regard to education, economy, society, culture, politics and so forth. Thus, there is not a universally accepted and applicable concept of literacy in any of the given areas of one's life. Given this:

adult literacy programs can expand the definition of literacy to include a more holistic and unified view of human experience. Rather than merely treating problems in reading, we can recognize that literacy in the broad sense takes the whole person and the whole person's life context into account. (Isley, 1985, p. 41)

Adult Literacy: Definitional Issues

In developing countries the adult literacy movement became widespread in the 1960s. Since then the concept and the practice of adult literacy has been constantly evolving in pursuit of better strategies. The adult literacy movement began with the notion that people's ability to read, write and compute is an essential factor in a nation's development. The assumption was that reading and writing skills would significantly improve people's economic, social and health status. The trend has thus been to strengthen the literacy practices where they contributed to these factors in people's lives, and to modify methods and approaches where literacy did not seem to yield any effect.

Nevertheless, it has been agreed that adult literacy is a very broad based issue, no longer merely referring to the process of giving adults the opportunity to learn to read and write. It is a complex phenomenon which includes a lot more than an individual's ability or inability to read or write. It has also become clear that the meaning of literacy changes as it is situated in different contexts. Literacy therefore is a fluid concept, which is better defined within a given context. Wagner (1992) notes that,

Because literacy is a cultural phenomenon--adequately defined and understood only within each culture in which it exists--it is not surprising that a definition of literacy may never be permanently fixed. Whether literacy includes computer skills, mental arithmetic, or civic responsibility will depend on how the public and political leaders of each society define this most basic of basic skills. Researchers can help in

this effort by trying to be clear about which definition or definitions they choose to employ in their work. (p. 17).

Wagner's suggestion above is relevant because literacy can not be defined in a vacuum; literacy is interrelated with the learners' cultures as well as the objectives of a given program. Many contemporary scholars (Wagner, 1987; Ramdas, 1990; Stromquist 1992; Street 1993) view literacy as more than just a technical practice because literacy practices encompass the political, cultural, social, economic and power structures of a given context.

Susan Lytle (1990) in her attempt to clarify the notion of literacy goes beyond an on-going definitional debate to situate literacy into two perspectives, i.e. "literacy as skills and tasks and literacy as practices and critical reflection/action". (p. 6) The "literacy as skills and tasks" perspective according to Lytle, views literacy as a set of technical skills and autonomous activities which is disconnected from the social context. The "literacy as practices and critical reflection/action" perspective, accordingly, views literacy as embedded in the cultural, social, political and historical contexts of a given community. Therefore it is not an independent and purely technical practice. From the "practices and critical reflective/action" perspective literacy will, according to Lytle, involve the learners in a "process of interpreting the world and developing a consciousness of values, behaviors and beliefs as socially and culturally constructed" (1990, p. 9). This process will enable learners to engage in a positive and more genuine process of both individual and social development. Moreover, such a process, where individuals are involved in learning skills needed for daily transactions at the same time as they are engaged in gaining a critical understanding of the impact of

such transactions in their lives, can generate comprehensive framework for learning strategies. Additionally, it is likely that the knowledge generated through such a comprehensive process of practice and reflective/action will lead groups or individuals towards transformative practices.

Most developing countries began their literacy movement with the notion that, "literacy is a characteristic acquired by individuals in varying degrees from just above none to an indeterminate upper level. Some individuals are more or less literate than others, but it is really not possible to speak of literate and illiterate persons as two distinct categories" (UNESCO, 1957, p. 18). However, this notion has constantly been challenged, analyzed, redefined and reconceptualized. For instance, Ilesley (1985) views that an adult literacy program can be more comprehensive. It can focus more on learning and knowing than mastery over a subject matter. Further, in his view methodology which centers on the process of integrating learners' experiences, is more important than the specific content of a program. Consequently, the implementational foci in many cases have also shifted.

Key Concepts Within Critical, Freirean and Participatory Perspectives

The vision of education from a critical perspective is much broader than other perspectives. Critical educators, for instance, do not see individual learners, teachers or the organizations in isolation. Giroux explains this notion as,

Unlike traditional and liberal accounts of schooling, with their emphasis on historical continuities and historical development, critical theory points educators toward a mode of analysis that stresses the breaks, discontinuities, and tensions in history, all of which become valuable in that they highlight the centrality of human agency and struggle while

simultaneously revealing the gap between society as it presently exists and society as it might be. (1983, p. 36)

Thus, the role of education, is to provide the learners not only with the technical skills of reading and writing but also with the conceptual and/or ideological tools needed to analyze and critique injustice and inequality. Therefore, according to Giroux, it is essential that learners are able "to come to grip with how a given society has made of them, how it has incorporated them ideologically and materially into its rules and logic, and what it is that they need to affirm and reject in their own histories in order to begin the process of struggling for the conditions that will give them opportunities to lead a self-managed existence" (ibid., p. 38). Thus critical education proposes a pedagogy that has both emancipatory and democratic qualities. Critical educational theorists view the pedagogical process as a political act, which Ira Shor (1992) states as,

Critical pedagogy is activist in its questioning of the status quo, in its participatory methods, and in its insistence that knowledge is not fixed but is constantly changing. More than just dynamic and filled with contending perspectives, critical knowledge offers a chance to rethink experience and society. (p. 189)

From a critical perspective education is a transformative praxis. Teachers and students through dialogical interaction, and self as well as social reflection create an emancipatory pedagogy, which will lead to transformative action. Proponents of critical literacy suggest that being able to read and understand one's own contexts, -culture or history and to understand it in relation to the current societal reality will enable learners to participate in shaping their own lives. According to the critical perspective, literacy can no longer be treated merely as a process by which adults are given the opportunity to learn to read and write so that they are able to be productive citizens in a complete

sense. Literacy goes well beyond the mere act of reading and writing. In this sense it is a tool that enables individuals or groups to think and look deeper into issues affecting their lives thereby enabling them to better identify their needs and ways to address such needs. In other words, critical literacy is an empowering process which leads to change. The role of educators' in this respect, therefore, should neither be passive nor prescriptive; it should rather be provocative (Kozol, 1985). In this sense literacy is a tool that prepares learners to participate and share the power on an institutional as well as at community level (Kretovics, 1985; Jurmo and Fingeret, 1989; Lind and Johnston, 1989; Auerbach 1996).

Similarly, the philosophy that Paulo Freire developed, which we call a Freirean perspective, has a lot in common with the critical perspective, and has been very influential in the field of adult literacy. The educators (Freire 1970, 1985, Shor 1980, Mackie 1981, Freire & Macedo 1987, Macedo 1994,) who view education through the Freirean perspective believe that literacy is not merely learning to read or write. They believe that literacy is a process, which enables individuals to learn and critically understand the social, political and economic realities in which they live. In other words, literacy is a tool which enables learners to situate themselves within their own historical and cultural contexts and analyze how their lives fit into the mainstream societal reality. This process, Freire (1970) believes, will help learners understand the fact that the social order that they thought to be natural is in fact not natural but oppressive, unjust, built upon domination and subordination, and can be changed. The unjust social constructs are therefore the causes of illiteracy.

The purpose of literacy therefore is to enable learners to participate in actions that would lead them towards desired change, which is oftentimes liberation from an oppressive situation (Freire, 1970). Illiteracy, therefore, in the Freirean perspective is:

. . . is one of the concrete expressions of an unjust social reality. Illiteracy is not a strictly linguistic or exclusively pedagogical or methodological problem. It is political, as is the very literacy through which we try to overcome illiteracy. (1985, p. 10)

Thus, literacy from this viewpoint is a political process by which learners will challenge the existing societal system and strive for a more democratic and egalitarian one. From the Freirean perspective the social conditions and culture people live within are not fixed. Culture according to Freire is not religion, food, craft, or social beliefs it is rather a process, which involves conflicting situations, possibilities for transformation and choices from which to select. Culture, as a dynamic process, can be changed, used or made more equitable. From this perspective as well, literacy is an empowering process.

According to the Freirean perspective 'dialogue', 'problem posing' and 'reflection' are essential concepts in order for literacy to achieve a transformative goal. The concept of 'dialogue' is a process which engages individuals in interaction with each other as equals. In a literacy class, the "teachers possess knowledge of reading and writing; students possess knowledge of the concrete reality of their cultures" (Spener, 1992). In this regard, the dialogue becomes a two-way communication where both teachers and learners are learning from each other. The learner in this case becomes an active participant instead of a passive recipient. The concept of 'problem posing' enables the learners to define problems through discussion with the help of either pictures or stories

and key words. The process of defining a problem includes identification of both the causes of the problem and possible action to solve it. The teacher's role then, is "to enter into dialogue with people around themes that speak to the concrete situations and lived experiences that inform their daily lives" (Giroux, 1983, p. 227). Through the 'problem-posing' approach, teachers can assist learners to question the barriers constructed by their deeply rooted fatalistic perception of the world and move towards critical understanding of the problems.

Similarly, the concept of 'reflection' is a significant feature in the Freirean approach. The individuals begin their learning through reflecting upon their real life conditions. The process of reflection is powerful because it leads to action. When such actions require reading and writing, then learning to read and write becomes meaningful. Freire (1970) thus views reflection as a dynamic process:

The insistence that the oppressed engaged in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection-true reflection-leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection.

. . . To achieve this praxis, however, it is necessary to trust the oppressed and their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiques, monologues, and instructions. (pp. 52-53)

Combined together, 'dialogue', 'problem-posing' and 'reflection' will cultivate a critical pedagogy. The purpose of critical pedagogy is to reinforce critical thinking and critical consciousness. Critical consciousness, to Freire, is 'the product and process of liberatory learning'. (Shor, 1980, pp. 48). Critical consciousness is thus cultivated through the critical approach which Freire explains as follows,

This critical process applies to the reading of books as well. For example, how can one apply Lenin to the Latin American context without making an effort to have a critical, political, and historical comprehension of the moment in which Lenin wrote? (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 133).

Educators who advocate the Freirean philosophy reject what Freire calls a banking education. The banking concept sees education as a process through which teachers fill students with the knowledge that is thought to be appropriate. The learners are expected to completely buy into what the teachers say. This approach is disempowering, according to Freire. In this situation the knowledge and experiences that learners bring with them are not acknowledged. The banking approach to education thus represses learners' creative power and fills learners with mechanistic skills and knowledge. In this sense education is a 'thought-controlling mechanism' (Freire 1970, Shor 1980). This kind of education Freire believes is 'authoritarian' and 'antidemocratic'.

Parallel to the critical perspective and the Freirean perspective is the participatory perspective. Literacy programs influenced by a participatory perspective are thought to be more decentralized and democratic in their processes, characteristics that both critical and Freirean perspectives strive for. From a participatory perspective learners are included in the literacy education process as collaborators rather than mere recipients. In this respect, and ideally, the learners are involved in the planning, designing and the management of a literacy program.

The participatory perspective of literacy education views learners as knowledgeable and experienced individuals. The learners might not be able to read or

write but they have a lot to offer to the class and also to their own learning.

Acknowledging, respecting and including learners' knowledge and experience in teaching reading and writing makes the learners more comfortable and confident.

Starting with what learners already know makes reading and writing more meaningful as well. In this sense the participatory perspective views learners' knowledge and skills as valid, and as valuable contributions to the attainment of a genuine education. As

Bhasin in her article, Participatory development demands participatory training (1991) argues that,

The discussion and analysis should be based on the reality as experienced by the participants in their life and work. They should begin with the known and then go on to the unknown rather than the other way around. In fact, the issues to be discussed should be determined in consultation with the participants according to their needs and expectations. (p. 11)

The literacy learners from a participatory perspective are a group of individuals with varied experiences, different social and cultural backgrounds and diverse needs.

The role of a teacher in this context is to assist such individuals to identify their commonalities and differences, and to work collaboratively to address their learning needs through the use of their own experiences and knowledge. The relationship between the teacher and the learners is thus based on mutual respect and mutual learning.

In a participatory perspective the assumption is that when learners have control over the instruction they will learn to read and write with what they already know and find it meaningful to them. Yet, since learning to read and write efficiently is not the only goal of literacy education, learners' participation in instruction and management

contributes to personal development by enabling learners' to think critically and work collaboratively in a group. When learners begin to think critically and learn to work collaboratively it is very likely that they are able to translate their knowledge and skills into reshaping the social, economic and cultural conditions within which they live.

Further expanding this notion Garrison (1992) adds,

The issue is not whether there should be collaboration but the degree to which the learner should assume control of the planning and management of the learning process. It is not contradictory for the learner to assume responsibility for the learning and still rely on an outside person for support, access to information, and guidance. (p. 143)

A participatory literacy program, should therefore share the responsibilities, decision-making and control among the learners and the practitioners around both operational and instructional issues (Jurmo, 1989; Auerbach, 1996).

Thus, in all the perspectives: critical, Freirean, and participatory, the focus is on critical thinking, participation, transformative action, contextuality and collaborative action. The nucleus of all these is "empowerment". However, these perspectives do not rule out the need to provide functional knowledge and skills. Functional knowledge and skill are also important, but what exactly they involve is the next potential topic of investigation.

Community Groups, Women and Literacy

Though support systems within communities have been in existence for a long time it is still difficult to find written documentation in this area. Since most support groups are helping structures outside the traditional professional service structure they did not receive much attention from the world of research for many years. However, in

the late 1970s, researchers like Katz and Bender (1976), Caplan and Killilea (1979), and Lieberman and Borman (1979), provided a research foundation for local support groups through their in-depth studies (Ross, 1984). Groups such as the mothers' group in Nepal and groups formed by women at local levels in developing countries, fall under this category.

Researchers have identified three types of support systems. Natural support systems are those that are found among families, friends, religious groups and neighbors. Professional support systems are support groups formed by professionals such as doctors, psychiatrists, counselors, and social workers for their clientele. Nonprofessional support groups are those that are initiated by a group of community members themselves, which are also known as self-help groups (Ross, 1984).

The nonprofessional or self-help group is a small voluntary group, which is usually formed by self-motivated people to bring about change in their lives. When people who have similar interests and have been facing similar problems, or have a mutual desire to bring about change in social system, or in individual lives, get together and establish a support system it is considered to be a nonprofessional or self-help group. According to Katz and Bender self-help groups are:

. . . voluntary, small group structures for mutual aid and the accomplishment of a special purpose. They are usually formed by peers who have come together for mutual assistance in satisfying a common need, overcoming a common handicap or life-disrupting problem, and bringing about desired social and/or personal change.

. . . They often provide material assistance and emotional support; they are frequently cause-oriented, and promulgate an ideology or values through which members maintain an enhanced sense of personal identity. (1976, p.9)

Self-help groups are often diverse in terms of their objectives. However, Katz and Bender discuss two specific categories of self-help groups: those which are "inner focused" and those which are "outer focused". Inner focused groups concentrate on providing direct services and support to their members. Outer focused groups are more committed to change in the larger context such as change in social policies (1976).

There are several instances where groups have slowly moved from being inner focused to being outer focused and vice versa. Women's consciousness-raising groups in the United States, for example, started as political and activist groups. In the second phase of the women's movement, groups began to operate as non-political support groups. Later the groups again recaptured their political and activist stance (Bond and Reibstein, 1979). Similarly, at the grassroots level in Nepal, for instance, mothers' groups started with the objective of disseminating information on health issues and have moved to executing a village wide campaign against alcoholism. The groups thus move from one category to another depending upon the nature of the demand at a given time.

Recognizing the contribution that women make in the family and the community, and the discrimination that they face in every sphere of their lives ranging from food and nutrition, to education, to health care and the economic resources, development agencies have started to make an extra effort to include women in their intervention efforts. Thus, various approaches have been used over the decades to address the issues. However, realizing the effectiveness of collective efforts, and having witnessed success stories of women's self-help groups in developing countries, many development agencies have begun to mobilize women to form small groups to achieve the agencies' women and development, as well as community development, goals. The

Upper Andhi Khola Watershed Management Project (UAKWMP) is one such example. It promotes self-help community groups in the project area to achieve its both conservation and community development goals.

One can find many examples where women with no or very little help from outside have formed into small groups in order to change their situation for the better. In developing countries women form such self-help groups when their family's lives are at stake. In many cases women were self-motivated, and with no or little help from outside formed strong groups. For instance, in one case in Bangladesh, women inspired by a men's cooperative group got together and formed their own cooperative and began trading livestock (FAO, 1982). Similarly, in Papua New Guinea women with some assistance from the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) formed a self-help group and successfully managed their farming. In this case, the YWCA provided women with some training and arranged several visits to other women's groups on the Pacific Island (ibid.). Though the objective of most local women's groups is to enhance the economic situation of the members, they have been successful in bringing positive changes in other aspects of their lives as well. There are plenty of examples of women's groups successfully conducting agricultural activities, income-generating activities and community development activities in developing countries. Research has also shown that the small group setting enables women to create a comfortable and safe space where they can identify and discuss matters regarding their lives. Women's groups or collaborative actions at the local levels are thus effective for women in achieving economic self-reliance, empowerment, self-confidence and community participation (Moser, 1993, Wacker, 1994, Hilhorst, 1997) .

Additionally, the recent emergence of community organizations at the grassroots level in developing countries such as SEWA and AMM in India (Abbot, 1997), Mothers' Club in Bolivia (Felty, 1991), Mutual Support Association among rural poor in Bangladesh and the Rotating Credit Association among sweepers in Pakistan (Streefland, 1996) have produced positive trends within the field of self-reliance and community development. The positive outcomes of such groups have encouraged community development and literacy program implementors to use the group formation strategies in their interventions.

There are instances where small scale groups have been used for literacy purposes as well. In the 1960s, many local groups known as "Grass-roots Groups" emerged specifically in Latin America mainly among the more disadvantaged populations. Various economic and political factors contributed to the emergence of such groups. Institutions like the churches and cooperatives supported the local people to form such groups. These groups were developed into participatory and cooperative working groups with concrete objectives and motivation. When the group began to have a significant role in the society the educators started using the groups to attain educational purposes (Ouane, 1989). Similarly, in countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, India, Mali and Indonesia, action groups and local study groups have been used for post-literacy. In India, for example, institutions like the Nehru Yuvak Kendras (Nehru Youth Centers), used various activities including literacy for the social and personal development of the youngsters (ibid.).

Nevertheless, the literature shows that, traditionally, the practices of post-literacy (advanced literacy) programs in many cases are limited to providing the learners with some

kind of skill development activities, or reading materials for certain periods of time.

Although the distribution of reading materials and/or skills training may not be inappropriate in some cases, in most cases since adult literacy learners, especially women, are in relatively disadvantaged economic and social positions, and geographic locations, merely distributing books or providing simple functional skills is not enough.

Within the realm of literacy and women's concerns there has been an on-going debate. Some argue that reading and writing, combined with specific knowledge and skills is effective in enhancing learners' knowledge and skills but others do not agree with this (Ballara, 1991; Bown, 1993; Lind, 1990). They believe that combining specific knowledge and skills with reading and writing is not effective. Which ever is the better process, Jayaweera's (1997) analysis is not very encouraging. Her analysis of the relationship between women's education and economic, political and social empowerment in the Asian context found that education has, to some extent, improved women's quality of life and status. It has not, however, been able to reduce the economic and social constraints that contribute to poverty, class differentiation and gender imbalance which consequently maintain the state of inequality in and outside of the family.

Nowadays, in many instances, women's literacy programs incorporate additional knowledge and skills with reading and writing. This measure, to some degree is necessary to keep the learners' motivation. Yet, some programs move beyond classroom instruction and encourage their learners to get involved into community actions through groups. In some cases literacy classes follow group formation but in others group formation follows literacy. In many Asian and Latin American contexts women from the literacy classes have formed self-help groups (Bown, 1990; Stromquist, 1993). In Nepal one can find both

models. In the UAKWMP, for instance, group formation is followed by literacy. But in the case of the Save the Children Fund US project in the Gorkha District and World Education Nepal's the Women's Economic Empowerment Literacy (WEEL) project in a couple of districts, literacy is followed by group formation. In any case, literacy, combined with or extended to some other meaningful activities, seems to be more effective in keeping women motivated.

There are also cases where learners are involved in both reading/writing activities and community actions at the same time. One such case is Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women's Equality) in Uttar Pradesh in India (Rogers, 1994). Mahila Samakhya and Jal Niyam, a water systems installation agency provided women with training for water pump maintenance and repair. The women who received the training had already completed through the initial literacy course. After the training, however, women asked for more information and materials. This resulted in a participatory materials production project. Mahila Samakhya, in cooperation with the National Institute of Adult Education, Delhi, organized a newsletter production workshop for women water pump maintenance workers. The assumption of the project, as observed by Alan Rogers (1994) was that, "if literacy work with women is grounded in local realities and critical, reflective and dialogical in method, it can be powerful tool in initiating processes of women's empowerment" (p. 26).

The participatory curriculum development project organized for women quarry workers to create training in Pudukkottai in the State of Tamil Nadu is another notable example. The training project was initiated to strengthen the organizational structure of newly formed women quarry workers' groups by cultivating a sense of collectivity, sharing and trust among the fellow group members in order to change the situation that the groups

were facing (Mishra, Ghose & Bhog, 1994). In this case and the case of the women water pump maintenance workers the projects sought to enable the participants to take responsibilities and power. And in both cases literacy activities played a major role.

Thus, one can not deny the fact that women literacy learners are concerned about their immediate needs, which Molyneux (1986) and Moser (1993) call practical needs. Given their economic and social conditions, their roles and responsibilities within their families, women learners are interested in skills and knowledge that will address their immediate concerns. These include, increased agricultural production, child care, health and nutrition, and income generation. Since immediate concerns such as health and nutrition are basic survival needs literacy programs can not afford to ignore them. This does not, however, suggest that learners' long terms needs be ignored either. Given this situation, Stromquist (1988) suggests that,

. . . the assessment of the usefulness of nonformal education programs has to be preceded by a thorough understanding of women's current conditions in the family and society, and a vision of the new social order we should create. Since at present women play a substantial reproductive role, (not only bearing children but raising them and managing the home,) it is clear that nonformal education programs should provide them with the skills and knowledge that would make the execution of these current reproductive tasks less demanding of time and energy. At the same time, since a considerable portion of women's subordination can be traced to their lack of financial autonomy, nonformal education programs should provide women with productive skills to enable them to enter the market economy in more advantageous conditions than before. (p. 11)

Oftentimes it is not due to a lack of knowledge and skills, but due to a lack of economic independence, a lack of reproductive rights and a disregard for their productive roles that most women who come to the class are subject to discrimination and subordination at home and in society at large (Stromquist 1988, 1992; Voices Rising 1990;

Lyon 1991). This requires literacy experts and/or practitioners to develop a model which will incorporate social issues with technical knowledge and skills. As mentioned earlier, many female literacy programs have started to move beyond classroom instruction. They assist women in participating in activities outside of their homestead, thereby enhancing women's social and financial situations, and their self-confidence.

Bown (1990) identifies three different models of women's literacy programs: 1) literacy used as an entry point to change, 2) literacy as a component in an integrated development program and 3) desire for literacy as a reinforcement, after having acquired some degree of change. In her research of 43 literacy programs in different parts of the world, all of which fall under the first model, Bown found that literacy programs in fact change women's situation at multiple levels. She found that at the social level women learners were more inclined to use child health care techniques including immunization and nutrition. At the economic level the women who participated in the literacy classes showed greater capacity to mobilize credit, including the use of banks. At the personal level the women were more inclined to influence family decisions, and participate in socio-economic organizations including advocacy on social and economic issues. To what extent, were the cause of the changes literacy, and to what extent were they other factors surrounding literacy, such as pre-existing cultural traditions and occupations just needing a slight push. For instance, a study conducted by the Commonwealth Secretariat in the African countries found that in some cases the activities introduced by the projects were already there, they just needed some polishing (Bown, 1985). In Kenya the craft production programs for women through NFE was one such example. There was a culturally accepted craft producing tradition among women. It just needed newer and better techniques.

It is obvious, though, that if the objective of women's literacy programs is to promote sustainable and equitable development for women, then programs need to be willing to invest more time enabling learners to build a sustainable collaboration. It has also been observed that to enabling women to actively participate in the organization of community development programs, including literacy classes, is very challenging. But when they are ready to do so, the programs are more likely to be successful and sustainable. As Ramirez (1990) states,

A community's participation in its own development endeavours guarantees ownership over the process itself and the necessary learning involved. While community development practitioners understand this, they also realize that participation can only emerge and be strengthened when the community is able and prepared to take over such responsibilities. (p. 131)

It is obvious that developing countries are facing the serious consequences of deforestation, deficit in agriculture, migration to cities, higher population growth rates, and social disintegration. Consequently, it is also obvious that there is an urgent need to raise awareness of the problem among women and men, and also to provide necessary technical and social skills to the community members to make the situation better. To better understand a given situation, and to equip oneself with the necessary knowledge and skills in order to positively deal with the situation, there is always a need for relevant educational processes. This is where literacy crosses its conventional boundary and blends with community development processes.

It is true that most developing countries are facing the immense pressure of illiteracy and mal-development and many educational interventions have been underway to address these issues. Yet, it has not been proven that once the level of illiteracy is reduced development will automatically occur, or that once the development has taken place the

literacy rate will automatically go up. Given this, many development agencies are initiating interventions which address both issues simultaneously. Still, instead of collaborating and learning from each other's experiences most development efforts have been initiated in isolation. Moreover, as Bhola (1990) observes, "some of them begin to think that the only type of development work worth doing in the world is of the type of work that they happen to be doing at that time" (p. 4). This is very true in the case of Nepal as well.

Nevertheless, the literature shows that there is a consensus, to some level, regarding the nature of women's literacy programs. As discussed earlier, most people agree that women's literacy should include both day to day issues and the issues of empowerment and social justice. So far some literacy programs seem to be emphasizing specific issues such as health, and legal provisions through literacy programs. They seem to be keen on assisting women in meeting their practical as well as strategic needs, but as long as the issues are confined to the limit of the content of the primer and classroom discussion, the intervention seems to be less effective. While the programmers focus on the content and do not pay attention to the support system that women may use in the community, the knowledge and skills that women gain from the literacy class will be of no use. As the Commonwealth Secretariat study team (Bown, 1985) found out, it was of no use to promote craft production without proper marketing facilities, and similarly, the efforts made by the agricultural extension programs were ineffective unless the women held ownership of the land and had access to credit.

Similarly, if women try to use and/or talk about the legal rights that they learned from the literacy class at home, without a support system in their community, it will do more harm than good. There are instances where women are beaten up by their husbands

when they tried to talk about their legal rights regarding domestic violence. If there is no place for those women to go for help or support then it is very likely that they will be victimized more. The same can happen with health care knowledge. If the health care services are not within the reach of women and no support is available in the family and in the community regarding women's health care needs, the knowledge and skills received from the literacy program is of no use. Thus, women's literacy programs should strive to help women be better able to understand the meaning of external intervention by putting it into the perspective of their historical, personal, and social contexts, and at the same time enable them to generate self-reliant and locally viable options for personal and community needs. Following this, what seems to be more effective is:

. . . first the recognition that women have different and special needs, second that they are a disadvantaged group, relative to men, in terms of their level of welfare and access and control over the factors of production; third that women's development entails working towards increased equality and empowerment of women, relative to men. (Longwe, 1991, p. 150)

Issues of Empowerment

One can find a great deal of literature on the issues of empowerment. People from many sectors, within the discipline of social science, have been writing on the conceptual as well as practical issues of empowerment. But for the purpose of this study, the focus has been given to the arguments put forth mainly by educators who have written on the issues of women's literacy education and also to the ideas emerging from South Asia.

Besides critical and Freirean perspectives the theoretical roots of empowerment are found in social-psychological studies as well, among writers such as Bandura (1986, 1997). Bandura's theoretical proposition of efficacy provides a conceptual foundation for

empowerment. According to him, efficacy, which is parallel to what we call empowerment, is fluid and it combines a variety of skills. Efficacy, " involves a generative capability in which cognitive, social and behavioural subskills must be organized into integrated course of action to serve innumerable purposes" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391).

Bandura talks about efficacy at two levels: self and collective. According to him collective-efficacy is based on self-efficacy, which is constantly influenced by the sociopsychological factors. The competency of a group, "lies partly in people's sense of collective efficacy that they can solve their problems and improve their lives through concerted effort" (ibid., p. 449). But still, the self-efficacy of individuals will determine or guide their collective-efficacy.

Any perspective that has empowerment as its underlying theme strives to enable individuals to personally and/or collectively participate in a process of transforming their realities for the better. The discussion on empowerment, presented in this section thus informs the theoretical lens proposed by Bandura. After long interaction with the practitioners as well as the theoreticians, some educators, and those who have been working in the field of women's education have developed indicators and working definitions of empowerment. Some of those indicators and definition will be discussed below.

According to a group of South Asian intellectuals and practitioners (CHETNA, 1996), being empowered generally means, 1) being able to understand one's position in a society, 2) being able to express one's feelings and opinion and to participate in an individual and/or collective action and 2) being able to take control of decision making individually and/or collectively regarding matters affecting one's life.

Stromquist (1995) goes further in her explanation of empowerment. According to her empowerment is a "sociopolitical concept" which transcends "formal political participation" and "consciousness raising". The meaning of empowerment constitutes both micro and macro level factors. The meaning of empowerment constitutes cognitive, psychological, political and economic factors. The cognitive, according to Stromquist include,

- o "women's understanding of their conditions of subordination and the causes of such conditions at both micro and macro levels of society. It involves acquiring new knowledge to create a different understanding of gender relations as well as destroying old beliefs that structure powerful gender ideologies" (p. 14).
- o The psychological factor constitutes, "the development of feelings that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their condition as well as the formation of the belief that they can succeed in their change efforts" (p. 14).
- o The political component refers to the "ability to analyze the surrounding environment in political and social terms; it also means the ability to organize and mobilize for social change" (p. 15).
- o The economic components "requires that women be able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of financial autonomy, no matter how small and hard to obtain at the beginning" (p. 15).

The indicators and the definitional issues presented above indicate that empowerment is a long process. Thus, to claim that women are empowered through a six or twelve month long literacy program is very immature. However, the notion of empowerment has become very popular because, "it captures the notion that individuals, and not only institutions, can bring about change" (Stromquist, 1992, p. 52).

Recognizing the fact that empowerment is a difficult concept, and "multi-faceted in nature," Dighe (1995) observes that, "while it may be difficult to define it, one is able to understand its meaning when one sees the manifestation of what it implies" (p. 39).

In this respect, the definition of empowerment is very context-specific and literacy education itself does not develop empowerment unless programs intentionally create an atmosphere to do so. The concept of empowerment, thus "cannot be constrained by a sectoral approach. Nor can it be related to just a set of activities or inputs" (ibid. p. 41). The intervention meant to empower women should work at different levels. For instance, providing knowledge and skills for economic activities and assisting women to organize into groups, which many literacy programs are implementing currently, may be the initial step in achieving the objective of empowerment.

Moreover, literacy programs for women only, or those specifically designed for women, do not necessarily achieve the goals of empowerment, emancipation, or social justice unless such issues are included in men's programs as well (CERID, 1997). If men do not understand and acknowledge the implication of gender imbalance and women's subordination and are not willing to contribute to the elimination of discriminatory practices it is very unlikely that any literacy program will achieve its goal of women's empowerment. At first, people are usually afraid to break the social harmony. As Freire puts it, "the oppressed are afraid to embrace freedom; the oppressors are afraid of losing the freedom to oppress" (Freire, 1970, p.31). Second, women who come to adult literacy classes or groups still have to go home and deal with their husbands and other men in the families who usually control the situations. Therefore it is equally important that men understand and realize women's concerns, issues and needs for empowerment.

So far, the discussion has been focused around women's empowerment. But what does empowerment look like in community development? Empowerment in the community development is also context specific, as in any other sector. Since communities are driven by their cultural and social norms as well as their economic situation, they are different from one another. Therefore the criterion applied to one may not be applied to another. Keeping this and Bandura's conceptual lens on efficacy in mind, Schuftan's argument of empowerment in relation to community development seems appropriate to mention:

Empowerment is not an outcome of a single event; it is a continuous process that enables people to understand, upgrade and use their capacity to better control and gain power over their lives. It provides people with choices, and the ability to choose, as well as to gain more control over resources they need to improve their condition. (1996, p. 260)

Within the realm of community development, Schuftan identifies four development approaches: service delivery, capacity building, advocacy and social mobilization. In the process of exploring the meaning of empowerment within these four approaches, he suggests an extensive set of components under each of them (Schuftan, 1996).

Given the complex nature of the concept, empowerment can not be compartmentalized or bound by a single definition, it is influenced by various aspects of one's life. However, given the fact that most literacy programs lack enough resources, lack well trained facilitators/practitioners and thus depend entirely on outside support, the question remains, how can a literacy program achieve such a 'multi-faceted' goal as empowerment?

Having briefly discussed the definitional issues within adult literacy, trends in community organization, women's literacy and the issues of empowerment, the following

section will look at adult literacy from the functional perspective. Along with the discussion on the conceptual and implementational issues of adult literacy in general, the notion of functional education has also been questioned, revised and changed over the years. Nevertheless, nowadays one of the major approaches within development interventions has been functional literacy and the UAKWMP is not an exception in it.

Towards a Functional Perspective

According to the functional perspective, literacy, "consists of basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills which people need on an everyday basis to solve the problems of existence with respect to their own lives" (Richmond, 1986, p. 3). This way of looking at literacy can be related to what Lytle (1990) calls "literacy as skills and tasks . . ."

Given this, traditionally the concept of functional adult literacy was implemented with the expectation that individuals who completed basic literacy lessons on reading, writing and computation would use those skills and knowledge to solve individual as well as societal problems. However, over a period of time, the proponents of functional adult literacy began to realize that literacy needed to be more than just reading, writing and computation. It should embrace learners' educational, financial and social contexts, as separating one issue and trying to treat it in isolation did not bring about positive changes in learners lives. The premise of functional literacy thus has been reformulated over a period of time making it more inclusive. Bhola (1994) notes:

Functional literacy was defined as literacy in which literacy and learning of economic skills is combined in to one whole. This definition of functional literacy was later generalized to include awareness. The definition of functionality has now expanded, but economic skills still remain central to the definition of functional literacy. (p. 41)

Following Bhola's definition it is obvious that the characteristics of functional literacy have shifted from teaching individuals to read, write and compute, to providing learners with knowledge and skills that they can use for their immediate concerns such as health, agriculture and child care. In this way, they can be more aware of, and effective in their respective roles. But the central idea, as Bhola's statement implies, is the improvement of quality of life through economic skills. Along these lines for instance, Lengrand (1975), one of the leading proponents of lifelong education argues,

With functional literacy solid progress has been made towards meeting man in his concrete reality. The subject of the educational process now becomes the individual in his dimension as a producer, and this marks a tremendous step forward in the theory and practice of education as applied to literacy work. In the first place it implies an acknowledgment of the high priority value of work in any modern and realistic conception of culture. (p. 81)

It is obvious that Lengrand's argument is influenced by the idea that having individuals adapt to technological culture leads to economic and social progress. Such perceptions infiltrated adult literacy education in both developing countries and industrialized countries to the extent that both practitioners and learners have difficulty in adapting to other possibilities. For instance, Kishindo (1994) in his article on functional literacy in Malawi envisions adult literacy in the following way:

A high level of illiteracy hinders information exchange and the transfer of skills. Illiterate farmers, for example, have limited access to information that could help them to increase their agricultural output through the adoption of modern agricultural techniques, since the dissemination of these techniques is mostly through the print media. (p. 20)

It was reasoned that an adult education curriculum which demonstrated the relevance of what was learned to people's struggle to improve their own standards of living would be more attractive than one that failed to do so. (p. 21)

Learners are taught to read vowels and syllables and to join these into complete words and ultimately sentences. The emphasis is on the construction of sentences which also carry important messages... then use

this sentence as a basis for a discussion on soil fertility improvement, or on the different types of chemical fertilizers, their appropriate uses and levels of application. (p. 22)

The arguments that functional literacy advocates (UNESCO 1970, Lengrad, 1975, Kishindo 1994) suggest that the learners are in dire need of knowledge and skills more than anything else in order to live a better life. Patil (1989), following the trend observes functional literacy as,

. . . literacy integrated with the occupation of the learners and directly related to development, while literacy proper merely provides access to written communication; functional literacy aims at more comprehensive training of the illiterate adult which is related to his role both as a producer and citizen. (p. 9)

Major criticism that many educators (Kozol 1985; Lankshear, 1986; McLaren 1988; Bee 1981, etc.) make about the traditional model of functional literacy is that it is limited in its teaching to "thought controlling". Functional literacy is more mechanical, it does not consider humanistic aspect of individuals lives and work, it enables learners to function according to the interest of the economy of a given nation rather than enabling them to become involved in dialogical interaction with the programmers, to build collaboration and engage in transformative and/or emancipatory action. The critics further argue that by offering a minimum level of competencies to already marginalized individuals, the functional model serves the people in power by maintaining the existing biased and undemocratic economic, political, and cultural constructs.

Nevertheless, lifelong education and continuing education based on the conceptual premises of traditional functional education were heavily advocated in the 1960s and 1970s. Proponents of lifelong education (Suchodolski, 1976; Lengrad, 1986;) seem to be influenced by the modernization theory of development, which corresponds with Western notions of

social development. The assumption, therefore, is that lifelong education enables people to think for themselves, and actively seek social and economic development through continuous learning about the areas relevant to their work and life.

But the theoretical explanations of lifelong education are inconsistent and ambiguous in that they make it difficult to consolidate the ideas to create a systematic understanding. For instance, Kirpal (1976) in his discussion about the objectives of lifelong education holds slightly different viewpoint,

Each society must seek its own quality of life from the roots of the past, the strivings of the present and the vision of the future, but there are certain humanistic values which should be sought and shared by all. The concept of quality of life is in essence the vindication of the human spirit which was weakened by the worship of mammon and machine. (p. 106)

On a philosophical level, lifelong education is "all-embracing and can accommodate a vast assortment of educational alternatives ranging from deschooling to "*education permanente*" (Brown, 1976, p. 283). However, raising concern over the practical implementation of the concept, Brown suggests that though lifelong education has been developed as worldwide concepts, how educators should use the term ought to be relevant to their particular context and culture (ibid.). China for instance, given its socio-cultural and economic situation developed it's own approach to lifelong education (Guo-Dong, 1994).

Lifelong education presumes that people are motivated to continuously update their skills and expand their knowledge because that will result in social, personal and physical well-being for them. Behera (1986) comments that, "lifelong education implies that education is a process which continues for life and all forms of education should aim for this goal" (p. 28). The assumption is that whether it is in schools, universities, colleges or short term work-related training contexts, the educators, facilitators and the learners are

simultaneously provided support to continue updating and expanding their skills and knowledge.

The central concepts of lifelong education have informed functional literacy. In other words, ideas that are found in lifelong education are also reflected in functional literacy. The idea that the educational system should allow individuals to continuously develop their skills and knowledge and enable them to enhance the quality of personal as well as community life are central to both lifelong and functional literacy. Similarly, the notion that continuous learning about areas relevant to the learners will help them seek social and economic change is parallel for instance, to the idea of providing training in agriculture, health and income generation activities to adult literacy participants.

Congruent to lifelong education is the continuing education movement, which was designed to address the change that the society and the economy of a nation were moving towards. Hence it has been used as an instrument to mobilize individuals towards the social and economic changes generated by national interest by providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to adjust and cope with the change. However, the definition, approach, objectives and mode of delivery of continuing education has been constantly debated. Apps (1985) thus comments,

We have a considerable distance to go in accepting the variety of approaches to continuing education; in fact, we have difficulty agreeing on what exactly counts as legitimate learning. The dilemma of defining what is continuing education and where it occurs is proving to be one of the most provocative challenges for continuing education policy makers. (p. 207)

Scholars have accepted the fact that continuing education is very complex, and has been undergoing a lot of changes, just as the workplace and society itself have. However, the main objectives of continuing education for most providers are to offer professional and

career development and enhancement skills and knowledge as required by the job market, and also to offer the adult population with activities and skills that will contribute to their mental and physical well being (ibid.). But some scholars put the educational activities which help minorities, particularly adult immigrants, make social adjustment easier into the category of continuing education as well. It further validates the assumption that the objectives of continuing education depend on a nation's sociocultural, political and economic situation.

For instance, in China although the goal of continuing education is to train individuals to adapt to and be able to make use of modern technologies in industries and other workplaces, political, social and cultural aspects have been successfully integrated in the programs. Similarly, continuing education in India is much wider in range. It includes introducing basic literacy skills through in-service technical trainings, and vocational trainings as well as during programs serving to update one's skills and knowledge in a given area (Behera 1986, Krishnan, 1987).

Expansion in technical knowledge in the work place has also created a need for updating one's skills and knowledge continuously in order to keep oneself qualified for the job. In such a situation continuing education enables individuals to keep connected to the changing world and modern life style created by technological innovations and the market economy.

The ideas that are central to continuing education are definitely reflected in functional literacy and/or post-literacy education. The idea of developing human resources in order to meet the overall developmental needs of a country is central to both continuing education and functional literacy. Similarly, the argument that continuing education

scholars (Schutze, 1987; Jarvis, 1983; Apps, 1985) put forth that it is not possible to equip individuals with all the necessary skills and knowledge needed for life in an initial education program. This is parallel to the argument that advanced literacy education is necessary to expand the knowledge and skills of learners who have completed basic literacy education.

One can find an extensive range of perspectives within the realm of adult literacy, all of which have their supporters, advocates and practitioners. Each has been engaged for quite a while in an argument over the contribution that the particular perspective they promote makes to the quality of adult education. However, considering the ideas of educators and researchers such as Freire (1970, 1972); Shor (1980); Giroux (1983); Lankshear (1986); Fueyo (1988); Jurmo (1989); Stromquist (1992, 1988); Ramdas (1990); Lytle (1990); Auerbach (1992,1996); Mishra, Ghose and Bhog (1994); and Bee (1993) seemingly in one frontier and researchers and educators such as UNESCO; Cahill (1987); Guo-Dong (1994); Markanda (1985); Krishnan (1987) in another frontier, some practitioners and thinkers have been trying to integrate both to generate a more holistic approach to adult education. A recommendation made by Mishra, Ghose and Bhog (1994) seems appropriate to mention at this point,

Adopting a functional approach where literacy becomes important only because you can read the number of a bus, count your money, or write letter, is inadequate in the long run. Questions of gender, self confidence, planning and decision-making need to be continuously addressed as part of the learning agenda. Women need time and space to spread out not only initially but throughout their lives. Changes in their lives, which might occur after they embark on an educational program, lead to new situations of conflict and new forms of oppression. These need to be taken into account as part of continuing education programs. (pp. 132-133)

The reality of adult literacy learners in developing countries is very different from the realities of their counter-parts in the west and industrialized countries. In most

developing countries individuals who join literacy classes are usually from rural and/or semi urban areas who lack basic needs such as medical facilities, education, fuel, food supplies, etc. In this case learners' objectives to come to the literacy class is to gain the immediate benefits that would make their lives more comfortable. Some literacy educators and researchers (Goyal & Kakar 1987, Reddy 1987, Bown 1993, Kishindo 1994) have also indicated that learners are motivated to continue with their literacy classes if they find it helpful in addressing their immediate concerns. This idea combined with the recommendations made by Stromquist (1988), and Mishra, Ghose and Bhog (1994) makes it more apparent that it is important and relevant to integrate multiple perspectives into women's literacy education.

Conclusion

As I mentioned earlier in the critical, Freirean, and participatory perspectives, the focus lies on critical thinking, participation, transformative action, contextuality and collaborative action. The central point of all these is "empowerment". However, the review of literature presented in this chapter also shows that functional literacy, which is assumed to be thought controlling and mechanical, can also contribute to empowerment. Functional literacy which promotes knowledge and skills needed for learners' daily lives raises motivation, and participation in action. When women are engaged in action which consequently makes their daily lives easier, and given opportunities to get involved in additional activities, they find it useful to explore other possibilities to improve their situations. This dynamic keeps women engaged in action, reflection and dialogue, thereby enhancing their confidence, self-esteem and ability to take charge of their situations. If

women are provided a conducive environment, such as group settings in which to talk, reflect and work, it not only develops confidence and courage, it also provides the leverage for collaborative action. Additionally, since most women from rural areas of developing countries lack access to financial resources group action which offers financial support to take care of their immediate issues also motivates women to actively participate in activities outside of their homestead (such as fund raising). The activity of savings and credit for example, on the one hand slowly encourages women to get involved in activities outside of their homestead, and on the other changes their status in and outside of their households.

Therefore the functional knowledge and skills which address women's immediate issues, as well as their long term development, are very likely to contribute to the empowerment process. Bandura, (1986), a leading author in the area of social-psychology, whose theory of efficacies has been used by many as a theoretical foundation for empowerment, says that the process of efficacy is generative, fluid and involves cognitive, social and behavioral tenets to produce a desired result. Looking at functional education through Bandura's lens proves that if functional education for women incorporates more than providing skills and knowledge through classroom instruction, and is inclusive of activities beneficial to the community at large, it contributes to the empowerment process. This kind of intervention is likely to contribute to "the development of feelings that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their condition as well as the formation of the belief that they can succeed in their change efforts" (Stromquist, 1995, p. 14). Although it is a long process and may need extra assistance from outside, if women are continuously engaged in collaborative action they will develop the motivation and strengthen to raise their voices against injustice.

However, functional literacy viewed by the traditional school as skills and tasks alone is not going to contribute to the empowerment process. The model which emphasizes encouraging learners to participate in both individual and community issues- for personal as well as community benefit- is more likely to lead learners towards the empowerment process. Many programs are implementing functional literacy programs which transcends the traditional version of functional literacy. This shows that the time has come to reconceptualize and redefine the functional literacy perspective.

Having reviewed different trends of thoughts in adult literacy, community groups, and empowerment my conclusion is that the important factor is that any program for women should aim at enabling women to take care of their daily concerns, as well as strategize for promoting a sustainable intervention. Both contribute to the empowerment process and women's self-reliance. However, any kind of program should be based on the context, needs and interests of the learners. Given this it seems appropriate to conclude the discussion with the following note,

To acknowledge different forms of literacy is not to suggest that they should all be given equal weight. On the contrary, it is to argue that their differences are to be weighed against the capacity they have for enabling people to locate themselves in their own histories while simultaneously establishing the conditions for them to function as part of a wider democratic culture. This represents a form of literacy that is not merely epistemological but also pedagogical. It is political because literacy represents a set of practices that can provide the conditions through which people can be empowered or disempowered. (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991, p. 51)

Programs which are eclectic in their methods and which base their content on learners' needs will be relevant and flexible. They can be responsive to both short and long term needs. These types of programs are most likely to lead to sustainable structures and practices which will encourage and facilitate the process of empowerment.

CHAPTER 3

NEPAL: COUNTRY AND CONTEXT

Introduction

The first section of this chapter will introduce Nepal with a brief overview of her geographic, demographic and administrative features. This will be followed by a brief discussion of community organization and community development trends; the status of Nepalese women; the policy and program issues of female education and development of mothers' groups. In the second section an overview of the Upper Andhi Khola Watershed Management Project (UAKWMP) will be presented. This section will include development activities of CARE Nepal followed by the literacy and community development strategies used in UAKWMP.

Nepal is a landlocked country with three distinct geographical regions- mountain, hill and tarai (flat land). According to the 1991 census the total population of Nepal is 18.4 million (CBS, 1995) with 2.1 percent annual growth rate. Of this 18.4 million 92.7 thousand are female and 92.2 thousand are male. The following statistics are taken from the 1991 census: 35 percent of the land is mountains, (7.5 percent population); 42 percent of the land is hills (45.5 percent population); and 23 percent of the land is flatland/Tarai (46.7 percent population).

Nepal has a constitutional monarchy with a House of Representatives consisting of 205 elected members. Nepal is divided into 5 development regions, 14 zones and 75 District Development Committees (DDC), 205 constituencies, 927 ilakas (one ilaka may consist of 3 to 4 VDCs), 58 municipalities and approximately 4 thousand Village

Development Committees (VDCs). Each VDC is divided into 9 wards.¹ All districts, villages and municipalities have executive committees. Since there is an ongoing thrust for decentralization, all districts and villages are given responsibilities, authorities and funding to design and implement necessary development plans and activities. However, the process has not yet gained momentum. DDC's sectoral plan is submitted to the line agencies, which are then forwarded to the sectoral ministries for approval. In this case the programs are decided at the central level. The interests of the politicians or members of the parliament at the central level influence the decisions in most cases. With regard to the village development fund, VDCs do receive Rs. 5 lakhs^{2,3} annually which they can use for development activities in their villages.

Nepal's planned development efforts date back to the 1950s, when she began orchestrating a consecutive five-year development plan. Since then a huge amount of money has been spent by Bi-lateral agencies through the government channels and INGOs. Additionally, NGOs and INGOs, have spent a huge amount of money each year on development activities in Nepal. Given this, Nepalese people have witnessed an enormous expenditure and various approaches being applied in the name of development, poverty alleviation and human development. One of these concepts, which has gained a good deal of attention is 'community development.'

Community Organization/Community Development Trend

Considering the focus of this study, an attempt has been made to discuss the subject matter as it relates to women's organizations. Since Nepal is predominantly a rural community, the concepts of rural development, community development,

community organization and their approaches overlap. It is thus difficult to talk about one without referring to the others. The history of rural development in Nepal dates back to 1953, when the US Government first provided assistance (Shrestha, 1996). Since then an enormous effort has been made by numerous agencies, including the Nepalese government, to improve economy, education, agriculture, health and natural environment of the rural communities.

The community organizations which are also known as 'groups' have been so popular that they include mothers' groups, credit groups, forest users' groups and water users' groups just to name a few. Consequently, most development agencies, including government and semi government institutions (health; agriculture; banks, etc.), have their own groups. Most groups have provisions for credit, thus in some places one person/household can be a member of more than one group and will enjoy the credit benefits of every group.

According to Bhattachan (1997), Nepal's community development or community organization history falls into several stages:

Pre- "Unification" (Pre 1768): Autonomous Indigenous Organizations

Rana Regimes (1846-1950): Indigenous organizations under the Center

Planned Development Periods (1950s): Community Development

Early Panchayat Regime (1960s): Growth + Community Development

Mid-Panchayat Regime (1970s): IRDPs + Community Development

Late-Panchayat Regime (1980s): Basic Needs + Community Development

Democratic Period (1990s): Market + NGOs + State + People or Community
(pp. 101).

As Bhattachan observes, it is obvious that Nepal like many other developing countries has been a testing ground for development related concepts and approaches since the 1950s. Development packages have come in a range of sizes and forms depending on the funders/donor organizations. For instance, the development packages such as the Basic and Primary Education Project supported by the World Bank is much larger in scale than educational projects funded by other INGOs.

A number of agencies in government and non-government sectors are trying to address community development by organizing women and men in groups for social, economic and political action. The trend of group formation for community and personal development has been in place for the past 15-16 years. All sectoral programs targeted at the grassroots, (e.g., agriculture, community forestry, drinking water, small irrigation, etc.) operate through groups. Some examples of group approaches in community development in Nepal include the Small Farmers' Development Program (SFDP); Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW); Micro Credit Program for Women (MCPW); Community Forestry Group and the Social Mobilization of Participatory District Development Program (PDDP) of UNDP/HMG. Donors such as UNICEF, FAO, IFAD, ADB, World Bank and the Danish Government support most community organizations or groups through the government agencies, INGOs or NGOs.

The largest and most innovative programs targeted at women in the country have to do with credit: Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW), the women's component in the Small Farmers Development Project (WID/SFDP), Micro-credit, and the four Grameen Banks. These interventions, although primarily credit based, are integrated community development programs initiated through groups. The programs

differ in terms of their emphasis on intervention strategy at the policy level, however at the implementation level all have come to focus on credit. Even PCRW, which was designed originally with the purpose of focusing on the development of women's individual development, now concentrates on credit (Pradhan 1995).

The focus on mobilizing women into economic activities by providing them access to credit is based on several assumptions. For instance, lack of access to economic resources is one of the factors that plays a major role in maintaining women's dependency over men. Additionally, the money that women make through credit is always spent on family well-being. Providing financial options to women, thus means supporting family and children. The economic contribution to the family also develops a sense of self-dignity among women.

With this general overview of the community development trends, the following section will talk about some initiatives in the area of community organization and community development in Nepal.

Madhya Paschimanchal Grameen Bikash Bank (MPGGBB)

MPGGBB, a semi-government financial institution, was established in 1995. In 1996 it was brought under the Development Bank Act. The primary objective of MPGGBB is poverty alleviation in the Mid-Western Development Region through easy access to credit for the poor and deprived people, especially women. The bank intends to assist poor women in improving their socio-economic conditions through micro credit, social and community development activities. Training is one of the main activities of the program. The group members are offered a week long training in which

they learn to write/sign their names. The training also includes lessons on Grameen banking procedures, health and sanitation, and group discipline.

Small Farmers Development Project (SFDP)

The Agricultural Development Bank Nepal (ADBN) initiated the SFDP in the late seventies. The objective of the program was to organize marginal farmers who were either landless or who held a very small area of land to enable them to implement diversified farming and economic activities for self-reliance. One of the main activities of the SFDP is credit disbursement. This is supported by trainings which include basic reading and writing. The number of members in SFDP groups range from five to fifteen. The group meets monthly and is engaged in saving, credit and investment activities. The program covers all 75 districts with branch offices in many VDCs.

Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW)

The HMGN initiated PCRW in 1982. Initially the project was based on group organization and community development through group action. The aim is to reduce women's domestic work burden and to provide credit for income generation. The project, after organizing women into groups provides basic reading and writing training to the group members. The Women Development Division (WDD) under the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) operates the program. Although the PCRW is operating in 67 districts, it is an area-based program covering small pockets in the districts.

Micro Credit Project for Women (MCPW)

The Ministry of Local Development as a companion project to PCRW initiated MCPW in 1994. The project is supported by the Asian Development Bank. The fund has been channeled through Nepal Bank Ltd. and Rastriya Banijya Bank. The primary aim of the project is to improve the socio-economic status of women through credit and related trainings and supports. The project seeks local NGOs to implement the project. The MCPW within the Women Development Division of the Ministry of Local Development has two major sectors: one is responsible for training and the other is responsible for credit allocation. Both sectors work closely with the participating NGOs. The project is currently implemented in 12 districts, which include five urban towns.

Social Mobilization/ Participatory District Development Project (PDDP)

The PDDP program, a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Nepal Planning Commission (HMG) is about enhancing the local capabilities of DDCs and VDCs to manage local participatory efforts and to network with various local level organizations. The project is operating at three levels: Villages, Districts and at the center (Kathmandu). The Social Mobilization model has two components: institutional development and economic development. The institutional development component encourages people to organize themselves as community organizations to begin to save regularly and enhance their personality through skill development programs. The economic development component consists

of credit capital and a one-time investment through the seed grant fund to the groups for productive investment.

Social mobilization is supposed to involve all households in the community without any discrimination. It has three objectives: (1) the involvement of men and women, irrespective of their class in the village development programming or planning process; (2) poverty alleviation by providing small credits for the poor; and (3) women's empowerment.

In Nepal, besides credit groups, there are forest users groups as well. For the effective implementation of the community forestry management scheme the forestry department of the government, as well as other agencies that are engaged in the protection of natural resource management, organize community members into groups. The following section will further discuss the status of community forestry groups in Nepal.

Community Forestry

Community forestry in the context of Nepal means management of forest resources through active participation by local communities. In Nepal, as in other developing countries, women play the leading role in managing the use of forest resources. They are the ones who are most knowledgeable about the local water springs, fodder and fuel needs, and their availability. Moreover, it is the women's responsibility to supply domestic fuel and fodder and to collect water. Group members within the community forestry programs receive training on a needs basis. However, there are also programs which start with literacy class and assist participants

to form forest users' groups. For instance, in Gorkha district Save the Children US began its intervention with literacy and later organized the participants into users' groups (Acharya, 1993).

Although community forestry was introduced in the mid-seventies, attempts to involve women in forest management have been sporadic and dependent on the individual initiatives of the projects or forestry staff. In the late eighties the Seventh National Plan mentioned the participation of women in forestry for the first time. The community forestry guidelines, which require that at least one third of the members in the forest user groups should be women, validated the Seventh National Plan (HMG/Ministry of Forest, 1995).

Having briefly discussed the major community development initiatives through groups the following section will briefly introduce the mothers' groups. The mothers' group known as Aama Samuha is a prominent grassroots women's organization which has been activated by many organizations for the effective implementation of their activities.

Aama Samuha (Mothers' Groups)

The Mothers' Group is a grassroots based informal organization. Mothers' Groups, though primarily formed to disseminate information on health issues, have been involved in various community development activities. However, in some communities mothers' groups already existed. The mothers' groups formed by the Department of Public Health in the late eighties in some cases have been revitalized by many NGOs and INGOs to implement their programs. Where there were no such

groups women were encouraged to form one. The development of mother's groups will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

However, it is not clear, when the literacy training occurs in the groups discussed above. On the one hand, this may be due to the fact that in some groups during the selection of the office holders of the community organizations priority is given to those who can read and write. On the other, in some groups, the group organizers depending on their strategy, objective, goal and the need of their participants provide training on reading and writing.

Besides these groups, there are numerous savings and credit groups of women initiated by NGOs and INGOs, for instance, savings and credit groups initiated by World Education Nepal through its WEEL project is an example of such groups. In this case, as in many other cases, literacy class preceded the group formation.

Status of Women

Nepal is a heterogeneous society with a wide spectrum of cultural variation and ethnic diversity. Each of the ethnic groups relates somewhat differently to their women. In spite of this, it will be helpful to follow the classification made by Acharya and Bennett (1982) to understand the status of women. They have classified the population of Nepal in two broad cultural groups, Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan. From a multidimensional comparison of women in these two groups Acharya and Bennett conclude that women in the Tibeto-Burman groups have greater freedom of choice in marriage and mobility, and higher decision making roles within the households. However, women from both groups lag far behind men in access to

resources; education; knowledge and information; health facilities; non-traditional employment and in the political sector.

Particularly in Indo-Aryan Groups, gender discrimination is encountered, beginning from feeding and childcare, to education and access to health services. Girls are married off early and face life long discrimination in their married household in terms of access to food, clothing, health facilities, etc. Their mobility is controlled by cultural practices.

Though the Constitution of Nepal 1991 guarantees equal treatment before the law without discrimination on the basis of caste, sex and religion, as well as equal pay to men and women for similar work, this is not so in practice for Nepalese women. Nepalese women are discriminated against in the laws on property rights in all communities, which deny them inheritance rights in the parental household after marriage. This results in very limited economic and political choices. The inheritance system of Nepal, as specified in the National Code of Nepal (Mulki Ain) of 1963, is patrilineal in character and derives from the Hindu system of beliefs which emphasize the need to keep family laws which govern marriage, divorce, property rights and inheritance. These laws, taken together, reinforce the patriarchy and put severe limits on women's control over economic resources (Sahavagi, 1997).

A fundamental disadvantage women face in the exercise of their legal and political rights, besides economic powerlessness, is the cultural perception about their sexuality, and the possibility of physical violence against them. Tolerance of domestic violence, rape, and girls' trafficking are examples of a dominant cultural attitude which hinders women in the exercise of their political and legal rights. However,

activist groups of women now have more freedom to work for women's causes and numerous such organizations have emerged. For the last two years, women activists have been fighting for reforms in inheritance laws so that daughters can inherit parental property.

Nepalese women's participation in the total labor force has increased substantially in all sectors, but the largest increases have been in agriculture and manufacturing (ibid.). Women's participation in agricultural work varies slightly in the tarai and hill regions. In the tarai region there is a greater inter-class differential in women's roles and activities than in the hilly region. Since this study focuses on hill women, their participation in agricultural work is further elaborated. Women are the main agricultural workers in the hills, responsible for up to 70 percent of the labor input in crop cultivation and up to 61 percent in animal husbandry (ibid.) They are the main decision makers for the choice of crops, fertilizers, labor allocation and labor arrangements. They are the main suppliers of fuel and water to the household, they are the ones who take care of other household activities and they are the major caretakers of the sick and the old. Men are responsible for supplying labor for land clearing and other heavy work in the field, however, women are not excluded from these activities. Almost all women work in the field, either on their own land or on a labor exchange basis. Though performing household related work outside of one's house is not very respectful, working outside in this case does not carry any stigma. Men migrate to towns in Nepal or to India and Arab countries, to earn supplementary incomes, which is used primarily to buy assets such as land and animals or to pay back debts. Consequently, major efforts to involve women in agricultural training and to provide

them access to credit for agricultural and other off-farm activities are common in WID and other development programs in Nepal.

Increasing numbers of women are working in the formal manufacturing sector, including the textile sector mostly as semi-skilled and unskilled workers. These jobs are often at low paying levels. In almost all food, drink, tobacco and match factories, women workers are mainly involved in packing the finished products and related processes (Acharya, 1997).

As the physical work outside the household is viewed as degrading to the family status, women who work outside in such jobs are looked down upon. This extends their inferior status from the household to the work place. In most cases women who work in a low paying and/or physical work only do so because there is a dire need for additional income for the family or there are no alternative sources of income.

Nepalese women suffer from a lack of proper medical facilities and care. They often face complications with pregnancy, poor nutrition, anemia, and many other complications related to reproductive health. Some of these problems are caused by a lack of knowledge and information about family planning methods. Moreover, with increasing resource constraints on the household and illusions created by the media, such as television and radio, violence against women is increasing. Girl trafficking and prostitution are also on the increase.

The Constitution specifies that political parties contesting elections to the Lower House must have at least 5 percent of their candidates be women. The Upper House of 60 members must have at least 5 percent of their members be women.

Similarly, the recent law on local elections (HMG, 1997) also requires all political parties to field at least one female candidate at the ward level. Representation of women is also mandatory at VDC and DDC levels.

At the National level, the government policy emphasizes women's involvement in all programs and projects. The main objective of development policy for women is specified as: 1) to involve women actively in various development fields, 2) to increase women's access to political, economic and social sectors and 3) to promulgate legal reforms to ensure women's equal legal rights. Special laws are promised for increasing women's participation at all levels of decision making, establishing women's rights in land ownership and technical trainings in all sectors.

At the policy level, the government has shown an awareness regarding the elevation of women's status, but how this awareness gets translated into practice is a different issue. HMG's development programs are implemented through numerous ministries and departments. Currently, ministries such as the Agriculture and Forestry ministries have special provisions for the involvement of women in their activities, especially through group formation. However, so far only three ministries: Local Development, Agriculture and Education have women's cells. The cell in the Education Ministry was responsible for female education and social welfare but recently the social welfare section has been moved to the newly created Ministry of Women and Social Welfare.

Women's Education-Policy and Program Issues

Women have made substantial gains in the educational field in last 25 years in Nepal. The female literacy rate (6 years and above) increased from 4 percent in 1971 to 25 percent in 1991. The gender gap in the male female educational levels is, however, decreasing very slowly. A decline is visible only in the younger generation of the 10-14 age group (Acharya, 1994). A recent survey (CBS, 1996) reports adult literacy rates of 53 and 19 percent respectively for adult men and women. Overall adult literacy is reported at 36 percent. The same survey reported that currently the in-school ratio among the 6-9 age cohorts is 71 percent for boys and 50 percent for girls. In the 10-14 age group the gender gap among currently-in-school population increases slightly. The major reasons given for not sending girls and boys to school are that they are required to help with farming or business and some parents prefer to keep the children home. The Nepal Multiple Indicators Survey (1996), completed almost concurrently by Nepal Planning Commission (NPC), reported adult male and female literacy rates at 57 and 23 percent respectively. The net enrollment was reported at 80 percent for boys and 60 percent for girls. Girls have more risks than boys of not attending school, this risk increases with age. Household chores and registration fees accounted for 45 percent of the responses as to why girls were not sent to school. Also repetitions of grades were reported higher among girls than boys at all ages. Similarly, the risks of dropping out are higher for girls in all regions and ecological zones; as the risks increases, the ratio of females declines.

The national target is to achieve 67 per-cent literacy by the year 2000 (Shrestha, 1997). Female literacy, which was only around 25-26 per-cent in the mid

nineties, is felt to be the main hindrance in achieving this objective. Further, researchers claim that education opens new employment opportunities for women apart from widening their vision and self-confidence, and hence is a powerful element in the empowerment process. Responding to this call HMG formulated a special education policy for women in 1992. The main objectives of this policy were to increase female literacy and educational levels through formal and informal education.

The objectives and targets are to be achieved by:

1. Using various media channels to develop a positive attitude about women's education in the public.
2. Providing scholarships to girls from primary to higher secondary and proficiency certificate levels.
3. Facilitating girls to complete their secondary level education by providing them with hostel facilities.
4. Encouraging educated women to get involved in teaching jobs.
5. Developing female teachers as community change agents. (HMG/Basic and Primary Education Project, 1997).

Nepal's formal education system comprises of primary, secondary and higher schools, which include 10 or 12 years of education and university education.

Women's education had been given specific attention early on. Special incentives to female education were introduced since 1971/72 (ibid.). A special program, called the Equal Access of Women to Education, was started for training female teachers from remote and disadvantaged areas in 1971. Numerous other programs were initiated during the seventies and eighties. In 1991/92, the Ministry of Education (MOE) established a separate Women's Education Section (WES) along with the initiation of the Basic and Primary Education Program (BPEP) to strengthen the

school educational system. This program includes a special women's non-formal education component.

Management Structure

Currently there are two separate units for women's education development in the Ministry. The WEU is responsible for formal education for girls and women, whereas the Women's Education Program (WEP) is responsible for nonformal education (NFE) for women and girls. WEU is directly under the Ministry of Education, whereas WEP is administratively under the NFE program of BPEP.

Similarly, a NFE council comprising of representatives from different ministries, NGOs and INGOs involved in NFE has been established in the Ministry of Education. The chairperson of the council is the Minister of Education. The major responsibility of the council is to coordinate, manage and oversee the NFE policy formation process (HMG/NFE Council, 1994).

The Education Regulation of 1992 has a provision for a District Education Committee (DEC), established to effectively channel the district level educational policy and programs, and to oversee and support the management and implementation of various formal and non-formal education activities. It is chaired by the DDC Chairperson. The Central District Officer (CDO) is the Vice-chairperson of the Committee. The member secretary of the committee is the District Education Officer; the Committee includes representation from the teaching community, VDCs, NGOs, etc. In addition, there is also a provision of the District NFE Development Committee. The roles and responsibilities of the committee include the implementation,

management, coordination and supervision of NFE activities at the district level. The committee can also form a literacy campaign committee at the district level if necessary. The government sponsored literacy programs are given to NGOs through the District Education Office (DEO) (CERID, 1997). Some bilaterally funded non-formal education programs, however, are managed centrally by donors, through large INGOs and district offices that have neither knowledge nor any role in them.

Formal Education

Education programs aimed at increasing girls' participation in formal education include special scholarships for primary, secondary and intermediate and campus levels, female teachers preparation, advocacy through various media channels, follow-up and community awareness programs. Follow-up has been an on-going activity of BPEP/WEU since 1992. The main objectives of this program are to a) identify the difficulties in implementing women's education programs at the field level, b) find out how to make the programs more effective in the coming years, and c) find out how to make the programs more practical/functional so that substantial improvements can be made in women's education (HMG/Basic and Primary Education Project, 1996). WEU has a strong advocacy program carried out through posters, calendars, brochures, street dramas, processions, TV and a women's education activity bulletin. The objective is to create awareness about the importance and benefit of women's education among the targeted population (ibid.).

In order to mobilize the community for the development of women's education, WEU has been launching various programs at this level. The main

objectives of this particular program are to, a) identify the problems and find solutions, b) develop the action-plan for the educational awareness program according to the need of the community and finally c) implement the educational awareness program (HMG/Basic and Primary Education Project, 1997).

Research on Gender and Secondary Education conducted by CERID has pointed to some issues at both policy and program levels. Concern has been shown over the efficiency in administration. One of the major issues reported is the lack of coordination among agencies involved from the central to the school level. In most cases the scholarships do not arrive at the schools on time. In some cases the schools lag behind in preparing necessary documents which allow them to receive the funds, in other cases the District Education Office (DEO) itself lags behind in allocating the scholarships to the schools due to frequent changes in personnel at DEO or due to administrative reasons. Similarly, the lack of clarity on the scholarship policy among local education administrations and/or schools was also reported. Head teachers and School Management Committees (SMC) were not sensitive to gender issues. Since SMU members are mostly affiliated with political parties and spend time maneuvering politically, they seem to have no interest or time for issues such as gender sensitivity. Additionally, some head teachers were not in favor of having female teachers. The communities were not involved much in school activities. The local initiative in the promotion of girls' education is negligible. DEOs do not have specific policies to promote girls' education in their respective districts. The study also pointed out that schools lacked facilities for female teachers as well as students.

Nonformal Education

In Nepal the history of adult literacy classes dates back to the 1950's. Since that time the MOE has been providing reading and writing programs through various channels. In recent decades, many government and non- government agencies including INGOs have begun to conduct literacy programs. The number of such agencies has been increasing annually. The objectives of the current non-formal education (NFE) policies of the government are:

- a. To make most women over 15 literate.
- b. To reduce the gap in the illiteracy rate of men and women by increasing women's literacy rates and
- c. To develop functional knowledge and skills to promote a healthy environment at home, within the family and the community (Regmi, 1997).

NFE for women comprises of :

1. **Basic Literacy:** This is a nine month long literacy class. The target group is illiterate women over 15 years of age. The purpose of this level is to teach reading and writing along with imparting functional knowledge necessary for daily household practices.
2. **Post-Literacy:** This is a six month long class for those who have completed the basic level. This level is also called 'functional literacy class'. The main objective of this level is to assist women to put the knowledge and skills learned in the basic level into practice.

3. Skill Training: The minimum duration of skill training is three months. The targeted group are those who either have completed the post-literacy level or those who have an equal level of education. The objective of this level is to assist women in forming groups, to develop projects and to develop skills for income generation activities. At this level participants are linked with various training agencies according to their needs and interests. For instance, in five districts women are receiving skill-oriented training through WDS and SFDP. WEP is coordinating this operation with WDS and SFDP as a pilot program.
4. Chelibeti is another specific program that the MOE implements. Its objective is to prepare out of schools girls of school age, for school entrance. The rural population receives this program very well. Similar programs are implemented for boys.

The primers for all three levels of the literacy program are designed and published by the NFE Unit of BPEP (Regmi, 1997).

Between 1987/88-1995/96 a total of 110, 389 women received adult education through non-formal education classes (Table 1) sponsored by MOE.

Table 1

Progress on Non-formal Education During 1987-88 to 1995-96

Year	Level	Target (in #)	Literate (in #)
1987-88 to 1995-96	Basic	126473	89472
	Functional	30521	20917
	Skill Development	1800	-

Source: compiled from Regmi, 1997.

Besides the MOE's programs and activities, many other NGOs and INGOs are contributing to the development of women's education in Nepal. Some of the major INGOS involved in implementing women's education programs are the World Education, Save the Children US, PACT, UMN, etc. Besides INGOs there are numerous NGOs who are involved in women's education programs.

The Ninth Plan Approach Paper (NPC/HMG, 1997) does not indicate any major change in policies on women's education from those that already exist. The plan declares that special programs will be launched to reduce the gender, ethnic and physical disparities in the secondary and higher secondary levels. It also proclaims that the scholarship programs for women and children from disadvantaged and backward classes will be expanded and made more effective in terms of accessibility and outreach. The government policy is to develop the communities of remote areas and uplift the disadvantaged population groups through nonformal education (NFE). As per this policy, while allocating the adult education programs, priority is to be given to those areas where the literacy rate is very low.

The Center for Educational Research Innovation and Development (CERID) recently conducted a study on the impact of adult education in Nepal. The study (CERID, 1997) is basically a small scale qualitative study which combines both field level research and a review of NFE programs implemented by selected agencies. In sum, the study found that literacy has been successful in bringing about positive changes in rural communities where it has been conducted. The participants of literacy classes showed a tendency to use new skills, and were more articulate in

expressing their needs. However literacy classes which do not offer any skills other than reading, writing and computation are not as popular as integrated classes.

The study found little change in women's lives and everyday practices as a consequence of these programs. The participants have knowledge and understanding of various subjects but they have not changed their practices generally in the area of health and sanitation. Similarly, the participants know women's concerns and they can discuss these issues as they have lessons on women's empowerment and women's rights. However, they are not changing their daily practices accordingly. The study recommends that men also need to be included in classes geared towards health and sanitation, women's issues, etc. This will make the programs more effective.

A study (IFCD, 1996) on Community Literacy in Nepal found that literacy implemented in isolation does not seem to be as effective as literacy integrated with a social development component; the extension programs or intervention of line ministries and NGOs are unevenly distributed and most women's groups lack access to new or updated information necessary to cope with current issues. Additionally, the study also observed that since women come from diverse ethnic, cultural and economic backgrounds they react to development interventions differently.

The study further suggests that creative approaches such as language experience, whole language, family literacy and REFLECT⁴ should be promoted extensively. All these approaches however, are not new to Nepal. They are not visible because they are being implemented by a very few agencies.

Development of Mothers' Group

Nepal, like many other developing countries has a high population growth rate. The population is growing at approximately 2.1 percent per year and has reached almost 20 million. The fertility rate, maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate are also very high. Given these facts, HMG has been initiating a variety of programs for decades to expand and improve the health care services and to reduce the growth, fertility and mortality rates through activities mostly focused on women. The formation of Mothers' Groups at the Ward levels is one such activity that the Ministry of Health (MOH) of HMG initiated to deliver health related messages to rural mothers. Later, the concept got adopted widely by many other organizations. They began to either use or form mothers' groups both for service delivery as well as women's development.

In the fiscal year 1988/89, the Department of Public Health conducted a countrywide training to prepare women community health volunteers who are now known as Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHV). These women are recommended by the community to work as FCHV. Later on, they are responsible to assist local mothers to organize and form mothers' groups which are known as Aama Samuha. The objective of establishing mothers groups is to deliver health related knowledge and skills particularly on family planning, childcare, and hygiene/sanitation to local mothers. The mothers' groups meet once a month. In that meeting each month, FCHV discusses one health related topic or issue, which is pertinent to the local families.

In the beginning, the health package that FCHV delivered to the mothers' groups included 12 topics. Currently, the health extension package of FCHV includes more than 12 topics: oral rehydration therapy, nutrition, family planning, HIV/AIDS information, first-aid, immunization, hygiene, cold/pneumonia, vitamin A, mother and child health, malaria, leprosy, tuberculosis, Kala-Ajar. All of these topics are illustrated in the 'FCHV Training and Action Picture Book' (1994) which the FCHV and mothers' group members deliver to the community. In order to do her job, a FCHV can ask for assistance from local health service delivery individuals or offices such as traditional doctors, agricultural extension workers, Village Health Worker (VHW), Mother and Child Health Worker (MCHW), trained traditional birth attendants, local pharmacists, the Village Development Committee, the Health Post and other local organizations/agencies. The FCHVs are provided with a Ward Health Service Register, in which they report each and every activity, including mothers' group meetings.

At the beginning of this program (1988/89), FCHVs received Rs. 100 per month. However, there is currently no such provision, so it has become purely voluntary work. The local health offices, health posts or sub-health posts give FCHV some medicines, which include a first-aid-kit, medicine for fever and cold, family planning devices and a delivery kit. The local women and men go and get these medications from their FCHV if they need any.

For various reasons mothers' groups in some cases lost their drive or deviated from their original objectives and started to get involved in other activities mostly introduced by other agencies. The mothers' groups were believed to be a way to

sensitize and mobilize women around community and family health issues. Where there were not many grassroots level voluntary groups or interventions as such, the concept of mothers' groups to reach women was a very viable channel. With the objective of strengthening mothers' groups, a four year long pilot project, Strengthening Mothers' Groups for Community Action in Population and Health, was undertaken in early 1993. The project was a joint initiative of the UNFPA and HMG. The technical support came from the Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) and UNFPA Country Support Team. The Mothers' Club (MC) implemented the project.⁵ The MC was established during the International Women's Year in 1975 under the Social Services National Coordination Council (SSNCC).⁶

An evaluation study of the project on "Strengthening Mothers Groups For Community Action in Population and Health" (Thapa & Shrestha, 1995) noted that the project did see women as agents of change rather than passive recipients of development assistance. It also stressed the need for women to organize themselves for development efforts. The report suggests incorporating the following

- including unmarried adolescents and women beyond child bearing age.
- emphasizing participation and sharing of responsibility by men in the actual family planning practices.
- incorporating other elements of reproductive health besides family planning into the program; etc.

The long-range objective of the UNFPA/HMG project was to enhance the status of women, particularly through improving their reproductive health, and subsequently reducing the national fertility growth rate. The immediate objectives

included increased awareness among women on population and health issues and realizing the benefits of group formation for community action in approximately one hundred villages. Additionally the project also aimed to institutionalize 50 percent of the total targeted mothers' groups as grassroots level NGOs (ibid.). However, once a group is formally registered it has to be bound by the NGO Act. This is difficult to maintain for informal village grassroots based organizations such as mothers' groups. For instance, the groups have to have their financial activity audited, and if they do not have a certain amount of funds the group will be dissolved and the Government will seize the remaining funds. Given these conditions not many mothers in villages would like to formally institutionalize their groups.

Upper Andhi Khola Watershed Management Project Case Study

This section discusses CARE Nepal's participation in the development activities of Nepal. Emphasis is given to community development and literacy strategies of the UAKWMP.

CARE International in Nepal

CARE International has been working in Nepal for the last 20 years. CARE Nepal's focus includes health, community development, bridge construction, natural resource management, watershed management and education. CARE Nepal works closely with the government line agencies and community based organizations to implement its projects.

The overall goal of CARE Nepal is to strengthen the capacity of the rural people to achieve their basic needs through a longer-term development strategy (CARE Nepal information sheet⁷). In order to achieve its primary goal, CARE Nepal has the following secondary goals:

- a) To increase the capacity of rural communities to identify, plan and implement development activities.
- b) To increase the agricultural productivity of rural communities, thereby increasing incomes, in a manner that is environmentally sound.
- c) To improve the communities' health status and awareness about health and population issues.
- d) To increase the level of literacy with rural communities, particularly for women.
- e) To increase safe access to trade, agriculture and employment opportunities for rural communities, thereby increasing incomes.
- f) To develop, test and document strategies for facilitating self-help community development.
- g) To strengthen programmatic coordination with Government counterparts, line agencies, and local international NGOs (CARE Nepal information sheet).

Upper Andhi Khola Watershed Management Project (UAKWMP)

A study conducted by the Department of Soil Conservation (DSC) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1978 in the Western Development Region rated the Upper Andhi Khola watershed area as having the third highest potential for erosion in Nepal. Since watershed was one of the areas that CARE Nepal had experience with, and Syangja was closer to its other collaborative project, Begnas

Taal Rupa Taal Watershed Management Project, CARE Nepal decided to get involved in the UAKWMP.

The Upper Andhi Khola Watershed Management Project of the Syangja District is an integrated community and conservation development project implemented by CARE Nepal in collaboration with the Department of Soil Conservation (DSC) of HMG. This five-year project was initiated in 1992 with the financial support of DANIDA (Danish Government) through CARE Denmark. In 1997, an agreement was made to go ahead with a five-year second phase of the project. In the second phase of the project UAKWMP has a plan to work in six new villages.

The organizational structure includes personnel from both CARE Nepal and the Department of Soil Conservation of HMG. The Project Manager and Co-manager are at the same level of the organizational structure. The Project Manager is an HMG staff member and comes from DSC whereas Co-manager is the CARE Nepal staff. Though UAKWMP is a joint venture, the participation of DSC at the field level seems to be very limited. Most of the field activities and the implementation of the programs are undertaken by the CARE Nepal field staff.

The UAKWMP covers 180 sq. Km. of the Syangja district with a small part of watershed in Parbat district. The project area is concentrated in the northern corner of the district. On its north is the Kaski district and on the west is the Parbat district. The project area ranges from 750 to over 2,000 meters above sea level. The climate varies according to the altitude. The average rainfall in the district is 1,462 mm., with 75 percent falling between June and September leaving almost eight months, October to

May, dry. In mid-altitude areas the average temperature in May is 26 degrees centigrade, and in January it goes down to 14 degrees. As in many other parts of the country, the vegetation and the crops in the UAKWMP area are dependent on the monsoons. The forest is mainly tropical mixed hardwood. The forest and grass are in a state of degradation due to overuse and excessive lopping of tree branches for fodder and fuel wood.

The population of the project area is about 50,000, with 10.5 persons per cultivated hectare of land (DSC/CARE, 1997). The major ethnic groups are the Brahmans and Chhetris, comprising 48 percent of the total population. Occupational castes, such as cobbler, blacksmith, tailor, etc., are 19 percent. Gurungs and Newars make up 14 and 9 percent of the population respectively. Other castes and ethnic groups comprise 10 percent of the population. Since seasonal migration out of Nepal is very high in the area, some villages are left only with women, children and older people for most of the year.

The main occupation of people in the project area is agriculture. The cultivated land is generally scattered and includes *khet*⁸ and *bari*.⁹ A household may have such plots scattered over a considerable distance, demanding extra time and energy for farm work. The main crops produced in the area are maize, millet, wheat, potato, rice, pulses and mustard-oil seed. Additionally, livestock raising is the second most important activity after agriculture in the area. Though livestock also requires a significant amount of time providing fodder and water (which are already scarce) most households own buffalo, cows, goats and/or chickens. The livestock provides manure and power to plow the land. Livestock may be sold or bartered in times of need.

Since the villagers lack economic alternatives to agriculture the pressure on forestland has increased. The only alternative economic activity are the earnings brought by male members who have gone to work outside of the country. On the one hand, this may have contributed to the livelihood of the family, but on the other it has increased the workload of women and children in the area.

The Project Goals, Assumptions and Activities

The final goal of the project is to improve the agricultural productivity and the socio-economic conditions of the inhabitants of the project area through the promotion of sustainable watershed management measures (DSC/CARE, 1992). The following are four intermediate goals which the project aimed to achieve by enabling people to identify, plan, implement and maintain the programs by themselves.

- A) To increase the capability of local Community Conservation User Groups to plan, implement and sustain watershed management activities on common lands.
- B) To increase the overall production of fuel wood, fodder, timber and minor forest products on common and private lands in perpetuity.
- C) To increase production of food through effective interaction between conservation and farming practices on private lands.
- D) To ensure the participation of women in all aspects of natural resource management (ibid., pp. 18-19).

These objectives are based on the following assumptions.

. . . improving the level of understanding of resource issues and enhancing the capacity of households and communities to manage common resources will contribute to the well being of the watershed and its people. Watershed management requires dealing with issues arising from common ownership of natural resources since households have incentives to exploit the resource for private gain.

. . . When individual decisions result in undesirable outcomes some form of cooperative action is needed to ensure collective benefit.

. . . While the household is the basic unit of decision making, gaining cooperation from the entire population to preserve forest resources requires some institutional structures.

. . . To generate voluntary cooperation institutional arrangements built on the talents and interests of the users themselves are required for sustained commitment. Towards this end, flexibility for arriving at an institutional arrangement that members regard as "theirs" and for which they will take responsibility will be encouraged to ensure sustainability. (DSC/CARE, 1997, pp. 20-21)

Out of fifteen targeted VDCs, the project was working in nine VDCs by early 1997. The project cycle is divided into seven stages: problem identification, problem analysis, identifying constraints and resources, developing an action plan, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and applying lessons learned. By the time the final evaluation of the first phase (the first five years) of the project was conducted in January 1997, none of the sites had completed the entire cycle. They were at different stages. For instance, seven villages were at the last two stages and two were at the second stage (Shrestha & Jacobsen, 1997). Both villages selected for study-- Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke-- were in the last two stages.

CARE Nepal, Syangja has recently initiated a family health care project in collaboration with a local NGO: Andha Andhi Community Development Center (AACDC). The head office of AACDC is in Chilaunabase VDC of the Syangja District. The program is entirely funded by USAID Nepal. This program has been implemented in both Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke. In both villages AACDC has a health service consultation center with a site in-charge who is trained in community medicine. Each center also has a locally hired women motivator. The main function of the center is to impart health related knowledge to the community,

specifically to women. Besides its drop-in facility and door to door visits, the center uses mothers' groups and literacy classes to implement its activities.

Community Organization Strategy of UAKWMP

The principle behind the UAKWMP community organization, as mentioned in CARE/Nepal's Long-Range Strategy Plan for 1993/94-97/98, is "to empower communities to assume responsibility for their own development processes. It is also to enable them to prioritize, plan, implement, maintain and evaluate all related local interventions through transfer of organizational and managerial skills, technical knowledge and resource generation and mobilization techniques" (Tuladhar and King, 1995, pp. 18) .

The UAKWMP staff made some adjustments to their original approach as they began to implement their community organization component. The community organization strategy of UAKWMP includes the following (ibid.):

- a. Preparatory stage (area familiarization and community selection): In this stage a team consisting of the Project manager, Co-manager, Socio economist, Agroforester and overseer, visited the area in order to familiarize themselves with the setting. The main activities at this stage include the introduction of the project staff to the local people, the collection of basic information about the VDCs and prioritization of the VDCs for project implementation. The VDCs are prioritized on the basis of environmental factors effecting watershed condition, soil

erosion, etc., and factors effecting community participation, interest and local organization.

- b. **Participatory-community-problem analysis:** In the second step the project staff meet with community members at the VDC level and then the ward level. The approaches used in this stage include group discussions and the use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques. At the end of this stage a site/ward is selected, problems identified by the community are identified and a year-long plan for project support to the sites is developed.
- c. **Entry of project team:** In this step a field office is established with field staff such as a Development Assistant and a Woman Motivator. An Overseer is also assigned who covers one to two VDCs.
- d. **Formation of community based organizations:** In this stage community organizations such as, CDCC, Mothers' Groups, Users' Groups: forest users' groups, water users' groups, etc. are organized.
- e. **Technical Surveys:** In this stage agroforesters and bio-engineers in coordination with the Development Assistants and the Users' groups, undertake the surveys.
- f. **Training:** In order to enhance the capacity of community organizations to effectively plan, manage and sustain development activities, UAKWMP provides a series of trainings to the members.

- g. Implementation: In this stage, the users' groups and the community organizations such as Mothers' Groups implement activities according to their needs and interests.
- h. Participatory monitoring and evaluation: This step has been initiated as a pilot project in which the implementors monitor and evaluate their activities. For instance, a forest users' group monitors seedling survival rates and replanting needs.
- i. Phase Out and Expansion to new communities: None of the project sites have yet reached this stage. However, the project has expanded to new VDCs.

At the beginning of each fiscal year, the project staff organize a Ward-level mass meeting using PRA techniques to identify needs. In this meeting the groups put forward their needs and then prioritized them. When these two steps are completed, the CDCC identifies the resources. Some needs may require outside funding, some may be carried on with the group fund, or some may even need VDC support. Depending on the funding situation, time commitment, etc., the groups decide whether they could still implement the program/activity. However, CARE Nepal/UAKWMP, depending on their financial and human resource capacity, decides where and how many similar activities it can allow in one fiscal year. In this sense, the project prioritizes the needs on the basis of the resources they have available.

Literacy Strategy of CARE Nepal and UAKWMP

Although CARE Nepal has a long history of participating in the development activities of Nepal its NFE and/or literacy activities started only in 1989 in Mahhottari (Duijnhouwer, 1996). According to the NFE strategy of CARE Nepal, 1994, the primary objective of CARE Nepal's literacy program is: "to increase and sustain the level of literacy within rural communities, particularly for girls, women and disadvantaged groups" (ibid.).

However, in addition to helping the participants learn to read and write, CARE Nepal aims at building learners' self confidence and self respect, thus enabling them to participate in the decision making and implementation of development activities. They also aim to provide the learners with practical knowledge relevant to their lives such as health, agro-forestry; creating awareness about community, social and economic issues. In this respect, the literacy strategy of CARE Nepal cuts across all the conceptual trends within the field of adult literacy discussed in chapter two.

CARE Nepal's adult literacy program is divided into two phases. The duration of each phase is about six months, though it may vary depending on the nature of the project. The first phase is called Basic Literacy Class (BLC) and the second phase is known as the Advanced Literacy Class (ALC). The classes are conducted for two hours every day in the evening except on Saturdays.

Usually in basic classes, the program uses the government-published Naya Goreto I and II. In the second phase, in most cases, CARE Nepal has produced materials relevant to their project. Efforts are made to revise the materials produced by the project periodically on the basis of the facilitators' and learners' feedback. In

most cases, CARE Nepal's advanced literacy materials include subject matters relevant to their specific projects related to community development, community organization, health, conservation, etc. In other words, the ALC is more functional and includes practical demonstrations when possible.

The adult literacy program in the UAKWMP follows the same pattern. In Basic Literacy Classes Naya Goreto is used. The Advanced Literacy Class has a set of four primers, each primer focuses on specific issues. The first book focuses on the cultural/traditional positive and negative practices found in the society, the second book focuses on group formation and the roles and responsibilities of the office holders, the third book deals with mother and child health, personal health and hygiene, sicknesses prevalent in the area, and the fourth book focuses on conservation agriculture and natural resource conservation. The entire series deals with issues relevant to daily practices of village life, particularly in the UAKWMP area. The primers are revised periodically. The project organizes a workshop in which the field level staff offer feedback and suggestions. This feedback and collected suggestions are then integrated and a newer version is designed. By 1997, the ALC primers were revised four times.

Facilitators of BLC are provided a 10 day long pre-service training and a refresher's training after 3 months. Similarly, facilitators of ALC are provided a 10 to 12 day long pre-service training and a follow-up/orientation training before they start book four. Both women and men facilitate the literacy classes in Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke.

The literacy program is not something that CARE Nepal automatically provides at certain points during the project, but is offered only when women ask for it. All of the groups come with their needs to the mass meeting organized at the beginning of a fiscal year. If the Mothers' Group, for instance, has identified the need for a literacy class for the women in the Ward it will propose it in that meeting. The Mothers' Group must select the facilitator and space to run the class. In most cases, they are able to manage this. CARE Nepal then provides the primers and a small amount of remuneration to the facilitators. The Mothers' Groups ask for BLC or ALC on the basis of the level of the learners.

Development of Mothers' Groups in UAKWMP

Before talking about the Mothers' Groups (locally known as Aama Samuha) it is important to briefly mention the Community Development and Conservation Committee (CDCC) because the CDCC and the Mothers' Groups in both villages work closely together. Further, the CDCC is required to have a representative from the Mothers' Group in its executive body.

The CDCC is organized in the Ward level. The members of the CDCC are elected in a Ward-level mass meeting. The CDCC's role in general is planning and coordinating, which includes generating peoples' participation, identifying local resources, and assisting other groups in prioritizing their needs. In most cases, the other groups, including the Mothers' Groups, are formed under the CDCC. The CDCC, to some extent, is an umbrella organization represented by various groups, such as users' groups and mothers' groups.

Since the CARE/Nepal seeks to reach women, the poor and the disadvantaged groups of the society, mobilization of women through group formation in its project area has been one of the groups' main activities. The women's participation in the UAKWMP, is based on the following assumptions:

The roles and tasks of women lead them to interact intensively with the agro ecological system upon which they depend for survival. They rely on natural resources to meet their daily needs, such as water, fuel wood, fodder, and other products for household maintenance. Hence, women's involvement in planning and decision making will be critical to achieve project objectives. (1997, p. 23)

In order to achieve its objectives, the project has been building the capacities of the Mothers' Groups through training, visits and grants. Generally there is one Mothers' Group per ward, but two if the settlement is dispersed. There are 68 Mothers' Groups in the project area, out of which 23 have already registered under the District Administration as NGOs and have obtained legal status. Theoretically, there should be a VDC level Mothers' Group which is represented by executive members of ward level mothers' groups. There is a district level Mothers' Group in Syangja, but due to political differences among the women, not all the Ward level mothers' groups are happy with the current executive body of the District level group.

Tuladhar and King (1995) found out that the Mothers' Groups in UAKWMP area have developed in three different ways . Some have 'evolved out of an indigenous tradition of collective action'. This type of Mothers' Group is found in the Gurung community. Some Mothers' Groups are reminiscent of the mothers' groups formed by the Department of Public Health and Small Farmers' Development Project

several years ago. Still others were initiated by UAKWMP and are influenced by the activities undertaken by the Mothers' Groups in other VDCs.

Mothers' Groups are self-help community based organizations. In the UAKWMP area the selection of the executive members of Mothers' Groups is a ward level event. They are selected in a general mass meeting. Efforts are made to ensure representation from all the clusters in the ward. The executive body consists of nine members: chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, treasurer and five members. The rest of the women besides these nine executive members are general members. The executive members are responsible for ensuring the participation of all women in the ward who take care of children and older women who were married and have raised children. In the beginning, some Mothers' Groups collected a certain amount of money to establish a group fund from every household. Later, a membership fee and/or monthly fee was charged, that everybody would deposit in the group fund. In most cases this trend stopped at some point. For instance, the Mothers' Group of ward # 1 of Bangsing collected Rs. 100 from every household and established a group fund. After two years the group decided to collect Rs.1 every month and an annual membership fee. This trend never really got off the ground. Similarly, the Mothers' Group of ward # 1, Bange Fadke, established its fund by collecting Rs. 50 from each household and Rs.1 for 3-4 months from its members, but this practice was stopped. Examples from Bange Fadke are of similar.

The members of the Mothers' Groups are mainly married women with children. In many Wards, women from every household in the Ward are the members of the group (Tuladhar and King, 1995). This, in fact, is the case in Siludanda Aama

Samuha of Ward # 7 of Bange Fadke. However, the executive committee members in all cases are experienced mothers.

One or two women from the executive committee are always in the CDCC. In most cases the CDCC and Mothers' Groups work very closely together. In Ward # 5 and 8 of Bange Fadke it goes even further, the Mothers' Group and CDCC have one single fund. The women do not find it necessary to have separate meetings as both are committed to their communities and to assisting each other in achieving their objectives. However, CDCC is still perceived as a fathers or men's group as most members of CDCC are men.

The Mothers' Groups have been revitalized by the project in order to promote gender-balanced participation in development activities. The underlying objective however, is to enhance women's social and economic situations by bringing them into all stages of development activities, from planning to decision making; and to give them control over resources and information, as well as labor contributions and benefits sharing. Though some Mothers' Groups were already engaged in community activities, as in Siludanda Ama Samuha and Naupuja Ama Samuha of Bange Fadke, they were encouraged to function in a more organized and systematic way by the UAKWMP.

Theoretically, the Mothers' Groups of the UAKWMP area are guided by the Mothers' Group mandate formulated by the Department of Public Health when it initiated the group formation in 1989. But in practice most groups function according to their own needs and convenience. The groups meet once a month except during planting and harvest season. According to the mandate the executive committee should

be reshuffled every year, but at least in Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke this is not the case. They have been comfortable with the same office holders for 3-4 years, thus, the leadership has remained the same.

The Mothers' Groups in Bangsing Deurali were formed with the initiation of the UAKWMP, whereas in the Gurung community of Bange Fadke Mothers' Groups already existed. Gurung women used to sing and dance and collect money during Tihar.¹⁰ Most of the time, the women, spent their money on food and drinks. But they realized that they should be using that money for community service. The mothers then began to call their groups "Mothers' Party." They raised their funds by performing and by asking for contributions. The mothers used their money to renovate temples and construct foot trails around the village. For instance, the Naupuja Mothers' Group of Ward # 7 constructed a foot trail to the cemetery of Gurung gurus situated up the hill in Ward # 8.

Mothers' Parties were very informal groups in which every dealing was based on the trust that they held between each other. There was always someone (in most cases men) to help them keep the accounts. When their male counterparts returned from the military service, they began to assist the mothers in their activities. The reason that these women started community work is a strong sense of service or dharma¹¹ towards the people and community.

Though traditionally the responsibility of the mothers' groups formed by the Department of Public Health was confined to sharing information and executing activities related to mother and child health, these days the groups' roles and responsibility have expanded to concrete activities that are beneficial to the

community as a whole. This is the case with the Mothers' Groups in Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke. The Mothers' Groups in both Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke have undertaken various activities such as the purchase of utensils for community members to rent out when needed; kitchen gardening; forest conservation; construction of foot trails, meeting halls, pit latrines, temples as well as the roofing of school building.

Mothers' Groups in both VDCs do the fund raising mainly through cultural activities such as singing and dancing. As a group they go to people's houses in times of religious events, the birth of a son or some other celebration, to perform and ask for a contribution. Some members of the Mothers' Group also work as wage laborers for the project to transport seedlings from the bottom of the hill to the villages to raise their funds. Additionally, when Lahures¹² and civil servants of their wards come home they ask for contributions from them as well.

Following this situation, the next chapter will specifically focus on the research methodology that I used to gather information for this study.

End Notes

1. The DDCs and VDCs are the governing bodies at the local levels. They are also responsible for identifying and planning development needs of their areas. Since the overall focus of the nation is on development the governing bodies at the district and village levels are called development committees instead of governing bodies.
2. Approximately Seventy-two hundred U.S. Dollars as of September 1998.
3. A government program for any out-of-school girls including domestic workers.

4. REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) approach is based on Paulo Freire's theoretical work and PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) techniques. REFLECT promotes dialogue and empowerment through literacy circle. Literacy circle participants develop their own materials thereby taking ownership of the issues that emerge. REFLECT has been implemented in Uganda, Bangladesh, and El Salvador. It has recently been implemented in Nepal as well.
5. The objectives of Mothers' Club was to develop and promote underprivileged women's social and economic status; formulate suitable projects for income generation and provide basic facilities for skill development and assist women in developing self-reliance through identification of areas and resources for income generation activities (Thapa & Shrestha, 1996).
6. SSNCC was established under the auspices/patronage of the Queen. After the restoration of a multi-party system in 1991, SSNCC was renamed as Social Welfare Council and the Queen was no longer the patron.
7. An updated information package compiled by the CARE/Nepal office for newly arrived personnel. This package includes basic information about all the projects that CARE/Nepal has been involved in.
8. An irrigated, cultivated plot.
9. An uphill, rain-fed plot.
10. Second largest Hindu festival in which men, women, and children go door-to-door singing and dancing and ask for gifts. They are usually given money and/or sweets.
11. Dharma here refers to an unconditional service or divine duty towards one's community.
12. Men who are in the British or Indian army and those who are working in other countries.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief discussion on how I arrived at doing this study. This is followed by a discussion of the research methodology and the methods of data analysis. The concluding section presents the limitations of the research design.

Initially, I was interested in exploring the impact of post-literacy programs on women's lives. However, when I began to explore the possible research sites I began to be interested in the integrated long-term programs rather than the short term program focused on classroom instruction and programs in which literacy is used as an entry point. My interest was based on the assumption that though the literacy programs bring changes in women's lives, there are always other elements surrounding literacy programs that also play a key role. Additionally, sometimes the activities that follow the literacy classes seem to be more effective in bringing about the changes than the literacy itself. Given this, and the support that CARE Nepal offered, I changed my focus and decided to make my study more open and inclusive. This led me to explore the elements, including the functional literacy programs, that contributed to women's experiences within an integrated development project.

Research Site

The study was undertaken in the Upper Andhi Khola Watershed Management Project (UAKWMP) in the Syangja District. UAKWMP is an integrated project jointly implemented by CARE Nepal and the Department of Soil Conservation of His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMGN). I decided to conduct my research in the UAKWMP area for several reasons. These reasons include the fact that CARE Nepal offered me logistical support when and where it was possible during my fieldwork.

I selected two villages: Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke from the project area. These were selected because they both had completed five out of the seven stages of project cycles (this is elaborated in Chapter III). Additionally, this gave me an opportunity to look at literacy and mothers' groups in two different ethnic groups: Brahman and Gurung. In terms of socio-cultural traditions and language these two ethnic groups are very different. In Bangsing Deurali I examined three mothers' groups representing the Brahman community and in Bange Fadke I examined two mothers' group representing the Gurung community.

Thus, one of the reasons for selecting groups from two different ethnic backgrounds is to examine if and how the interventions (literacy, community development, mothers' group, etc.) affect those women differently. Some differences in how women from each group view and experience the interventions are expected, which consequently, will broaden the findings and issues. Additionally, I wanted to engage in interaction with, and observe closely, women who belong to the ethnic groups different from my own.

Since this is an exploratory study which examines the women's groups and their experiences with the group actions and the literacy program, for my interviews, I selected those women who were active in the group and had participated in the literacy class. I interviewed 26 people, not including the participants of the group interviews. The following table reflects the number of the interview participants and which groups they are from.

Research Question

To explore my research questions I used a qualitative case study research process which included mainly a review of project documents and open ended interviews with the mothers' group members who had participated in literacy classes in recent years. In addition to the group members I conducted interviews with different levels of stakeholders: Development Assistants (UAKWMP field in-charge), UAKWMP Women Motivators, UAKWMP co-manager and the community health workers of Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke.

Given this context the primary question is: What are the factors that contribute to empowering women in rural Nepal as a collective group? and to what extent do literacy programs contribute to that process?

In order to formulate an answer to the primary question the following guiding questions were used in the interviews, observations and document review.

Why did the group ask for the literacy program?

What kinds of benefits did women get from the literacy program?

Table 2

Interview Participants

Groups	Individual interview*	Group interview	Interview participants
Lausibot Mothers' Group Ward # 1, Bangsing Deurali	4	1	-Chairperson -Vice-chairperson -Treasurer -general member
Mothers' Group Ward # 4, Bangsing Deurali	4	1	-Chairperson -Vice-chairperson -Treasurer -Secretary
Mothers' Group Ward # 6, Bangsing Deurali	4	1	-Chairperson -Treasurer -Secretary -general member
Naupuja Mothers' Group Ward # 5, Bange Fadke	4	-	-Vice-chairperson -Treasurer -general member -general member
Siludanda Mothers' Group Ward # 7, Bange Fadke	3	1	-Chairperson -Executive member -general member
UAKWMP field staff	5	-	-Development Assistant Bangsing Deurali -Development Assistant, Bange Fadke -Woman Motivator, Bangsing Deurali, -Woman Motivator, Bange Fadke -UAKWM Project Co- manager
AACDC field staff	2	-	-Site-in charge/health worker, Bangsing Deurali -Site-in charge/health worker, Bange fadke

* The number of the interview participants does not include the group interview participants. The individual interview also in some cases turned into a group interview which is not reflected in the table.

How have the benefits gained from the literacy program helped the mothers' groups?

Is the literacy program appropriate and effective for local mothers' groups?

How would it be if there was only the literacy program and not mothers' groups?

What has been the impact of the mothers' groups in the lives of the group members?

Is the mothers' group appropriate and effective in the local community?

Research Methods and Instruments

In addition to gathering information through document reviews from the CARE Nepal's head office in Kathmandu, field office in Bhatkhola, Syangja and site offices in Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke VDCs, I collected field data using three qualitative research approaches. Those three approaches are: observation, group interviews, and one on one interviews. As indicated in the previous section I did not use formal interview questions, instead I used the guiding questions for my the interviews.

My decision to use a qualitative case study method is guided by two factors: my research question itself and the nature of qualitative case study research. Qualitative research method processes allow a researcher to gain a deeper understanding of a given situation or context by allowing her/him to explore and use various data gathering approaches. The qualitative case study method examines a given situation in its natural setting (Yin, 1994). The researchers for the purpose of a study do not frame settings. The qualitative case researchers use settings that already exist. The qualitative research

method seeks to delineate participants' interpretations and perspectives of the phenomenon, thus revealing their ways of thinking and knowing.

Additionally a qualitative method allows researchers to collect data in a variety of formal and informal approaches. Patton observes that,

Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contribute to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry. (ibid, p. 13)

Keeping this in mind I began my field work in May 1997. In February 1997 I made a preliminary visit to Syangja. During this visit I got acquainted with the UAKWMP field level staff in Bhatkhola where the field office is located. The next day I went to Bangsing Deurali with the UAKWMP Development Assistant (DA). I stayed in the village for two days. While I was in Bangsing Deurali I visited two literacy classes and introduced myself to some members of the Mothers' Groups. The UAKWMP field staff arranged my meetings and class observation.

As mentioned earlier, I used the following approaches to collect information for this study: the review of documents, observation, group interviews, and one on one interviews. The data collection techniques that I used were not only a set of approaches but also a process, which interacted with each other and also overlapped. Each approach and/or stage helped me make decisions for my next step in the research process. In other words, the approaches allowed me to adjust to the circumstances in the field. All the approaches I employed to collect data triangulated together, allowing me to see a holistic picture of the UAKWMP's intervention, and the women's experience with the community development, groups and literacy programs. The

following discussion on the approaches that I used will present a picture of the process that I went through in the course of data gathering.

The review of documents is an approach which researchers use to gain a detailed understanding of the setting through analyzing the content of a given document. The researcher, depending on the nature of the study, reviews the contents of the documents ranging from the minutes of staff meetings to policy statements to memos. In this study I focused on the national policy on women's education, UAKWMP and CARE Nepal's mission statements, evaluation reports, reports on literacy programs, community organization/development trend in Nepal just to mention a few. This helped me understand the nature of the literacy program and also the community development strategies implemented in Nepal. The review of the documents helped me decide what kind of information to look for in my observations and interviews.

Observation is an approach to data gathering through which, "the researcher learns about behaviors and the meanings attached to those behaviors" (Marshall and Rossman 1995, pp. 84). The researcher, through keen observation, prepares field notes, which can either serve as data itself or can be used to formulate questions for the interview instrument. In this study I used observation for both purposes. On the one hand I used this approach to understand and explain the physical environment of the setting and the nature of interaction among the participants of women's groups and between the facilitator and the participants in the literacy classes. This helped me reformulate my guiding questions as well as understand the women's groups and the literacy classes better.

Group interviews are conducted with a group of people. This approach also allows people to discuss an issue and/or question in a conversational manner which is less stressful. People get an opportunity to listen to, argue with and at the same time verify their opinions with each other. This situation creates a more natural environment for the participants to communicate their ideas. I organized one group meeting in each mothers' group except in Naupuja Mothers' Group of Bange Fadke. In this group since the mothers were busy with the farm work it was difficult to bring them together at one place at one time.

The group meetings consisted of 6 to 8 women. However, in some instances individual interviews also ended up being a group interview. This is because of the informal way of village life. Anyone can visit anytime and participate in an on-going conversation. This happens even more when the villagers know that somebody from outside is visiting. I did not stop this from happening. Instead I viewed it as a natural process in gathering my data.

One on one interviews allow participants' perspective to unfold in a conversational manner. Since the one on one interview in qualitative research is not as structured as in a regular interview technique, the setting allows participants to journey through their experiences and perspectives more freely. I conducted one on one interviews with members of the mothers' groups and with those who, at some point participated in the literacy class. In addition to interviewing the group members I interviewed UAKWMP's field in-charges who are called Development Assistants (DA), field staff of Andha Andhi Community Development Center (AACDC), the UAKWMP Co- Manager, UAKWMP Women Motivator and community health workers. The

interviews with women took place mostly in their homes. I had prepared a set of guiding questions for my interview after my preliminary visit, which I revised along with my observations and some interviews. The rationale for using this approach is based on the notion that "the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" Marshall and Rossman (1995, p. 80). I spent a considerable amount of time with women which allowed them to talk about their experiences at length.

In order to capture the perspectives and experiences of the participants as they unfold in a natural settings. I allowed myself to be more attentive as participants talked by taping all the interviews. In addition to the above mentioned approaches I kept journal entries through-out my fieldwork. The research journal has been very useful for me, particularly to gain an insight into my own experiences of the inquiry process.

Methods of Analysis

My method of analysis is basically interpretative. My intention in doing interpretative research was to discover the changes that the mothers' group members are experiencing in their lives and what they view as the contributing factors to those changes. I discussed, asked questions and observed classes to capture women's experiences with literacy classes, community activities and the intervention of the Upper Andhi Kholā Watershed Management Project.

First Step

I had taped interviews which I listened to and transcribed. In order to make sense of and interpret the data, I generated inferences from the transcribed data by developing categories and themes. Until I transcribed the data I didn't have a framework that I had selected to report on my information. After reviewing the data and my research question several times I found it most relevant to structure the information within three categories: self, group and community empowerment processes. Each category is substantiated by themes. This helped me present the women's perspectives through a structured framework (Marshall & Rossman, 1994). I used direct quotes from discussions and interviews drawn from the transcribed information. Since my research question itself is directed towards the issues of empowerment I was able to generate a framework from the experiences and opinions of the mothers' group members themselves, instead of borrowing a framework from the literature.

Second Step

In the second step I identified the elements that cut across or informed the self, group and community empowerment processes. Looking at the categories and themes it was clear that they fell into three broad areas: programmatic factors, non programmatic factors and long term intervention. The first section looks at the factors that are found because of the UAKWMP intervention and how it impacted the empowerment processes. The second section looks at the factors outside of the UAKWMP intervention that influenced the empowerment process. The third section looks at the issue of long term intervention and how it supports women to move towards the

empowerment processes. The focus lies on the elements under each section that substantiates the empowerment processes.

Limitations

One of the issues that I consider as the biggest problem with my field work is the number and composition of the participants. The group members I interviewed are very limited in numbers. Moreover, most of the women with whom I conducted individual interviews hold some kind of position in the group structure. If the number of the participants was larger and more varied in terms of their positions within the group structure, the findings would have been more generalizable.

Regarding the composition of the participants, I also came to realize that men should have been included in the study, as it would have enriched the findings. Moreover, the discussion might have persuaded men from the community to think about issues, that they, otherwise would never consider thinking about. Therefore, if I were to do a study of this kind again, I would include men in my group of participants.

The design also suffered from a time limitation. Due to a lack of financial support I could not spend as much time in the field as I would have liked to. If this was a longitudinal study it would have produced more in-depth and valuable information. It would also have provided me with more in-depth knowledge of the women's informal groups, literacy and outside interventions.

The inability to include the marginalized women (lower caste women) has also impacted the findings. I was not aware that one of the groups that I was going to examine consisted of women from lower class households. I was not prepared to

include them because I had not reviewed any research or literature that would have helped me understand more about the cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of these women. And also my limited time would not have allowed me to do more than I set off to do.

My inability to speak the Gurung language also had an impact on my data gathering. In the Gurung community I was not able to talk to as many women as I did in the Brahman community. Some Gurung women were hesitant to talk to me on the grounds that their Nepali language is not good enough to answer my questions. For instance, the group members of the Siludanda Mothers' Group of Bange Fadke told their Chairperson that they didn't know what I wanted and how to respond to my queries, so they didn't want to talk to me. However, I think that the tendency of approving and accepting what the elders say is also the reason the Gurung women were not willing to talk to me. I think that since their Chairperson, whom they respect very much already talked to me, they didn't see why it was necessary for them to do the same.

I am aware that this study raises an issue about the definition of empowerment as it is viewed by the women I interviewed. I did not specifically ask women for their definitions of empowerment because on the one hand the objective and the goals of the project (UAKWMP) do not indicate empowerment as their goal, and on the other, I was more interested in examining if the experience and knowledge of women with (programmatic or non-programmatic) activities that they are involved in would support the indicators of empowerment as reflected in the selected literature.

CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDIES

Introduction

This chapter presents a brief overview of the geographical location, the population composition and a social overview of Bangsing Deurali VDC. This will be followed by the profiles of the three mothers' groups of the village selected for this study. The third section of the chapter presents a brief overview of the geographical location, the population composition and a social overview of Bange Fadke VDC. This will be followed by the profiles of the two mothers' groups of Bange Fadke selected for the study. The concluding section will discuss the literacy programs in these two villages.

As mentioned in chapter three, out of fifteen targeted VDCs, the Upper Andhi Khola Watershed Management Project (UAKWMP) was working in nine VDCs by early 1997. Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke are two of those nine villages. The Upper Andhi Khola Watershed Management Project of Syangja District is an integrated community, as well as a conservation development project implemented by CARE Nepal in collaboration with the Department of Soil Conservation (DSC) of HMG. It has completed its fifth year and has been extended for another five years.

The UAKWMP cycle is divided into seven stages: problem identification, problem analysis, identifying constraints and resources, developing an action plan, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and applying lessons learned. (see Chapter

III). In 1997 when the field work for this study was conducted both Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke were at the last two stages.

Bangsing Deurali

Geographical Location and Population

Bangsing Deurali is situated at 1,500 meters above sea level. It is situated in the northwest part of the project area. To the east of Bangsing Deurali sits Bange Fadke, to its west is Bicharichautara and to its south is Chilaunebas VDC. In the north is the Kaski District.

According to a survey conducted by the UAKWMP in 1996, Bangsing Deurali's population is predominantly Brahman and Chettri with some lower caste households. The lower castes include blacksmiths, cobblers and tailors. The total population of the village is 3, 132 (CARE field office Chart), out of which 1, 516 are male and 1, 616 are women. The average family size in Bangsing Deurali is 8. There are 510 households. Out of 510, eighty-eight households belong to the lower caste and the remaining 422 belong to Brahman and Chettri.

Occupations in Bangsing vary according to ethnicity. For Brahmans and Chettris the main occupation is agriculture, teaching and government service. For lower castes, traditional work and wage labor on other peoples' land are the main sources of earning. There is also a tendency among young men to go to India or to Arab countries to work. Most people in Bangsing Deurali are Hindus. There are 2 primary schools, 3 lower secondary schools and 1 high school in Bangsing Deurali. The main crops of

Bangsing Deurali are maize, mustard, millet, wheat and rice. Spices, oil and clothes are some of the main items that are imported.

UAKWMP Activities

The UAKWMP initiated its project work in Bangsing Deurali in 1992. The major programs in the VDC are as follows:

- o Engineering: drinking water supply, irrigation, gully control, landslide treatment, kuwa¹ renovation, plant nursery, community tree planting, and improved stove construction;
- o On site training: seasonal and off-season vegetable and fruit farming, improved stove, bee farming and integrated pest management;
- o Training and visits: CDCC/Mothers' Group orientation training, CDCC/Mothers' Group management, in-country visits for CDCC/Mothers' groups, care-taker training (e.g., repair and maintenance training of drinking water scheme), latrine slab construction, female adult education facilitator's training for both basic and functional levels;
- o Income generation program: income generation program for disadvantaged groups (lower caste) of ward # 2. The main activities under this program are pig farming, goat farming, buffalo raising, iron and copper utensil manufacturing.
- o The Conservation Education Program at Shwarn High School.
- o Andhi-Khola Conservation Farmers' Group: the project provided conservation farming training for about 142 farmers from seven VDCs.

However, since this training did not result in any satisfactory outcomes, two to three trained farmers including both women and men from each VDC were selected and given additional training in order to capacitate them as model conservation farmers. This training included visits to other districts which increased their motivation very much. The group then started to meet once a month and exchanged their experience and knowledge. In order to provide an institutional structure the group asked for support from the UAKWMP. The project then provided the group with trainings appropriate to an organization. The group so far has held an agriculture exhibition, given conservation farming training to interested farmers and has provided orientation on conservation farming to NFE facilitators during their training.

Social Overview

All the women from Bangsing Deurali who were interviewed were Brahmans. In order to understand where those women stand in terms of cultural and social contexts, the following section will briefly talk about the Brahmans of Nepal.

Though Brahmans are found throughout Nepal more than half of them live in the Western hills (Bista, 1967). Traditionally, Brahmans have been a highly educated and influential group in Nepal. Their mother tongue is Nepali. The priests however, are knowledgeable in the Sanskrit language, since the religious scripts are written in Sanskrit. The main occupations of Brahmans are agriculture and government service including teaching jobs. This is true of the Brahmans of Bangsing Deurali as well.

Brahmans are divided into groups: Purbiya and Kumai. Kumai is said to be named after Kumaon, a place in northern India. It is said that Purbiya and Kumai Brahmans might have migrated from different parts of India and each considers itself purer than does the other (Bista, 1967). Additionally, if a Brahman man marries a widow or someone from a lower caste, the children of such union are called Jainisi Brahmans. Jainisis are considered lower in status than both Purbiya and Kumai Brahmans.

The Brahman caste is relatively conservative; however, they have recently undergone many changes. Still, the rural Brahmans have not observed the same magnitude of change as have their urban counterparts. The Brahmans are a rigid and class/status conscious community in Nepal. Brahman women are bound by a lot of social and cultural conditions which restrict them from participating in activities outside their immediate families/households. Brahman women and girls are most of the time involved in household chores and farm work, since their male counterparts are less likely to contribute in this area.

In the Brahman community, women and men are basically confined to their own family events and celebrations. They do not have any social or community institutions where they gather and participate in activities or perform work as a group. Marriage in the Brahman caste is viewed as a spiritual obligation, only after which a woman gains her full status in the family and society (Bista, 1967). When her husband dies a Brahman woman can not wear colorful clothes, beads or tika,² and her status also changes. This practice of observing the mourning of one's husband for life has been changing, mostly among younger women in the cities, but not in the rural areas.

The Brahmans of Bangsing Deurali are very strict in maintaining caste hierarchy. They do not touch the lower caste people or accept food or drink from them. Interestingly though, most Brahmans encountered during the study claimed to be strong supporters of the Communist Party of Nepal: United Marxist-Leninist (NCPUML).

Mothers' Group, Lausibot, Ward # 1

There are two mothers' groups in Ward # 1 because the settlement is extended, thus making it harder for women from every household to gather in one place. Because of the distance it is also harder to communicate with one another, so the women decided to form two groups: one in Lausibot, another in Bharsyang.

In 1993, before the UAKWMP came to the village, a woman from Bharsyang who knew about the Mothers' Groups in the other villages encouraged the mothers of Ward # 1 to form a Mothers' Group. The women organized a ward level meeting. In that meeting, the woman from Bharsyang who was taking the initiative talked about the work that mothers' groups in other villages were doing. The women then decided to form a mothers' group in their Ward as well. They selected the chairperson, treasurer, and secretary of the group. They decided to collect Rs. 100 per household for developmental work in their ward. They bought a madal³ and started performing dance and songs for fund raising. They were able to make about five to six thousand rupees. They loaned this amount in interest to the women. However, given the nature of the settlement, keeping one another informed and getting together was quite difficult. In 1994 the UAKWMP came and sponsored the group. The group was reorganized and split into two: Lausibot Mothers' Group and Bharsyang Mothers' Group.

There are 60 households in Lausibot. Members of the Lausibot Mothers' Group are all Brahmans. There are 9 executive members and all can read and write their names. At the selection time, priority was given to those who could write at least their names, but this was not strictly observed. Both the Chairperson and the Treasurer learned to read and write in the NFE class. The CDCC and the Mothers' Group were formed the same day. This made it easier for women to get together in a more organized manner.

Profile of the Executive Committee Members. The Chairperson of the group is a 51-year-old single woman who has a daughter married to a man from another district. She has two stepsons who also live in another district. Her husband died long ago. She has been the chairperson of the mothers' group from the beginning. This Chairperson ran for ward member as a woman candidate from the Nepali Congress Party, a right wing political party, in the local election but she did not win. The Vice-chairperson has two grown sons and a husband who is a government officer working in another district. The Treasurer has two small children and a husband who is a teacher in the local school. She is an elected ward member. She belongs to the Nepali Communist Party: United Marxist-Leninist (NCPUML). The Treasurer represents the mothers' group in the CDCC executive committee. The Secretary has two small children and a husband who is a local schoolteacher. She has completed her SLC⁴ and is doing the Intermediate level.⁵ She does most of the writing work in the group including minute keeping in the meetings. The Treasurer did, however, participate in a one-day training on accounting. When the money is gathered it is given to the chairperson. The Chairperson and the Treasurer keep the accounts and decide how much to lend, and when to lend it. The

Chairperson and the Treasurer report the transactions to the Secretary who puts it down on paper and presents it back to the group. However, the Treasurer and Secretary's husbands, both of whom are schoolteachers, help them with the account keeping and recording all the time.

Group Activities. The Lausibot mothers' group has been registered under the District Administration within the District level Mothers' Group. According to the Mothers' Group mandate, the executive committee is supposed to be reformulated every two years, but this group has stayed the same since its formation. Nobody felt the need to reform the committee.

The regular meeting of the group is held once every month, but the executive members can meet other times if needed. The executive members divide the tasks among themselves. When they have a Mothers' Group meeting, each one informs and reminds the women in her neighborhood about the date and time of the meeting.

The main objectives of Lausibot Mothers' Group were to construct foot trails, a drinking water system, and a building. The group constructed the foot trail. Money for the foot trail came from the group fund, the villagers made the labor contribution, and the wages for skilled labor came from the project. Each household took turns to provide the day's meals to the workers.

After the completion of the foot trail construction project, the DA advised the women to propose pit latrine and improved stove construction projects. The group implemented the both the pit-latrines and improved stove projects. In most activities, the UAKWMP would provide technical training and/or materials and the group arranged

other necessary elements. The group has also started conservation work and a drinking water project.

Fund raising is also one the most important activities of the group. Though married women with children, and women who are responsible for taking care of children, are automatically the members of the Mothers' Group, the Lausibot Mothers' Group decided to distribute the membership to the women from the Ward to make the group financially as well as institutionally stronger. Those who were willing to pay the annual membership fee did so and joined the group. Since on the one hand the group was not strict enough to implement the membership, and on the other it was difficult to ask for money from women who do not have a regular earning, the membership scheme could not take off the ground. But in 1996 the group started to collect Rs. 1 per month from the members. The group raises funds mainly by performing at people's houses in times of religious celebrations and social events including the birth of a male child. They also ask for contributions from Lahures, and civil servants who come home on vacation.

Additionally, the project provided seeds for groups which also helped generate money. In the first year, the project gave seeds to the groups for free but required the women to deposit fifty percent of the cost into their fund. During the second year the project still gave the seed for free but the groups were required to deposit a hundred percent of the cost in their group fund. From the third year on, the project only paid the transportation and charged the price of the seed from the women.

Lausibot also has a Forest Users' Group (FUG). Women bring plants for the forest from the UAKWMP nursery which is in Ward # 9. The forest is growing well

and the FUG has started selling grass from that forest. Although the FUG is not only a women's group, women also share the benefit as it is a community resource.

The Lausibot Mothers' Group members borrow money from the group fund on interest. The women borrow money from the group fund in times of medical needs, pregnancies at home, weddings of their children, and in some cases they also borrow to buy livestock.

The group asked for the class one year after the group was formed. The women have completed both basic and advanced literacy classes. The learners did not find the basic literacy course very useful. The functional classes were more important and useful for them.

Additional Training and Visits. The UAKWMP offers training to the group in different areas, such as vegetable gardening, agroforestry, group management, and accounting. Recently, Andha Andhi Community Development Center (AACDC) and the UAKWMP jointly organized a visit for mothers' groups. The Vice-chairperson of Lausibot Mothers' Group was selected for the visit. They were taken to Janakpur which is in the Central Development Region. During such visits women are expected to share their experiences with the host groups and vice versa. They talk about their groups and activities.

Besides training and visits, the women sometimes need additional support and assistance, which the DA, the Women Motivator and other UAKWMP field staff offer. The DA, for instance, facilitated the need identification meeting of the Lausibot Mothers' Group.

The Lausibot Mothers' Group works closely with the Community Development and Conservation Committee (CDCC). The CDCC plays the role of advisor to the Mothers' Group. It also assists and supports the group when needed. Also when the group has to make decisions on bigger investments such as the construction of foot-trails, or drinking water systems, a Ward meeting is called, in which both men and women are present.

Mothers' Group, Thulakeht/Daha, Ward # 4

The village in ward # 4 has two clusters. One is on the upper elevation and the other is at the lower level. This makes it harder for women to come to the meetings. The women from the upper elevation do not want to go down the hill for meetings and those on the lower level do not like to walk up the hill. In observing the group meeting, and also listening to their conversations, I found that the issue around the venue of the meeting has been an ongoing debate among the members. Due to this tension the group meeting is held at the chautari⁶ which is somewhere in the middle of both clusters.

Since it takes a lot of time to walk from one cluster to another, the Mothers' Group has kept its fund in two places. One is in the upper cluster and another is in the lower cluster. The women decided to make this arrangement because in times of emergency it would be very difficult for women to get the money if the fund is in another cluster. Though the Chairperson, who lives in the lower cluster, does not know reading, writing or computation she keeps the account for the lower cluster fund. She

does the counting in her head. She could count only up to 30 before she joined the class, but these days she can count further. For the upper cluster, the Secretary does the job.

Profile of the Executive Committee Members. The Mothers' Group in ward # 4 was formed in 1993, with the initiative of the UAKWMP. There are 28 households in the ward. There are only seven executive members in the group. All the members are Brahmans. The chairperson of the group is in her late forties with seven grown children: four daughters and three sons. Her husband is an elected ward member who belongs to the Nepal Communist Party United Marxist-Leninist (NCPUML). The Chairperson did not know how to read or write. Still, as in previous group, nobody in the ward objected to her being the chairperson. She has been the chairperson since its inception. The executive committee has not reformed yet. If somebody leaves, the members simply find someone to replace that person.

The Treasurer is a 25-year-old married woman. She has completed the 5th grade. Although she knows how to read and write, she has been attending the basic literacy class. When asked why she joined the class, she said that the class has helped her remember the things that she has forgotten. She does not think that she was selected to be the treasurer because she knew how to write and read.

The Secretary is in her early thirties with 2 small children. She is an elected ward member from NCPUML. She stood in the election as a woman candidate from NCPUML. She is also a Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) and a member of the Community Development and Conservation Committee (CDCC). She did not know reading and writing well, but as soon as she completed the FCHV training she joined the functional class in a neighboring ward and completed that one too. Her

husband has been working in India for many years. She has a mother-in-law who helps with the child care as well as livestock raising. Since the mother-in-law shares child care and household chores, she gets time to attend meetings and to go places.

Group activities. The group is registered under the District Administration and pays the renewal fee every year (Rs. 100). One of the main activities of the Mothers' Group of ward # 4, as in any other groups, has been fund raising. At the beginning the group collected Rs. 50 per household. For four to five months Rs. 1 was collected at each meeting from every woman. Later that practice was stopped. These days the Mothers' Group ask for contributions from people who come home on leave. The group also collects an annual membership fee, which is Rs. 6. Though most women in the ward are members and pay the annual membership fees this has not been strictly practiced. The women also perform cultural activities at different religious and social occasions in people's houses and ask for contributions. As in other Wards, women from this Ward also raised their group funds by depositing the cost of the vegetable seeds that the UAKWMP gave them.

As in other groups, the literacy class is also one of the major activities of this group. The Ward was currently (1997) conducting a basic literacy class. The main objective of asking for the literacy class was to learn to read and write one's name. The expectation, according to the Secretary, was that those who could not even recognize "ka", (the first consonant in Nepali language) would learn to sign their names and those who already had some reading and writing skills would get an opportunity to recall what they have forgotten.

Though the mothers from this ward learned about practical knowledge and skills, such as sanitation through the pit-latrines program, and about smokeless stoves, and conservation through various other training programs offered by the UAKWMP, they were still interested in joining the functional literacy class, and so were planning to ask for functional class when they complete the basic.

Anyone who writes well in the group does the writing jobs. Sometimes women ask men to do the writing for them. The Secretary's writing and reading skills, though improved, are not enough for recording the information and minute keeping. The secretary has not faced any problem in doing her job in the group, as there is always someone to help.

Additional Training and Visits. Some of the executive members of the group have also participated in trainings on such topics as the Mothers' Group management, accounting, vegetable and fruit gardening and smokeless stoves. For instance, the Treasurer participated in a training on accounts, and the Chairperson participated in the management and Mothers' Group orientation trainings.

The treasurer of the group went to Madan Pokhara in Palpa, a neighboring district. It was a tour organized by the UAKWMP. The Mothers' Group members were taken to Madan Pokhara to show them a well known community development work that local groups have been doing. Similarly, the Chairperson went on a tour to Janakpur organized by the UAKWMP and AACDC.

The CDCC was formed the same year the Mothers' Group was formed. The group members have a very high opinion about CDCC. They look at the CDCC as their partner. They are proud that, though the CDCC is basically represented by men there

are women too. The CDCC informs the Mothers' Group about its activities and programs and The Mothers' Group also informs the CDCC about its programs and activities. The CDCC is also involved in the functioning of the Mothers' Group. The CDCC and the Mothers' Group work hand in hand.

Mothers' Group, Rimal Swara, Ward # 6

Rimal Swara mothers' group was established in 1993. The group has seven executive members. There are 33 households in ward # 6. Most women in the group are Brahmans. This mothers' group is not registered because most women in the executive committee did not have their citizenship card.⁷

Profile of Executive Committee Members. The chairperson of the group is an elderly woman with four children and five grandchildren. She is an elected ward member from NCPUML. The Chairperson's husband works in a bank in Pokhara, the closest city. Her husband's father is at home with her. The VDC Chairperson, and women and men from the village, insisted that she should run for the position, so she did. The Chairperson is also a member of the CDCC which was formed the same year, but shortly after the Mothers' Group. The Chairperson did not enroll in the literacy class because she already knew how to sign her name. Instead, she sent other women who did not know how to sign their names.

The Secretary is in her early twenties and has completed 5th grade. She is married with a small child. Her husband worked in India for many years. Now he is back and looks after the farming. She enrolled in the functional class but could not

continue for more than one month because of her small child. She does all the writing for the group.

The Treasurer is in her mid thirties with six small children, ranging from one to ten. She has been the Treasurer from the inception of the group. She could not attend the class because of frequent pregnancies and small children. She joined the functional class but discontinued after two months. The Treasurer takes care of the financial responsibilities of the group. When they receive money, the group members take it to the Treasurer. Her husband does the financial documentation and accounting. Since she could not leave the house, he represents her in meetings and other activities. The Treasurer's husband is the advisor of the Mothers' Group and so he assists the group in many ways. Considering her household situation the group members hold meetings and discussions at the Treasurer's house. In meetings her husband and the Secretary present the transaction report. They call meetings whenever the Treasurer's husband is at home.

Though most women from this Ward support CPNUML a political difference does exist in the group, as in the previous group.

Group Activities. The UAKWMP initiated the mothers' group in this Ward. The project staff came and organized a Ward meeting. They advised the villagers to form community organizations. The staff also discussed about the formation of the executive committees of the groups. The people who were present in the meeting agreed to the UAKWMP proposal and formed the groups by selecting the executive committee members.

The Mothers' Group has been involved in many activities but the prominent ones are fund raising, construction of the foot trail and drinking water system. They are

also, however, involved in sanitation work, including the construction of pit-latrines, and plantation.

As in other cases, one of the main activities of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 6 is fund raising. In the beginning every household contributed as much as they could. After that they started performing cultural programs at people's houses on different occasions and getting contributions. They ask for contributions from Lahures, most of whom are working in India, but some are also working in Brunei and Germany as well. The group also generated funds by depositing the cost price of seeds that they received from the UAKWMP. The group's sources of funds are mainly cultural programs and interest from the loan. However, the group has also made an interest free loan to the local school (Shrestha & Jacobsen, 1997).

Ward # 6 has completed both basic and functional classes. The women completed the basic class in which they learned to write their names and then asked for the advanced/functional class. They sent a list of those who showed interest in attending the functional class to the UAKWMP. The Mothers' Group selected the facilitator from the village and organized the class. Later the women became disinterested in continuing. They felt that learning to write their names was enough. Though the women from this Ward were not regular in the class, in the functional class they found lessons on topics such as health, HIV/AIDS, family planning, group formation, conservation, land slide control, vegetable gardening, compost manure, roles and responsibilities of mothers' group chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary very useful.

Additional Training/Activities and Visits. The Chairperson of this group has participated in trainings, such as the Mothers' Group orientation training, group management, and training on drinking water management. She went on two trips linked to Mother's Group activities. In her first trip she learned about the advantages of conservation, tree plantation and about the sustainability of the mothers' group. In her second visit which was to Janakpur, she learned about health issues, such as first aid, child care, nutrition, oral rehydration solution, pre-natal and post-natal care, and group organization. When asked how did the knowledge and skills she gathered from training and visits benefit the group, she responded that she told the women what she saw and what she learned. For instance, she recently gathered women from about thirty houses to report about her visit. She informed the women about health care issues which she learned from her trip to Janakpur.

Similarly, some mothers' group members participated in vegetable gardening training. Those who participated in the training demonstrated what they learned to other women in the village.

According to the evaluation report of the first phase of UAKWMP (Shrestha & Jacobsen, 1997), all activities such as community plantation, kitchen gardening, pit latrines and improved stoves undertaken by the Mothers' Group of Ward # 6, were initiated by the project. The group does not have any self-initiated activities. The report indicates that in the scale of low to high the chance of sustainability of this group is in the middle.

However, the Mothers' Group of Ward # 6 initiated another women's group to look after the health and sanitation work. On the one hand the existing mothers' group

alone could not take care of everything, and on the other, there was a feeling that other women should also have the opportunity to hold positions, thereby making them more active and smart. The women of the Ward formed this group on their own. One woman from the UAKWMP was supposed to come and help them but she could not. So the Chairperson of the Mothers' Group, with the help of other women, selected the executive committee members.

Bange Fadke

Geographical Location and Population

Bange Fadke Village is at 1, 100 to 1, 750 meters above the sea level. The total area of Bange Fadke is 187 hecter. To its east are the Arukarka and Bhatkhola villages, to the west is Bangsing Deurali, and to the south are the Bhatkhola and Setidovan villages of the Syangja district. In the north of Bange Fadke is the Kaski District.

The total population of Bange Fadke is 1,540 (Care field office chart), out of which 765 are female and 775 are male. There are 242 households. Among the 242 households, 105 belong to Brahmins and Chettris, 97 belong to Gurungs, and 40 belong to disadvantaged castes. The average family size in Bange Fadke is 8.5 persons. The main occupation of Brahmins and Chettris is agriculture. The Gurungs of Bange Fadke are either in the army in India and Nepal, or working in Arab countries, or in Japan or Germany. The disadvantaged castes of the village are blacksmiths, cobblers and tailors. There is one high school and two primary schools in Bange Fadke.

The main crops of Bange Fadke are maize, mustard, millet and some rice. Since the rice and mustard grown are not enough to feed the people, they are also imported along with clothes and spices. Villagers do produce varieties of vegetables depending on the seasons. However, due to a lack of market facilities they are unable to sell the surplus.

UAKWMP Activities

The UAKWMP was started in Bange Fadke in 1992, covering Ward nos. 2, 3, 6, and 7 in its first year. The main projects implemented by UAKWMP in Bange Fadke are as follows:

- o Engineering: drinking water, irrigation, gully control, private latrine, and school latrine;
- o Agriculture/Forestry Program: nursery, community tree plantation, and improved stove construction, feeding stalls for cows and buffaloes;
- o On site training Program: Seasonal and off-season vegetable farming, integrated pest management through domestic measures, management of garden and winter fruits, mushroom farming, bee farming, improved stove construction;
- o Training and Visits: CDCC/Mothers' Group orientation training, CDCC/Mothers' Group management, in-country visits for CDCC/Mothers' groups, care-taker training (e.g. repair and maintenance training of drinking water scheme), latrine slab construction, female adult education facilitator's training for both basic and functional levels;

- o Conservation Education: The conservation education program for school children was instated in 1994/95 at the 7 and 9 grades of Shree Maidan Madhyamik Vidyalaya. A teachers' seminar on conservation education was also held;
- o Income Generation Program: The income generation program has been implemented for the disadvantaged community in ward # 7. The main activities under this program are poultry, pig farming, goat farming, buffalo raising, iron and copper utensil and manufacturing. CARE/Nepal provides a certain amount of funding to the Income Generation Committee. The committee loans the money to individuals who are interested and who are potential entrepreneurs. The interest generated by the loan goes back to the committee's fund and is used as a revolving fund.
- o Mothers' Group Building Construction: CARE/Nepal provided the Mothers' Group of Ward # 4 and 5 with partial funding to construct their buildings. MS/Nepal, a Danish development agency also contributed to the construction of the building. The women also used their group fund and made a labor contribution as well.

Social Overview

In order to understand the cultural and social context of the Gurung women of Bange Fadke, this section will briefly discuss the social context of the Gurung of Nepal. The Gurungs are hill people of Nepal, mostly living in west central Nepal. Traditionally,

the Gurungs have lived all through the Gandaki Zone, including the Gorkha, Lamjung, Kaski and Syangja districts. The Gurungs have lived in the Baglung district of Dhaulagiri Zone, the Manang district, and Budhi-Gandaki Valley as well.

The Gurung culture and religious activities intersect those of Hinduism and Buddhism (Messerschmidt, 1976). For instance, Gurungs do celebrate Hindu festivals like Dasain and Tihar but their death ritual is strictly Buddhist. However, though their death ritual ceremony is conducted according to the Buddhist tradition, the mourning which goes on for a couple months to a year resembles to some extent the Brahmins', the highest caste of the Hindus. The sons of a deceased Gurung do not eat meat or drink liquor during the mourning period, similar to their Brahman counterparts (Bista, 1967). Pignede (1966) found Gurung ways of celebrating different events a complex blend of social and religious customs (Messerschmidt, 1976). The Gurungs of Bange Fadke, for instance, who are Buddhists, celebrate Hindu festivals and worship Hindu deities. At the same time, the death ritual is observed according to a Buddhist tradition.

The Gurung community is divided into two groups: Char jaat (four clans) and Sora jaat (sixteen clans). The Char jaat is higher in status than the Sora jaat and the members of each group are supposed to marry someone who belongs to the same group (Bista, 1967; Messerschmidt, 1976; Regmi, 1990). The Char jaat includes four clans but in a hierarchical order. Sora jaat, however, includes more than sixteen clans (Messerschmidt, 1976; Regmi, 1990).

Most Gurungs are bilingual. They speak and/or understand both the Nepali and Gurung language. The Gurung language is not a written language. The Gurung priests

are trained in the Tibetan language so they can interpret the religious scripts which are written in Tibetan.

The main occupation of the Gurungs are farming and military services in Nepal or elsewhere. However, the Gurungs of Western Nepal have migrated to low lands such as Pokhara where they are involved in trade as well.

Macfarlane (1976) found the Gurung community flexible and fluid. In the social and cultural sphere, the Gurung women are in a better position than their Brahman counterparts. The Gurung women enjoy more freedom in certain aspects of life, such as marriage, remarriage, divorce, and recreational activities like singing and dancing than do the Brahman women (Gurung, 1994). In his later study, Macfarlane observed that the Gurungs regard both women and men as equal and since women are in control of the money they are considered more powerful as well (1992).

The community associations that Gurungs tend to form either to socialize or to perform certain jobs may also explain the social and cultural life of the Gurung community. One very prominent example of such association is Rodi. Rodi is usually a girls' institution where boys are invited. However, boys may also have their own Rodi (Bista, 1967; Messerschmidt, 1976). This is a kind of a club supervised by an adult woman or man. It includes a temporary dwelling offered by an adult as a meeting place, or for entertainment for young women or young men. The members of a Rodi usually work together and come from a similar age group. The Rodi continues as long as its members actively participate. The purpose of having a Rodi includes 'recreation' and 'pre-marital socialization', gaining individual autonomy, and developing mutual understanding among members of similar age group, which are believed to help youths

make a smooth transition to adulthood (Messerschmidt, 1976; Regmi, 1990). Gurung (1994), however, finds Mothers' Group taking the place of Rodi. A Rodi, according to Gurung, is traditionally a weaving and knitting group where young men and young women sing and dance for entertainment. Since Mothers Groups are also engaged in entertainment by singing and dancing, he sees them as replacement of Rodi.

Nogar is another institution organized to perform seasonal fieldwork. Usually, women of a Rodi invite boys to form a Nogar. According to Regmi (1990), since most Gurung men are away from home either in the army or in other jobs outside the country, the families lack enough able work force. Having a Nogar helps solve this problem to some degree.

Dhikur, in the Gurung community, is another institution organized purely for economic purposes. It is a rotating credit group. This is formed among friends and acquaintances in similar financial situations.

Gurungs of Bange Fadke observe the same tradition as their Brahman counterparts from Bangsing Deurali with regard to the caste system. Gurungs, as Brahmans, do not allow people from lower castes into their houses, and do not accept food or drinks offered by them.

Naupuja Mothers' Group, Danda Gaun Ward # 5

There was a mothers' group in Ward # 5 before the UAKWMP came. Gurung mothers raised funds and did some community work. It was in 1992, with the coming of UAKWMP in the Ward, that existing mothers' group were reformed. Since then the group has not been reformed. There are 29 households in the ward. Eleven of them

belong to low castes. There are ten members in the executive committee of the mothers' group. Out of ten, two come from low caste households.

Profile of the executive committee members. The chairperson was in India with her husband at the time of interview. Other members said that she visits him quite often. The women are thinking whether to replace her. The Vice-chairperson is in her early sixties. She is an elected Ward member. She belongs to the Nepali Congress Party. The Vice-Chairperson has four children. She lives with her younger son and grandsons. Her grandson helps her fetch fodder and fuel wood in his free time. Her husband took another woman and lives in another village.

The Treasurer who is in her early 40s has five children ranging from five to twenty in age. Her husband is retired from the Indian Army. Her father-in-law has a business in another place and her mother-in-law lives in Pokhara with her disabled daughter. The Treasurer's husband and her older children contribute to the farm work, and cattle raising. She could not complete the literacy class due to her responsibilities at home which would not end until late at night. The Treasurer's husband does financial reporting and recording. The Secretary, who has completed the 10th grade, also does the writing jobs in the group, including the minute keeping.

Group Activities. The former mothers' group which was known as the Aama Party (Mother's Party) was represented only by the Gurung women. The Gurung mothers got together and raised some money with a desire to do some service to the community. With their money the women constructed a foot trail to the Naupuja temple and a trail that goes down to the river. After these two projects women did not do anything significant. In 1992 with the initiative of the UAKWMP the women

reorganized their group. Since the newer mothers' group, which is known as Naupuja Mothers' Group, was required to be represented by all of the households in the Ward, women from lower caste households were also included in the group.

The Naupuja Mothers' Group has a building. They constructed the building with the assistance from the MS/Nepal (Danish aid agency), the UAKWMP and the Murari trust.⁸ The group spent most of their savings in the building. A large portion of the contribution came from the labor contribution that the women made. With the remaining funds the group constructed a muddy foot trail which the children used to go to the school. The group is planning to renovate the older water systems as well.

The fund raising has been an ongoing activity of the group. The main sources of fund are cultural activities and interest from the loan. In the beginning the group collected Rs. 5 per household. But since there are some families who are financially weaker the group stopped collecting the money. The women carried seedlings from the bottom of the hill to the village for the UAKWMP, and deposited their wages to the group fund. The group was allowed to charge money for the fruit plants and vegetable plants that the UAKWMP gave them for distribution. The group has rented out the second floor of the building to the AACDC.

The Naupuja Mother's Group manages 0.60 hacter (Shrestha & Jacobsen, 1997) of forestland which it obtained on lease but it has not grown or generated enough. Due to the practice of the agro-forestry techniques, those who have enough land can manage with the bushes and shrubs from around their field but for people who do not have enough fields, they still have to go up the hill to meet their needs.

Interestingly in this Ward, the CDCC, the Mothers' Group and the Forest Users' Group (FUG) have a single fund. Since the CDCC, the Mother's Group and FUG funds are eventually spent in community work, women did not find a problem in it.

Moreover, women who are in the Mothers' Group executive committee are also in the FUG.

The Ward did not have a drinking water facility so the group at first asked for the water system from different agencies. They approached the UAKWMP, the Association of Ex-Army and also the Member of the Parliament (MP) from their area. The UAKWMP and the MP both provided them with the facility. This made their lives much easier.

The Naupuja Mothers' Group asked for the literacy class, three years after its inception. The Ward has completed both basic classes, and advanced classes are offered by the UAKWMP. In 1997 a basic class offered by the District Education Office was underway. If there were not enough women literacy, the class was not offered. The older women wanted younger women to be smart, so though they were not interested, they signed up for the class. Though women completed the classes and learned to read and write, all the writing jobs in the group are done by men. Earlier, there weren't any woman who could do the reading and writing job so men helped the women. Since then it has become a trend.

Some Gurung women of this group found it difficult to work in a group with members belonging to a diverse ethnicity and diverse economic background. There are women who live on daily wages. Those women think that it is not worth doing development work as they have to run every morning for their families' livelihood.

There are a few families who belong to a lower caste and are also financially weaker than the Gurungs and are less active in group work. They do not attend meetings, and if a program is proposed, they would show their acceptance but never participate. Gurung members of the group have requested the UAKWMP to provide funds for goat raising or chicken raising to these families for income generation. Despite, some drawbacks the Naupuja Mothers' Group is rated high. Most of the activities of the Naupuja Mothers' are self-initiated and in the scale of low to high the chances of sustainability of this group is high (ibid.)

Additional Training and Visits. Since women are involved in more than one group they constantly get orientation and trainings. The women are happy that they have opportunities to learn more and more. For instance, the women received training on seasonal and off-season vegetable farming. The eating habits have also changed. They eat more vegetables these days which is good for their families' health. But as in the case of Bangsing Deurali Mothers' Groups, due to the lack of roadways they are unable to sell their products. Additionally, visits to different places have given them the opportunity to learn and observe how women and men work for individual and community benefits.

Siludanda Mothers' Group, Puchhar, Ward # 7

The mothers' group in ward # 7 was formed before the UAKWMP came to the village. The women of ward # 7 decided to establish a fund so that they will have some resources when they need them. They raised funds and did some community activities. The current mothers' group which is a second generation mothers' group, was

established in 1992 with the initiative of the UAKWMP. There are 9 executive members in the group. There are 21 households in the ward. All of them are Gurungs. The CDCC was also formed the same year.

Profile of the Executive Committee Members. The Chairperson of the group is in her early fifties with five grown children. She lives with her parents-in-law, husband and children. Her husband is an elected Ward Chairperson and belongs to the Nepali Congress Party. The Chairperson's oldest daughter, who has completed SLC, is currently the literacy facilitator. Both her father in-law and husband were in the Indian Army. Both are retired and collect pension.

The Chairperson was hesitant to take the position because her Nepali language is not good enough. But nobody in the community found a problem in it. The Chairperson's family background may also have contributed to her decision to accept the position. Her father and siblings, who live in a neighboring district, are active in local politics. Her father was a retired military service man who later became a local leader. He was a member of the Village Panchayat during the Panchayat regime. According to the Chairperson, she watched her father's political activities very closely when she was growing up. A lot of people used to come to her house to meet her father. After the restoration of a multi-party system in the country in 1991, he ran for election under the Nepali Congress Party and was elected as a ward member. Her brother is also a ward member under the Nepali Congress Party. One sister is an elected ward member from the Nepali Congress in a village at the bottom of Mount Macchapucchre. Another sister is a ward chairperson in the same village where her father lives.

The Treasurer of the group is a young married woman whose mother-in-law is still active in the group. Though she holds the position, the Treasurer does not do the job that her position requires her to do. There are several possible reasons for the Treasurer not to participate in the group activities: first, the financial transactions are taken care of by men so there is no need for the official treasurer to get involved; second, her mother-in-law is still active in the mothers' group activities; and third, she is a Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV). The Secretary is in a similar position. She holds the position but does not do her job because there is no need for her to take care of the business, since men help the group do so.

Most of the members of the group support the Nepali Congress Party. The facilitator, who is the daughter of the mothers' group Chairperson, had applied for a position as the Women Motivator in the AACDC but they were sure that she would not get the job. The women were sure that the supporters of the Nepal Communist Party, who were in the majority in the village, would prevent supporters of the Nepali Congress Party from getting any kind of job in the village.

Group Background and Activities. The Gurung women of Ward # 7 had a tradition of singing and dancing at various occasions. In some events they used to receive contributions or gifts in cash for their performances. Oftentimes the women spent the money on food or drink, but they stopped spending the money on those items and expanded their performances to collect more money. The mothers' group asked for contributions from Lahures as well. Fathers (men) also helped. They played madal while the women danced and sang. They started to save their funds to use in the community work.

The first generation group, or the Mothers' Party, was active in this ward. The members of mothers' party got together and used their funds to fence a barren hill right above their village and planted some trees there. They dug out small tree plants from the forest and replanted them. But those plants did not grow. The women later came to know that trees are not grown that way. They learned that they were supposed to be planting trees bred in the nursery. Some women then went to Pokhara and brought some tree plants. They also brought some plants from the UAKWMP nursery in Bangsing Deurali. But they could cover just a small piece of the hill. With their funds the Mothers' Party also constructed a foot trail to the Chian Danda (Gurung gurus' cemetery up on a hill). Though the trail lies in Ward # 8, since it was very difficult to get to the Chian Danda the Mothers' Party of Ward # 7 constructed it.

The UAKWMP came to their village and called a ward level meeting. Wards # 7, 8 and 9 were gathered together. The UAKWMP staff explained to them about their project and possible work in the village. But the villagers, according to the Chairperson, did not understand what the project staff were talking about. The villagers found it all bogus at that time. So the project staff left even before the meeting was concluded. They said that they would not come to a village where there is dispute and disagreement among the people.

On their way back home from the meeting it appeared to some women that the UAKWMP might be proposing something good. They talked to the men about it. The women thought that if the UAKWMP is going to provide assistance, the villagers should agree to their proposal and work for their village. The women wanted to invite the UAKWMP, which the men also agreed upon. The ward members asked the

UAKWMP to organize a ward meeting in Ward # 7 again. The women and men from Ward # 7 were asked to send a request in a written form. The men from the ward wrote a letter and send it to the project office. The project staff then came and organized a Ward level meeting in Ward # 7. In that meeting they discussed about all the activities and programs that both the UAKWMP and the villagers would be doing.

The UAKWMP staff proposed that the villagers form a mothers' group and a CDCC. After a couple days of this meeting the women reformed the Mothers' Party. The women selected the executive committee members and named the newer group the Siludanda Aama Samuha (Siludanda Mothers' Group). In this way, the women found this group very different from the previous one. The project staff suggested that in the newer group not only mothers-in-law but daughters-in-law should also participate.

Siludanda Mothers' Group Activities. Since the formation of the newer group, the women started to meet once a month. If a mother-in-law cannot come to the meeting, her daughter-in-law would come and vice versa. Currently, since most mothers who work actively in the mothers' group are in the literacy class, they notify one another and discuss issues in the class so there is no need a for regular once a month meeting.

The women at one point decided to register their group. They went to the district office with five executive members, but they were told that they needed at least seven people in the executive committee. Though they had selected the executive members before, they did not take it seriously. They selected the members for the sake of the UAKWMP. Therefore, when they really wanted to officialize their group they had to look for women to fill the positions. After they returned from the district office,

they gathered all the necessary documents, made a list of executive members, formulated by-laws, and submitted all the information to the District Office to register the group. But this time the women did not follow through because they learned that once their group is registered they have to renew it every year. They also heard that they should always have a certain amount of money in their fund, and if they failed to observe any of these conditions the government would dissolve the group and confiscate the remaining funds. So women stopped the idea of registering their group.

The Siludanda Mothers' Group has been very active in fund raising. As with many of the groups, they started with a monthly contribution of Rs. 5 from the members, which they stopped later. They also have a drinking water user's fund in which every household contributes Rs. 5 per month for repair and maintenance. However, some families in the ward work on daily wages for a living and so it is difficult for them to contribute to both. Realizing this, the mothers' group stopped collecting monthly contributions.

The Siludanda Mothers' Group manages 2.2 hacter of forestland on lease (Shrestha & Jacodsen, 1997). It is the same hill that the mothers' party had planted trees on. The group has leased the land under the leasehold forestry program of the District Forest Office. Most of the members of the mothers' group are in the Forest Users' Group.⁹ Since the same women are in both groups, the women decided to have one single fund. Therefore, funds generated from the forest are also deposited in the mothers' group fund. Women have also started to sell fodder from their forestland. The group decided to distribute the fuel wood generated by the forest for the first time among themselves instead of selling it. Additionally, the group generates funds from

cultural programs that they organize at different social and religious events, including arghaun,¹⁰ and interest from loans.

The women stopped going to other Wards to raise money because they realized that this practice added an extra burden to the hosts. The mothers' groups of all the wards discussed the issue and decided to limit themselves to their own wards. Still, on special occasions, such as winning the village level election, the mothers' groups from all the wards go to that person's house, perform cultural programs and ask for contributions.

The group members borrow money from the group fund for medical or social needs and responsibilities. The Siludanda Mothers' Group also spent their funds on activities such as foot trail construction, drinking water system repair and maintenance. In foot trail construction, villagers made labor contributions and the UAKWMP paid the wages of skilled and semi-skilled laborers. All the households in the ward took turns to provide day meals for the workers.

In the village people quite often have religious and social gatherings. But they do not have enough dishes at home so women bought dishes from the group fund to rent them out to people in need at a minimum charge. The evaluation report indicates that most of the activities undertaken by the Mothers' Group of Ward # 7 were self-initiated and in the scale of low to high, the report indicates that the chances of sustainability of the Siludanda Mothers' Group is high (ibid.).

The Siludanda Mothers' Group asked for class three years after it was formed. The Ward has completed both the basic and functional classes. But in 1997 they again got the basic class from the District Education Office. The women who participated in

the classes offered by the UAKWMP also joined the basic class offered by the government.

The main objective of asking for a literacy class was that the women wanted to learn to read simple words and write their names. Only a few women in the group know how to read and write. The Chairperson of the group learned to sign her name from her children before the literacy class came to the village. She did not like to use a thumbprint so she asked them to teach her to sign her name.

There are three families who do not participate in meetings or in any programs. They are a little bit away from the main cluster. The members do not complain that those households are not involved in the activities, and the women from those households have never disagreed with what the group has decided to do. In fact, the group started to invite those households only when there was a major decision to make.

Though the executive members are selected it does not really matter who does what in the Siludanda Mothers' Group. In observing the group discussion, and from the interviews, it seems that the women selected the executive members for official purposes only. In practice they function in the same manner as they did earlier. Nobody cares who are who or how things are processed. They are more concerned about doing the work. If somebody in the group suggests a reasonable proposal everybody agrees to it. The younger women respect the older women in the group, and so they agree to the older women's proposal. If the group comes across a difficult task, the women approach the CDCC, which they call a Fathers' Party, for help. The CDCC has agreed to this deal. The women would like to work in harmony with the men. If

somebody does not pay back the loan or interest on time the mothers' group members, as well as the fathers, go and talk to that person.

Additional Training and Visits. In the beginning, the Siludanda Mothers' Group office holders were given management training. Following this, the executive members of the group have been offered an orientation workshop, financial management training, vegetable gardening and other relevant trainings every year.

Though the Treasurer is not active in the group work, she was sent to the training for the sake of representation. Yet, when she came back from the training she called a group meeting and let the women know what had happened. There was a training for secretaries as well, but, the Secretary of this group exists on paper, and the group saw no need to send her to the training.

The Chairperson visited the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad in India. The visit was organized jointly by UAKWMP and MS/Nepal for the mothers' group members of the project area.

Application of Literacy in Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke

The literacy programs in Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke are only for women. However, if men are interested in joining they are not prevented from doing so. The literacy classes of the UAKWMP are known as the Conservation Classes for Women. The age of the learners in the Wards visited in Bangsing Deurali range from early twenties to late fifties. In Bange Fadke it is early thirties to early sixties.

The classes are not offered if there are not enough women, so women who do not feel it necessary also sign up for the class to give an opportunity to those who are

interested in studying. For instance, older women from Ward # 5 and 7 of Bange Fadke signed up for the class though they were not interested, because they wanted to give an opportunity to the younger women of their Wards.

The women from Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke followed a similar process of literacy program implementation as women from other sites of the UAKWMP. As mentioned in Chapter three basic and advanced classes are conducted through the UAKWMP depending on the level of the learners. They used the same primers, Naya Goreto in the basic class, and a set of four primers developed by the UAKWMP field staff in advanced classes. The subject matter in these primers range from compost manure preparation to health issues to agro-forestry to mothers' group formation and to roles and responsibilities of mothers' group executive members. These areas are consistent with the overall interest areas of the UAKWMP.

If women would like to continue their education after the advanced class, they form a reading group or establish a reading center where they gather to read and share with each other. In this case, the project let the women keep the chalkboard, lantern, trunk and other materials that the UAKWMP provided for the regular literacy class. For instance, Ward # 7 of Bangsing Deurali has a reading center, but this is not used because a government run literacy class is underway there, and also the project did not follow through as much as it needed to. However, a local man from Bangsing Deurali, who worked as the NFE facilitator, has been hired as a supervisor. His job is to do research on NFE. He will assist local people to identify and deal with the issues. Issues that could not be dealt with at the field level will be brought to the DA at the site office. If needed, this report will be taken to the project office in Badkhola. One of the main

jobs of the supervisor is to encourage the local people to open reading centers after the completion of the literacy classes.

In both villages, the literacy class and the mothers' group have made the Andha Andhi Community Development Center's (AACDC) job easier. It has been easier for them to invite women to their programs. Though the AACDC field staff visits homes it has been easier for them to inform the chairpersons, or the secretaries, or the literacy class facilitators and have them inform other women about the events.

The AACDC, with the permission of the facilitators, uses the class time to discuss the health related topics with the women. AACDC also provides health related training, bulletins, and newspapers, to the mothers' group members, traditional birth attendants, and witch doctors.

As mentioned earlier, the mothers' groups examined are at different stages in terms of the literacy classes. The following tables will present an overview of the status of the Mothers' Groups and literacy classes in the Wards of both villages selected for the study.

Table 3

Status of Mothers' Group formation and Literacy Classes in Bangsing Deurali Wards # 1, 4 and 6

Group/Ward	Formed Date	Total member	Female member	Low caste member	Total Household	Low caste Household	Fund (in NRS.)	Literacy Classes
Lausibot # 1	1994	9	9	0	60	0	22200.00	BLC (1995) ALC (1996)
Thulakhet/Daha # 4	1993	7	7	0	28	0	14362.00	BLC (1997)
Rimal Swara # 6	1993	7	7	0	33	0	14362.00	BLC (1995) ALC (1996)

Source: CARE field Office file

Table 4

Status of Mothers' Group formation and Literacy Classes in Bange Fadke Wards # 5 and 7

Group/Ward	Formed Date	Total member	Female member	Low caste member	Total Household	Low Caste Household	Fund (in NRS.)	Literacy Classes
Danda Gaun # 5	1992	10	10	2	29	11	5200.00	BLC (1995) ALC (1996)
Puchhar # 7	1992	9	9	0	21	0	25000.00	BLC (1995) ALC (1996)

Source: CARE field Office file

End Notes

1. Natural water spring.
2. A red dot that most Hindu women put on their forehead.
3. Traditional Nepali musical instrument.
4. SLC (School Leaving Certificate) is a centralized examination that every child has to take at the end of 10th grade.
5. Two-year college level education after SLC.
6. A dais built by villagers with stone for pedestrians to rest.
7. In order to register an organization, the administration requires the executive members to submit their citizenship cards. In every day life, a woman does not need one unless she is buying or selling property or traveling abroad, all of which are very unusual for a village woman.
8. A UAKWMP staff who was stationed in Bange Fadke contributed some money for the building.
9. Forest User's Group is one of the measures adopted in forestry management under the Community Forestry program of HMGN. Although the concept of community forestry was introduced in the seventies, and women's participation in forestry management was mentioned in the Seventh Plan, the ownership and authority of the local communities for forestry management was formalized only by the Community Forestry Act (MOF, 1995). According to Departmental data sheet (September 1997), there are 5939 forest users groups in Nepal. Of these, 158 are women-only groups.
10. Arghaun is a death ritual of Gurung. Gurungs have a tradition of singing and dancing in arghaun.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS

Introduction

As discussed in the methodology section, the main source of data in this study is the interview. Most of the interviews are with the women who are actively involved in the mothers' groups and have experience with the literacy classes. Additionally, the Development Assistants (DAs), Women Motivators and community health workers were also interviewed. In this chapter, the information gathered from the interviews is organized under the themes which emerged from the data. These are clustered within three categories: the self empowerment process, the group empowerment process and the community empowerment process.

Bandura (1986), whose theory of efficacy has been used by many as a theoretical foundation for empowerment, says that the process of efficacy is generative, fluid and involves cognitive, social and behavioral tenets to produce a desired result. Therefore, though the three categories of the process of empowerment are separately organized, they intersect each other in many instances. Empowerment occurs at different levels which are supported or limited by various aspects at different points in time of women's lives, and is a fluid process. Given this, I will present the information as the processes rather than the outcomes.

Self-Empowerment Process

Learning to Sign One's Name, Learning to Read Simple Words and Numbers

To be able to sign one's name has social significance in Nepal. Since signing one's name is considered literate and subsequently equated with knowledge as opposed to the thumbprint which is equated with ignorance. Therefore to be able to sign one's name is valued as a prestigious skill in the villages. It is obvious that the most important objective of joining the class for the mothers' group members is to learn to sign their names. For instance, when asked why the women asked for literacy classes, several women from the Lausibot Mothers' Group said, "we wanted to learn to read and write our names. And after that we wanted to learn more about conservation farming, and other practical skills related to our daily work" (tape # 1).

When asked if the Chairperson and the Vice-chairperson of the Lausibot Mothers' Group had not learned to read and write, how would it have impacted the management of the group, an immediate response was, "it would have been harder as they would use thumbprint instead of signing their names". But after some discussion the women viewed it slightly differently. They said that since the Secretary and the Treasurer do most of the writing jobs, the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson do not require much reading and writing. One woman further stated that, "the secretary keeps the minute of the meetings. If we were interested we could read but we do not do it. It is a matter of trust" (tape # 2).

Since most group members are involved in activities such as trainings, visits and meetings, all of which requires them to sign their names for attendance, they find this

skill very important and self-satisfying. Though women do not see themselves as smart enough to do more than their routine household work, to be able to replace the thumbprint with a signature is viewed as a minimum level of skill to have to prevent one from being seen as a stupid. When the Ward # 4 Mothers' Group was formed, most members did not have reading and writing skills. Now many women know simple reading and writing. The Treasurer, in a group interview, stated, "now most can sign their names. Women who did not even know how to hold pens can now sign their names" (tape # 4).

Emphasizing the importance of knowing how to sign one's name the Chairperson of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 6 of Bangsing Deurali said:

Women attended the basic course regularly. But in the functional class, they were not regular because they lost interest/excitement and also found it difficult to understand and remember things learned in the class. Because of the nature of their domestic lives women do not expect to work in offices and move upward so recognizing the letters and learning to write their names seemed to be enough at this stage (tape # 6).

The group members of the Naupuja Mothers' Group and Siludanda Mothers' Group of Bange Fadke hold similar view points. The most important objective of the literacy class for these women were to learn to sign their names. The Chairperson of the Siludanda Mothers' Group, in fact, did not wait for the literacy class to learn to sign her name. She learned to sign her name from her children. Some women said that the literacy program helped them understand that if they got the opportunity to learn, they could learn a lot of things which would make their lives better. They realized, for example, that to be able to count money and identify the roads and buses while traveling has made their life much easier. An older woman who learned to sign her name from

the literacy class and who is still active in the Naupuja Mothers' Group said, "if one learns more one can avoid being cheated, can read sign boards, can sign one's name instead of using thumbprint" (tape # 7). Many women interviewed hold a similar view point. Knowing to read simple words and numbers helped the mothers' group members identify roads, and buses and read sign boards while traveling.

Adding to the benefits of the literacy, several women from Siludanda Mothers' Group said that they learned the directions: East West, North and South. This has made it easier for them to identify right directions in the cities. The women said they can now identify their belongings as well. Giving an example of how literacy skills have helped them one woman said, ". . . we can identify our things. We have marked our dishes with our group name and numbers which we can read". Following this the Chairperson of the group jokingly commented, "though we say that it is useless to carry bags and go to school, at this age it is definitely beneficial to some extent". She, in an individual interview, added that, " the class has been beneficial for both groups of women- for older like me and for women who are too old to go to regular school but young enough to study" (tape # 8).

Moreover, to be able to sign one's name and read simple words and numbers has become essential because women are required to interact with the outside world for various purposes. For instance, the Chairperson of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 1 of Bangsing Deurali was humiliated by a city woman for her inability to read the room number in which her son was staying. This kind of encounter, when she was feeling helpless because of her son's illness was very painful to her. She tells about her experience:

. . . When my son was in room # 83 in a hospital in Kathmandu one day I asked a woman who was going down the stairs where room # 83 was. The woman stopped, looked at me and commented that what kind of person I was who could not even read # 83. My son passed away. The comment pinched me very much that I still remember that feeling. Going to NFE class and learning to read and write has now made me more able. Now I do not have to ask anyone such simple thing. I am very glad that I could sign my name instead of using thumbprint (tape # 1).

Using the thumbprint seemed more problematic than their inability to do jobs that require reading and writing. In most cases the women are happy that they can sign their names. Regarding other reading and writing jobs, there is always somebody within the group, or outside of the group, who can help them. But signing one's name is something that one should do oneself. No one can do it for you. In some cases, like in the Mothers' Group of Ward # 6 of Bangsing Deurali, women feel that learning to write their names is enough. One woman from the same group proudly said, "we had to carry stamp pad in the meetings. Now everyone can sign their names we do not have to use thumb prints in the minutes" (tape # 6).

Though learning to read and write is considered a prestigious skill, it is not considered necessary. This is true in both villages, and particularly among older women. As in most villages, in Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke, people still practice a 'word-of-mouth' tradition to convey messages. For instance, official messages, notices and invitations from and to the Village Development Committee (VDC) or the District Development Committee (DDC) are in a written form. The UAKWMP uses both written and oral medium. But, if the mother's groups need to send messages to their fellow women who live far away they send a messenger to convey the message orally.

This is much faster and easier for women because this tradition has been in place for years.

Additionally, for the mothers' group members there are other issues which are more pressing than reading and writing. In Bangsing Deurali, with the initiative of a UAKWMP staff, a cement board is built at the chautari near the shops at Ward # 9. The board is used to post health flyers, VDC notices, and other relevant messages. The women from Ward # 4 and 6 pass through that spot quite often for various domestic as well as official reasons. When asked if they stop and look at the notices, some women said that they have seen the board but have never stopped and read them. Others said that they have not even noticed that there is a board. One of the main reasons for this is that women are most of the time in a hurry to get their work done. They do not have the time or interest to stand at the road side board and read the notices. This, however, cannot be used to determine the women's level of empowerment or self-confidence. In the cases of the group members of Bangsing and Bange Fadke, knowing better ways to improve their lives, and getting information- through whichever channel- is more empowering than reading or writing.

Though women are comfortable having other people take care of the writing jobs, they find reading and writing skills necessary when dealing with outside agencies. For instance, the Chairperson of the Siludanda Mothers' Group said that particularly for the forest hand-over procedures they needed reading and writing skills. She commented:

. . . we had to go to the forest office and sign our names. It is better if one is able to understand all the terms and conditions and be able to read or write. Before, we said it will work if someone explains to us what is

needed to be done but that it not true. One should be able to read, write and be smart enough to understand the terms and conditions oneself. Otherwise she/he will be doomed (tape #8).

A thirty-one year old woman who is a member of the Siludanda Mothers' Group and also the Chairperson of the Forest Users' Group (FUG), holds a similar viewpoint.

She said:

. . . to complete the forest hand-over procedure we had to go to the Forest Office and sign our names. Time to time we are offered trainings. In such trainings it is better to be able to read and write. As I can read and write it has been easier for me to report back to the group what I learned in the training. Since I can not memorize everything I write down some points though in a very slow pace which make it easier for me to remember the matters. Sometimes we receive letters. Since I can read we do not have to look for other people to read for us. I am participating in the literacy class to learn more. women feel that it is better to master reading and writing skills (tape # 9).

When asked if she faced difficulty in her job due to lack of literacy skills, the Chairperson of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 4 of Bangsing Deurali's response was not very different from her counterparts from Bange Fadke. She elaborated how it did affect her:

For instance, in conferences those who were literate wrote and also signed their names, but I neither could write what was told in the conference nor could sign my name. So when I returned home from a conference I tried for 6/7 days and learned to sign my name. The Secretary keeps the minutes of the meeting, so I do not need to know writing and reading as such. But I would like to let other people know what I saw and learned, so I dictate and have someone write for me. For instance, in my recent visit to Janakpur, I asked a boy from the guest house to write for me. I told the boy where I went, what I did and what I saw. He then wrote down this information: ". . . I did face problems. If I knew how to write, when others were writing I would also do the same. I did not have to use thumbprint, I would also sign my name." (tape # 4)

Enhanced Self-Confidence

The mothers' group members feel that they act more confidently. For instance, they are less scared to sign their names. A member of the Mother's Group of Ward # 4 of Bangsing Deurali said, "even those who could sign their names were afraid to do so before joining the group. After the formation of mothers' group women started to come to the meetings and began to sign their names confidently" (tape # 5).

Although the Secretary of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 6 of Bangsing Deurali could not continue the advanced literacy class, she thinks that the reading and writing skills that she has learned have helped her a great deal in her work. She can send letters, note transactions and keep the minutes of the meetings. She is proud that she does not have to ask for help; she can do it by herself.

Since the women lack exposure and opportunities to interact with the world outside of their immediate neighborhood and household duties, they lack self-confidence and were unable to voice their opinions in public. But they think that since they started participating in community activities including mothers' group meetings, activities and visits, they have become more skillful and confident. Women, though not very skillful in terms of reading and writing, are proud that they have extensive experience and knowledge, which they are expanding through various channels.

Referring to the example of their secretary, who is in the Intermediate Level but has less experience and is less assertive, one woman from the Lausibot Mothers' Group stated that, "we have more experience and knowledge than the secretary about our daily practices because we have been learning the functional knowledge and skills and applying them to our work" (tape #1).

Women in the villages are limited to their houses, farms and neighbors, due to lack of time or options. Consequently they lack confidence and skills to function in the outside world. However, women from Lausibot Mothers' Group feel that this has been changing. As one woman said,

. . . because of the nature of our work such as agriculture, livestock raising and other household chores, we can not afford to spend time outside of our homestead. As a consequence we lacked communication skills. We were afraid of expressing our opinion and hesitant to talk to visitors like you. We were uneducated, not because we lacked reading and writing skills, but because we lacked exposure, communication skills and confidence. The Mothers' Group meetings, activities and visits made us more skillful and confident. (tape # 1)

Similarly, when the Chairperson, who completed the basic class but never completed the functional class, was asked about her opinion regarding her literacy skills and her position in the mothers' group, she responded, "I was made the chairperson maybe because I could speak out, go around, make people do some work. The secretary was educated, so maybe they thought that I did not need to be literate" (tape # 2). Though she did not complete the functional class, she did learn how to call the Mothers' Group meetings and assemblies, and do the correspondence (what should be included in what kind of letters) in the class. When she needed to send a letter she would ask the Secretary what information should be included in the letter, and where and when should it be sent. The Chairperson sounded satisfied and confident that, though she could not write, she could make her fellow group members do what needed to be done.

The women think that they are confident that they can ask people to assist them in accomplishing their jobs when needed, and to speak in times of injustice. The Vice-Chairperson of the Lausibot Mothers' Group expressed her opinion:

What is important is thinking. First, one should be able to think right. In order to think right one does not need reading and writing skills. If one is highly learned but does not have ideas and can not think right, that person's education is useless. One should be able to remember what has been told in the class. In order to be able to remember and understand what has been told in the class one should have some experience and thinking power. This then will enable people to differentiate between negative and positive impact of their own and others practices and learn from them. If one is able to do this one can learn from observing, and asking, one does not need to read to learn all these. (tape # 1)

. . . one single lesson can not make a learner skillful enough. And the lessons do not deal with the technical aspects of a subject matter in detail, so the learners need additional trainings. For instance, lessons on kitchen gardening, mothers' group management, account keeping, etc. cannot be taught in the class alone because of time constraint and facilitators' lack of technical knowledge. So trainings in such areas are offered separately outside of regular classes to mothers' group members. (tape # 3)

Additionally, the practical knowledge and skills learned in the literacy class reinforce the knowledge and skills learned outside of the class, and vice versa. For instance, the mothers' group members of Ward # 1 and Ward # 4 in Bangsing Deurali found that the women were more convinced about the benefits of pit latrines when they learned about them by themselves in the class, though they were already told about it long ago. The Secretary of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 4, who is also a Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV), expressed her experience:

. . . since women learned about issues such as hygiene, sanitation, and child health in the literacy class by themselves, they have started to change their behavior and attitudes. The UAKWMP initiated the pit latrine scheme almost three years before the literacy class. Some built the latrine and some did not. Those who did not think it necessary to

built latrines before, built them after they learned about the advantages of having latrines in the literacy class. It was difficult to convince women about the benefits of having pit latrines. When it came from the adult literacy class, together with mothers' group it was more convincing and women reacted to it.

Similarly, the DA of Bange Fadke, when asked about the benefits of the literacy class, said that the UAKWMP does not expect women to master the reading and writing skills. "This is not the project's intention," he said. He added:

. . . knowledge and understanding among women about saving, credit, investment, group formation, group activities, sanitation, development work, prenatal care, post natal care, nutrition, kitchen gardening, use and effects of chemical fertilizer- it's effect on environment and humans, diarrheal disease, Vitamin A, etc., are developed by literacy class. (tape 10)

One of the most important achievement for the mothers' group members of Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke seems to be vegetable production. They are glad that they grow vegetables round the year. Their eating habits have changed. They eat more vegetable these days. They also sell extra vegetables when they can, although it is not always possible as the villages do not have roadways.

Interestingly, those who had formal schooling also found the practical knowledge and skills learned in the literacy classes directly benefiting them. The literacy classes helped them recall what had been forgotten and also helped them learn more meaningful skills. As the Treasurer of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 4 of Bangsing Deurali (who completed the fifth grade in regular school) stated, "the school education is different from the literacy class. In school, one does not learn about practical issues. I learned more about my daily necessities in the literacy class and it has also helped me remember things that I have forgotten" (tape # 4). Similarly, a member

of the Siludanda Mothers' Group who had prior knowledge of reading and writing, comes to the literacy class to refresh her reading and writing skills in addition to learning the functional skills.

The Secretary of the Ward # 4 of Bangsing Deurali further added:

Women got the opportunity to hear and learn what they had not learned or heard before. This has raised their awareness about matters important to their daily lives such as oral rehydration solution, mother and child health, hygiene and sanitation, the consequences of cutting down trees, etc. They learned practical knowledge and skills beneficial to individuals and families. (tape # 4)

Most women interviewed in Bangsing Deurali think that since they joined the literacy class they have a better understanding of how things are done, and what the consequences are of doing or not doing certain things with regard to household matters, agriculture or community improvement. But earlier they did things just because they were told to do so.

Sense of Control Over One's Life

Most group members interviewed, though they have a lot of household responsibilities, seem to have control over how they accomplish such responsibilities. This has allowed them to manage their time and prioritize their work. The group members of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 4 of Bangsing Deurali think that their Chairperson and the Secretary have played a key role in keeping their group together for four years. The Secretary is very active. When asked how could she manage her time to get involved in community activities outside the home, she responded that in the evening she can leave her children with her mother-in-law. But she said, "what it really

is, I get up one step earlier than before. If I mopped the house twice, I do it only once or next day, or whenever I get free time" (tape #5).

When discussing how the women managed to get involved in community activities, the Secretary of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 6 of Bangsing Deurali said that she has been able to do her work comfortably because she has less pressure from the family members. Her husband, who is back in the village, takes care of the farm work. She said, "I ought to do my chores but I manage my time accordingly. I cook on time and perform other household duties, but these chores do not prevent me from attending the meetings or getting involved in other activities" (tape # 6).

The Chairperson's response was somewhat similar:

I do not have pressure at home. I feel that since it is solely my responsibility and I am the one who is accountable for the chores I can do them whenever and however it is convenient to me. There is no one at home whom I should feel accountable for or dominated by. (tape # 6)

Additionally, changes in the environmental situation have also contributed to the women's participation in activities outside of their homesteads. This has allowed flexibility to the women regarding the fulfillment of their household duties. This can be noticed in all most all the cases referred to in this study. In Ward # 6 of Bangsing Deurali, before the construction of the drinking water system, during rainy season the villagers had managed to bring the water closer to home, but during the dry season it used to take the women about an hour to fetch the water. Since there was not enough water at home, the women had to carry a huge load of dirty clothes to the water source to wash. They hardly got any leisure time. But now it is more systematic and convenient throughout the year. This has saved women's time and has allowed them

the opportunity to get involved in other activities. A similar process occurred with the fodder and fuel wood situations. Before the introduction of agroforestry and conservation, it took them a whole day to fetch fodder and fuel wood from the forest.

The Secretary, remembering the situation, said:

. . . if we had to spend the same amount of time to collect fuel wood and fodder we could not get involved in mothers' group activities. But these days we have not stepped in the forest. We have enough fodder and fuel wood in our fields around our houses. (tape # 6)

Similarly, the Naupuja Mother's Group members think that they can participate more in community activities because they have less worry at home. Before, water was the main issue that mothers had. Women did not have to go far but had to sit in the line from three in the morning for hours to get water. During the dry season it was worse. The Vice Chairperson of the group commented, "when we received the drinking water facility with six or seven water taps in our ward then we could think of other development work" (tape # 7). Another woman added to it and said, "water was a major problem. ...these days since water is at the door we are able to participate in different activities and work. Otherwise we would still be spending a lot of time waiting to fill the container" (tape # 7).

Regarding fodder and fuelwood, due to the practice of the agroforestry techniques, those who have enough land and field can manage with the bushes and shrubs from around their fields but for people who do not have enough land they still have to go up the hill to meet their needs. The group also has a lease-hold forest but this has not generated enough to provide fuelwood.

Understanding of the Importance of Children's Schooling

In the villages, while learning to read and write is important, sending children to school everyday is not the priority. Households are very much dependent on child-labor, and subsequently their livelihood depends on family members' physical and economic contributions. In this situation, when parents have to choose between household chore and school they prefer the former. Additionally, parents who have not been to school do not realize how much a child will lose if she/he misses the school. But interestingly, the mothers' group members who, for various reasons, missed the lessons, realized how difficult it was to follow the next day's lesson. The members of the Siludanda Mothers' Group related their experience with their children's schooling and felt that children too will miss a great deal if they do not go to school even for a single day. The mothers then decided not to prevent their children from going to school during the academic session just because they needed a helping hand at home.

Additionally, some mothers who have completed the literacy course are helping their smaller children with school work. As the Siludanda Mothers' Group member said, "those who have school-going small children at home can teach what is wrong and what is right even when they are in the kitchen" (tape # 9).

Group Empowerment Process

Understanding of Mothers' Group, its Roles and Responsibilities

The functional literacy classes include lessons on the mothers' group formation and the roles and responsibilities of the office holders. Though in all the cases the

group was formed long before the literacy classes took place, the group members found the lessons on the mothers' group very useful. The executive committee members of the mothers' groups are provided trainings on group related subject matter. But, since other women (general members) do not participate in such trainings they may not know about the roles and responsibilities of the mothers' group. Getting to know and understand about their group leaders' responsibilities from the literacy class was therefore helpful to them.

For the members of the Naupuja Mothers' Group and the Siludanda Mothers' Group, understanding of the roles and responsibilities of mothers' group office holders is not as important. The process and the roles (who does what officially) is not as important as the accomplishment of the work itself. In these groups any reasonable proposal put forth by an elder is agreed upon. The group members are not bothered, for instance, about whether or not the Secretary does her job, because traditionally the group functions in a un-structured manner in these two cases. Also, according to their social and cultural traditions, involvement of all in a community task is more important than taking a position and working within the parameters.

Most group members interviewed like the tradition of learning from each other. Those who attend the trainings, or go on tours come back and tell the group what happened. Even those group members who are unable to attend the literacy class get to learn about practical skills and knowledge from those members who attend the classes. For instance, when asked how the members used skills and knowledge, including reading and writing, the women responded that members who joined the class would teach their fellow women about topics such as hygiene and sanitation, the importance of

proper filing, the roles and responsibilities of chairperson, treasurer and secretary, and the process of investment and interest collection. This meant that women who did not join the class were nonetheless also able to benefit. The executive committee members who take part in trainings on specific areas such as vegetable gardening, off season farming, and fruit farming are required to share the knowledge and skills with other women in the group.

Understanding of the Importance of Collaborative Actions

The realization that they can not do any work which benefits the community and the families without uniting, has held most of the groups together. The group members have observed that they are getting assistance to improve the situation of their families and the community because they are working in a team. However, this is more true in the case of Bangsing Deurali than in Bange Fadke. In Bange Fadke the Gurung women already had active groups. Collaborative action is inherent in their culture. The tradition of communal approach to problem solving, and a desire to do service to the community, resulted in community activities such as the construction of foot trails, a temple and a drinking water system in Ward # 5 and 7 of Bange Fadke. The group members of these Wards began working as a team not because they would get support from the outside for their families and communities, but because they were keen to do service to their communities.

Following this, the DA of Bange Fadke said that the mothers' groups in Bange Fadke are very active. He added, "most mothers of Bange Fadke were already aware that they should contribute to the development of their village. The UAKWMP came

and tried to assist them to make their efforts more organized, skilled and sustainable" (tape # 10).

In Bangsing Deurali, since the concept of collaborative action is new, the understanding is somewhat different. The mothers' groups work as a team mainly because they get support from others if they come as a group. Also it is easier to accomplish the job if they work together. Among the group members who are Brahmans, collaborative action is not in their social or cultural tradition. Collaboration, to some extent, occurs only in times of religious functions and events like weddings and death rituals. But taking action for the benefit of the community as a whole is an unusual concept among Brahmans. Therefore, getting involved in community actions outside of ones' home and family is very nontraditional for women in Bangsing Deurali.

Since the collaborative action is initiated and supported by outsiders the group cohesiveness is seen as a way of getting outside assistance for the welfare of both the individual and the community. For example, several women from the Lausibot Mothers' Group stated that the presence of the UAKWMP, and its interventions in the past five years, has changed their lives a great deal. One woman summed up her experience and observation in the following words:

Women did progress in community development work. We learned to unite. We learned that if we wanted our programs to be successful we needed to work as a team. We also came to realize that the issues and contradictions that we used to have before could be resolved by changing our attitude and thoughts. (tape # 3)

Referring to the above statement, when the UAKWMP Women Motivator was asked about her view point regarding the continuity of the group, she said that the women

have realized the fact that they will not get any assistance from outside if they do not come forward as a group. Knowing this, they have kept the group alive.

The availability of cash in times of need has also contributed to collaboration among group members. The funds that women raise are used for both community purposes and individual purposes. In times of medical emergency or even for social and religious occasions women borrow money from the group. Since women are not engaged in regular cash earning activities they do not have enough cash on their hands all the time. Easy access to funding has provided women a kind of security, thereby strengthening the motivation for collaboration among group members.

Group Cohesiveness

The discussion presented in this section is to some extent an extension of the above section on collaborative actions as a process of group empowerment. The mothers' groups examined in this study have been functioning for various reasons. Some of these have already been mentioned. In both villages the groups are functioning well because of a few active women. However, particularly in Bange Fadke, since the trend has been to carry on the work initiated by the mothers-in-law by their daughters-in-law, it is more likely that the younger women will take over the group responsibilities. Additionally, the attitude of the group members, trust among the members, interpersonal communication, and the clear benefits of doing the group activities have also influenced group cohesiveness. Referring to the issue, an older woman from the Naupuja Mothers' Group said:

. . . everything is person's speech. We do not fight. We rather try to make each other understand the situation. There are women in our village who have to work outside for living. We understand their problem. So we have asked UAKWMP to provide funding for income generation that group of women. (tape # 8)

When discussing the reasons for continuity the women from the same group said that they realized that if they organized themselves and worked as a group, their lives would be much easier. The Treasurer of the Naupuja Mothers' Group told about her experience and observations:

Those who understood the benefits of working together and living in harmony explained these to others. Fetching water, fodder and fuel wood are the major problems for women and mothers. In our meetings we used to discuss how we as a group could ask for facilities such as water, forest land, etc. things which a single person can not make happen. For instance, women's joint effort brought the drinking water facility to the Ward which made women's lives much easier. It has been very convenient as they can fetch water or wash clothes anytime of the day. (tape # 8)

She further added that they should not leave their work aside just because someone started a conflict. Rather, they should try to make her understand the issue or problem and explain why they are doing these things. This group, however, has not yet come across any major dispute.

Similarly, the Siludanda Mothers' Group is also a cohesive unit held together by few older women whom everybody respects. Due to their personalities, family background, long experience, and willingness to work in the community, they are able to hold the group together and act as role models for the younger women. Regarding this, the chairperson of the group said:

The mothers of our Ward are determined to do something better for our village. We have decided not to fight with each other and everybody has agreed to that. Fortunately we have not quarreled up to this day.

Everybody has agreed to work together and not let any factors affect our group cohesiveness. For instance, during election we did support and voted for different parties but after the election we are together again as before. Mothers want their daughters and daughters-in-law to work together in harmony for the development of the village. So they are preparing them for the future by showing them a right path. (tape # 8)

A group member added:

We get along well. If somebody does not show up we try to convince her how important the work is. We do not quarrel over small issues. If she does not come today she will come next time. We do not stop working just because somebody did not show up. If a woman like her (pointing towards the Chairperson) or fathers' party (CDCC) proposes some work, we do not refuse it. All of us accept to the proposal and start working on it. There are not many houses in our Ward. All of us are Gurungs. May be that's why we get along well. (tape # 9)

Holding a similar view point, another woman, in an individual interview, said:

. . . if there is a disagreement among group members the group breaks. We never have any argument among ourselves. In most cases a dispute arises when people are not transparent about financial matters. Nobody has cheated in our group till now. There has never been a case where somebody misused the funds. We do not commit such sin. We are happy with what we have. How can there be a conflict in such situation? (tape # 10)

Having the space and time to talk about matters of interest has also helped strengthen group collaboration as well as cohesiveness. In the observation of the DA of

Bange Fadke:

. . . in literacy class, even if women sit and just chat it is worth it. Most of the time they talk about farming, and other relevant daily practices which are useful to listen to. So the literacy class has provided a space and time to share each other's knowledge, skills and ideas. On the other hand, women who could not sign their names can now write letters. Even older women show an interest in reading. Some are proud that they can sign their names at the meeting. Some are proud that they can write letters to their husbands. Some women go to the class just to listen to what the facilitator talks about and to look at the pictures that the facilitator shows. In my observation, it is not so much the reading and writing it is the realization what should they have done and/or what they

should do in their daily practices to make their living situation better and their village a better place is the most important and beneficial factor that women gained from the literacy class. The women have realized that they should move forward; they also have rights; they should form groups. They also realized that the proposals put forward to the project from the group is more likely to be materialized. (tape # 10)

In observing the literacy class it was obvious that women took class time to discuss other issues as well. In the literacy class in Ward # 7 a woman came and lay down. She said she was tired. She had a long day. After reading and writing for a while, they began discussing the possibility of their facilitator not getting the job that she had applied to in the village because she belongs to the Nepali Congress Party. The women were saying that since the communist party was the most favored party, any one who belongs to other parties would not be given the opportunity. Additionally women also talked about their day, where they went, and what they did. For instance, one of the issues that women talked about was that, due to lack of enough oil mills in the village, women had to stand in line for hours.

In this respect, the groups provide a space in which women can talk about their personal concerns, as well as issues affecting their communities, and find ways to work together to meet both short and long term goals. The groups provide emotional and social support as well as support in helping the women build concrete skills necessary to improve the quality of their lives.

Mutual Support

The mothers group members are supportive towards personal needs of the group members. In most cases the mothers' groups asked for literacy classes to give

opportunities to those who are interested, and to those who do not know how to sign their own names. The classes are not offered if there are not enough women, so sometimes women who already know how to sign their names, or are not interested in learning, also sign up for the class to give opportunity to those who are interested in studying. For instance, older women from Ward # 5 and 7 of Bange Fadke signed up for the class, though they were not interested, because they wanted to give an opportunity to the younger women of their Wards. Similarly, when asked why they wanted to join the functional class, the response of the women from the Mothers' Group of Ward # 4 of Bangsing Deurali was not new. They said that the functional classes will teach them more about daily household practices. And the older women would like to see their daughters and daughters-in-laws, who have completed 3 or 4 grades and are interested in learning more, continue with their learning.

Community Empowerment Process

Increased Participation in the Community

In most cases, group members are involved in activities outside of their homes. They participate in mothers' group meetings, visits and ward level meetings. Those who are Ward Members participate in Ward meetings. Women are eager to participate in activities as long as time permits. This is an important achievement, especially for group members from Bangsing Deurali, because by their social and cultural norms they are restricted from participating in public events. Therefore, participation in local politics, meetings, visits and in performing cultural activities, are important changes for

them. With regard to these changes, several women from the Lausibot Mother's Group observed:

. . . since we formed the mothers' group we have been meeting monthly and planning and discussing our activities and interests. Before women were prevented from talking in public places and visiting places but these days there is more freedom. People used to look down on women who were more outgoing and articulate. If women chatted with men people would accuse them of being over smart or loose. Women were not allowed to gather in groups. It was not felt respectful for women to do so. But these days situation is different. We can freely talk with anyone. (tape # 1)

Discussing the literacy classes, and the increased active participation of women in the public sphere, several women of the same group responded, "if there was only literacy and no Mothers' Group we would not have anywhere to go or anything to do in the community. We think that we would just be at our homestead most of the time after the completion of the class, so such changes would not occur" (tape # 2).

The situation with group members from Bange Fadke is different. Participation in activities outside of one's homestead is not new to these women. The socio-cultural tradition of Gurungs allow women to participate in dancing, singing and other community activities. Therefore, participating in meetings and community events or performing cultural activities, is not a major breakthrough for Gurung group members. Due to the language barrier and cultural differences they may feel uncomfortable interacting with people outside of their immediate community, but within their community they confidently exercise their ability to accomplish their mission.

Fund raising activities are one of the major activities of the mothers' groups. This activity on the one hand reinforces women's participation in the public sphere, and

on the other, gives women economic leverage. Besides, the fund raising activities are also entertaining.

Speaking about the fund raising and community activities of the former group, which they called the Mothers' Party, the Chairperson of the Siludanda Mothers' Group commented:

. . . earlier the tradition was to eat, drink and finish the money that was raised. But our older women thought that they should use the money for something better than food or drink. Our mothers have contributed a lot to the group. On the one and they walked door to door to raise money and on the other, for instance, if somebody gave them RS. 90 a mother would come forward and add RS. 10 to make it 100. This is how they increased the fund. My mother-in-law also worked hard. She did not recognize the rupee bills though. For instance, she would say "one with a goat to a 50 rupees bill !". She used to bring the money raised by the Mothers' Group to her son. Her son then kept the account for her.

In an individual interview an elderly women, who is still an active member in the same group, further added:

. . . we did our housework during the day. I went out to sing and dance when the children and their father went to bed at night. Later the children grew up and older sons got married and brought their wives home. This made it easier for me to participate in the mothers' group activities.

. . . we wanted to do some service to our community. We did not have anyone to guide us or give suggestions. We just discussed and decided to save money and do something good for the village. (tape # 10)

Participation in Local Politics

Many women interviewed are involved in local politics. They are elected members of the ward. Some are very strong and articulate in their convictions. The women's understanding of the situation, and their participation, has moved beyond their homestead and the mothers' group.

The Treasurer, of the Lausibot Mothers' Group, who is an elected ward member under the NCPUML, stated, " [The] Nepali Congress has land and laborer under its control. But we are those who do not have much land and earn our living ourselves. We can not compare our situation with theirs. So when we hear the Nepali Congress or other parties making allegations about us, we cannot tolerate it. This also inspired me to run in the election" (tape # 2).

Since it has become mandatory to have a woman in the elected local governance body, men in the villages encourage and motivate women to run in the election under the political parties they support. Both the Chairperson (who did not win the election) and the Treasurer of the Lausibot Mother's Group were encouraged and supported by local leaders, their friends, and men and women, to accept the candidacy. In the case of the Treasurer, her husband and his friends were in the forefront to motivate her.

This was very unusual before. Discussing the women's participation in local election, the chairperson of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 6 of Bangsing Deurali describes the situation this way, "a woman running for election would be seen as drinking water from nose instead of mouth for it was men's work" (tape # 6).

It is good that women are visibly contributing to the community, and the community also (due to several reasons) supports it. However, differences in political beliefs may also create tension in the group, possibly affecting group cohesiveness. For instance, the Chairperson of the Lausibot Mothers' Group ran in an election as a member of an unpopular party, and there was tension in the group. The women showed their dissatisfaction at having a chairperson from another frontier during the group interview, and wanted to bring it out in the meeting the next day. The Chairperson also

knew that her fellow women were not happy with her. In an individual interview she stated her position as,

I know my fellow women from the Mothers' Group are not happy with me because I ran for the election as a candidate from the Nepali Congress. I did it because my friends encouraged me to do so. Now it's over. Anyway I did not win. We should not bring politics to our work. But if they would like me to sign off from the position I am willing to do it. I don't need it. (tape # 2)

Interestingly, though, the next day in the Mothers' Group General Assembly (which takes place once a year) nobody raised the issue. Since nobody said anything, the chairperson herself told the group that she was willing to give up her position if anybody would like to take it. Nobody seemed to be willing to take the responsibility, as it requires a lot of time and commitment. Instead the group made a decision regarding the purchase of utensils. They discussed and agreed to the financial reporting that the Secretary presented, and the participants also decided to consult the CDCC about the action report and the evaluation report of the previous year's activities.

Since a variety of activities are happening within and outside of the UAKWMP project intervention, it is difficult for women to identify the factors that may have contributed to the change in their position in the community. The Treasurer of the Lausibot Mothers' Group, who is an elected member of the Ward, gives credit to the change in the political system as well:

The change is neither caused by literacy nor by UAKWMP alone, the multi-party system also brought the change. Through our involvement in the politics and community activities such as group formation, we became aware of many things such as the development fund that VDCs get from the district. Now we are able to ask VDC to fund development projects in our ward. This knowledge and understanding has prevented local leaders from misusing the fund. For instance, one year our ward received RS. 13,000 which we used to construct the trail. Before we

were not aware of this fund, and so never inquired about it. And women who were limited to their farm work have started to show interest in listening to the radios these days. (tape # 2)

Self-Reliance

Some mothers' groups in Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke have been able to take action without anybody's assistance. Though it is not new among the Gurung mothers of Bange Fadke, it is certainly teaching the community to take responsibility and make decisions on their behalf. For instance, the Mother's Group of Ward # 6 of Bangsing Deurali organized another group. One of the objectives of doing so is to make other women more smart and active. The process of forming the group and selecting the office holders is done by the mothers' group without help from the project staff. They are confident that they can organize themselves and function without outside help. The Chairperson of the group viewed it this way, "...since the project taught us how to work in groups, how to organize ourselves, and how to run the group, we should be able to function ourselves. We should develop our village ourselves, we should walk as the project showed us the path" (tape # 6). Several women of the same group think that the UAKWMP encouraged them to move forward. They said that the project assisted them in selecting group officers such as a chairperson, a vice chairperson, a treasurer and a secretary and to form the group so that they could gain recognition.

The UAKWMP wants women to participate more in group activities in order to meet their learning and other developmental needs, thereby making them self-supporting. To create an atmosphere for this, in addition to the on-going activities mentioned earlier, the project has started to motivate and encourage women to establish

reading centers. The project has hired a local man, who used to be the NFE facilitator, to do this job.

Discussing the situation of the mothers' groups in terms of self-reliance and independence the DA of Bangsing Deurali, said that there are mothers' groups who, without his assistance, fill out the vegetable seed-request form. The group members survey who wants how much in their Wards, collects money, fills out the information, and sends it back to the office. Given this situation, according to the DA, the project has been thinking of connecting the active and mature groups to good seed distributors, rather than continue working as mediator. In his observation, since one of the objectives of the UAKWMP was to strengthen the community organizations, to enable them to act independently for their benefits thereby building a path to sustainable development, this step seems to be relevant. Discussing the support that the mothers' group gets from the CDCC and how that affects the group's existence, he thinks that the Lausibot Mothers' Group can survive without CDCC's presence.

He also observes that those who have been through the literacy class readily get together, or meet when the project staff invite them to, for various reasons. He added:

There are certain knowledge and skills that people understand, learn and apply just by listening. But those who can read benefit more. The field office receives bulletins and newsletters from different places which are mostly meant for new readers. Some mothers' groups borrow these reading materials from the office and read in groups. Those who can read get to know about newer discoveries or techniques sooner, but those who cannot read have to wait for project staff or for others to come and tell them. (tape # 2)

Since the UAKWMP completed its first phase, and was looking forward to its second phase, it seemed pertinent to ask about the project's vision with regard to the

community groups. In this respect, when asked how the UAKWMP intervention will look in the second phase of the project (1997-2002), the DA commented that the policy is to empower local groups through the project's community-based support program. Groups that are active, and better at need identification, planning, implementation and follow-ups, will be provided with additional training, especially on management. They will be encouraged to submit proposals to the project for the consideration of grant support.

Change in Men's Attitude and Men's Assistance to Women's Activities

Most women interviewed think that the shift in men's attitude towards women's roles in the community has also contributed to women's increased participation in the public. The women acknowledge men's assistance to their group activities. In most cases examined, financial transactions are overseen by men. The assistance provided by men to the group is accepted as *dhunga ko bhar maato, maato ko bhar dhunga*,¹ by group members in all the cases. The common notion among women is that community development is a common responsibility, which can not be achieved through the work of one single sex.

Discussing the causes of change in their lives, several women from the Lausibot Mother's Group responded that both the mothers' group activities, and a shift in the men's attitudes brought the change. One woman added:

. . . as men began to understand the importance of mothers' group activities, they became keener to send their wives to the meetings, trainings, and visits. When there is a group program men no longer prevent their wives from participating. This is the result of men

understanding that both women and men should get together and work together for the benefit of the community and families. (tape # 1)

The Treasurer of the same group thinks that the official recognition given to men also made it easier for them to get involved in activities. She said, "if it was only a Mothers' Group there was a possibility of protest against women's participation in group activities, but since the CDCC was also formed the same day nobody said anything" (tape # 2).

The family, who initially did not allow the daughter-in-law to participate in the group activities, slowly let her do so. The Secretary of the Mothers' Group of Ward # 6 of Bangsing Deurali went through a similar change. In the beginning, she was not allowed to participate in any activities by her parents-in-law. But her husband returned from India, her mother-in-law passed away and things began to change. Her husband, and also the Chairperson of the group, talked to her father-in-law and had him allow her to take this position.

In her experience, the Chairperson of the same group said:

. . . we were not allowed to get together and speak like we do these days. Women were accused of being corrupt and over smart if they were out spoken and out going. . . . These days both men and women listen to the radio saying things about women's' roles. For instance, we heard from the radio as well, about women's participation in the election. People then slowly started recognizing women as candidates (tape # 6)

The women are raising more funds and contributing more to the community work than their male counterparts. In this respect, when asked whether the CDCC, which is basically a men's group, would still be supporting their group if they did not have funding, several women from the Mothers' Group of Ward # 4 of Bangsing Deurali responded positively:

Funds are not that important. A good relationship between the Mothers' Group and the CDCC is more important. If we did not agree with each other and could not work together, the fund would not do anything. The Mothers' Group is still alive because CDCC and the Mothers' Group get along with each other. (tape # 4)

Some women from Bange Fadke, however, think that their ways of doing things are better. The DA commented that the mothers' groups in Bange Fadke are more active than their counterpart CDCCs. He added:

. . . some mothers think that they were more organized and active before the fathers (ex-army men) returned and started helping. Some think that their ways of doing things were better. . . . The men from the CDCC try not to take the responsibility on the ground that mothers are already doing such things. They think that what mothers groups are doing are beneficial to them as well. The men do support and assist the mothers' group implement their programs. (tape # 10)

Though the findings in this chapter are separated into three categories of empowerment processes, they are connected to each other. The findings imply that all three categories: the self empowerment process, the group empowerment process and the community empowerment process, under which the themes are clustered, are linked with one another and are fluid in nature. And so, the themes may very well move from one category to another depending on the personal as well as non-personal factors in one's life. Keeping this in view, the next chapter will present an analysis of the findings. The perspectives presented on chapter two will be used to support the discussion.

End Note

1. This is a popular expression in Nepal which means "Brick is supported by Clay and clay is supported by brick." This is correlated to the construction of the walls or houses in which brick and clay are equally important and should stick to

each other. This is the expression that women used in the interviews to explain men's assistance to the group.

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Introduction

In this Chapter I have identified and explored the elements that cut across or inform the categories developed in chapter 6. This chapter is organized into two broad areas: programmatic factors and non-programmatic factors. I found this helpful in delineating a holistic picture of the issues identified in the findings. The first section of the chapter will look at the factors that are found because of the UAKWMP intervention and which impacted the empowerment processes discussed in the previous chapter. The second section will look at the factors outside of the UAKWMP intervention that influenced the empowerment process. The arguments presented in chapter 2 are applied to support the discussion. This will be followed by concluding remarks and issues for further research.

The most important finding of this study is that activities which lead to the process of empowerment are the most valuable. The most desired outcome, or the consequences of the activities (that women are involved in), are those which lead to self, group and community empowerment. Given this, now I am going to analyze programmatic and non-programmatic factors as they relate to self, group and community empowerment processes. Before examining the factors that influence the empowerment processes it is important that I begin with what empowerment means in this context.

In my interpretation, the mothers' group members' conception of empowerment is the achievement of qualities and skills that will help them address their immediate concerns as well as their long term issues. In this respect, empowerment for them involves both the concrete skills, knowledge and facilities which lead to better living as well as the skills, knowledge and qualities which lead to the means and desire to create a sustainable improvement at both the personal and community level over time. The skills, knowledge and facilities that the women identified as useful for their immediate concerns, include areas such as health, financial security, food and nutrition, sanitation, financial security, food and nutrition, drinking water, fuelwood, and fodder. The skills, knowledge and qualities that women identified as critical for sustainable improvement include areas such as, communication skills, self-confidence, the ability to voice one's opinion, thinking right, collaboration, and participation in local politics. Though these skills and knowledge appear to be distinct they are all inter-related. Their inter-relationship is a dialectical process. For example, some women commented that the skills and knowledge that they gained raised their awareness about matters important to their daily lives- which motivated them to take action. Others are proud that they are confident to speak out in times of injustice. As a group, they can work for the improvement of their community. They can manage their time accordingly in order to allow themselves to participate in activities outside of their homestead.

The emerging conception of empowerment according to the women most accurately matches those of Bandura (1986) and Stromquist (1995). Bandura, whose theory of efficacies has been used by many as a theoretical foundation for empowerment, says that the process of efficacy is generative, fluid and involves

cognitive, social and behavioral tenets to produce a desired result. Similarly, Stromquist also views empowerment as an integrated course of action which involves cognitive, psychological, economic and political factors.

Neither of them see empowerment as a set of separate and sequential skills. This understanding of empowerment has been used as a frame of reference, in the following section when I specifically look at the factors that lead to empowerment processes.

Programmatic Factors

Functional Literacy: Functional Knowledge and Skills

The UAKWMP literacy class, which is known as the Conservation Education Classes for Women (CECW), falls under Bown's (1990) third model of literacy intervention: desire for literacy as a reinforcement, after having acquired some degree of change (Chapter 2). In all the cases examined, the literacy programs took place at least two years after women got involved in the activities initiated by the UAKWMP.

The definition of functional education, and of literacy, has been changing over time. Its definition changes depending on the context and the objective of the program. According to the mother's group members' perspective, functional education is the knowledge and skills that are useful to their immediate circumstances. As we already mentioned, this kind of knowledge and skills include those related to health, sanitation, drinking water, fire/fodder, savings and credit. This definition matches the idea that functional education aims at developing skills and knowledge to enable one to enhance

the quality of personal as well as community life. The notion that continuous learning about areas relevant to the learners will help them seek social and economic change (Chapter 2) also fits into how the mothers' group members view functional knowledge and skills.

Though the UAKWMP literacy class is a set of "skills and tasks" (Lytle, 1990) the activities that the literacy learners are engaged in outside of the classes make it more comprehensive. Since the group members are learning skills for daily transactions and practicing what has been learned, they are, to some extent, engaged in what Lytle (1990) calls "practices and critical reflective/action". The women, because of their participation in other activities in addition to the literacy class, have developed an understanding of the impact of the transactions in which they are engaged. Women are learning from various educational as well as non-educational channels about issues important to their lives. They are practicing many of the skills, and applying the new knowledge they have learned. In this process of learning and doing, the women are also reflecting on how their situation was five years ago, before the project came. Thus, this comprehensive process, which takes women beyond the mere act of reading bus numbers, signing names, and counting money, has itself generated a learning strategy for the group members. The women wanted the skills to deal with problems confronting them, but at the same time they valued qualities such as self-confidence, self-identity, and collaborative action and a simple fact of having a place to meet to discuss issues of interest.

Nevertheless, due to their daily duties and chores, women lack leisure and are withdrawn from many activities in their communities. Women are therefore interested

in learning about things that will help make their lives easier by making their work less stressful. In this context, functional education provides women with the knowledge and skills, and the hope, needed to make their daily practices easier and more efficient. It is obvious from the case studies and the document review that the acquisition of knowledge and skills, including reading and writing skills, is not a goal in and of itself. The literacy program for women is a reinforcement to what the UAKWMP has already been initiating in the community. The objective of the CECW thus is two-fold, for both the women and the project. The women asked for the classes, primarily because they wanted to learn to read and write, and secondarily because they wanted to learn more about the functional knowledge and skills needed for their lives. Similarly, the project's objective is also to provide women with the opportunity to acquire basic reading, writing and computation skills, and to impart the knowledge and skills that are needed for achieving the project's community development and conservation goals. Given this, the literacy classes that the mothers' group members attend, to some extent substantiate Isley's (1985) view of literacy which focuses more on learning and knowing than mastery over a subject matter.

Functional literacy for women is thus embedded within the UAKWMP's conservation and community development activities. The lessons that the mothers' group members learn in the literacy classes are based within the context in which they will use it. The lessons, for example on health, sanitation, nutrition, vegetable gardening, and on the mothers' group are relevant to the group members' living situations. Similarly, the lessons on savings, credit and investment are also appropriate, from a financial point of view, to the situations of the group members.

Interestingly, the functional education classes that the mothers' group members are involved in also include elements of participatory and critical literacy. For example, Bhasin (1991) and Fueyo (1988) suggest that the starting point for literacy should be the learners' experience and knowledge about their life and work. This matches the experience of women in the conservation education and the agro-forestry activities. The conservation classes and the project activities drew upon the pre-existing experience and knowledge of women. Because women are primarily responsible for collecting fuelwood, fodder and water, they have experience with natural resources management. Since women have more experience and are more knowledgeable about natural resources, starting with the issue of conservation seems relevant. In this sense, the literacy and/or educational activities of the UAKWMP combine both functional skills and perspectives from the field of participatory and critical education. This further substantiates the fact that functional education, though it sounds very mechanical, can still uphold the humanistic aspects that make it more comprehensive (Kirpal, 1976).

Functional knowledge and skills, if combined with the educational and non-educational activities relevant to the learners' situation, thus contributes to the empowerment process. At first, those classes and activities help women better take care of their "practical needs" (Molynex, 1986 and Moser, 1993) thereby allowing them a free mind to think about and participate in activities outside of their homestead. Secondly, they develop a sense of achievement when they replace thumbprints with their signatures. Also, the women feel confident to travel because they can read the signboards and the directions.

What Schaetzel (1993) found in Bangladesh could be said of Nepal. In most South Asian villages, not to exclude the urban areas, women's self-identity is lost. They are not usually called by their given names. Mostly, village women are identified in relation to either their fathers, husbands, fathers-in-law or their sons. Therefore learning to sign one's name is quite an achievement to mothers' group members. It can give them a sense of identity which otherwise is known only through their relationship with others. Developing a sense of self-identity is also a milestone toward the empowerment process.

Schaetzel (1993), in her research in rural Bangladesh, also found out that those who had prior experience with formal schooling used functional literacy "as a way of refreshing their skills". In the cases of the mothers' group members also, those who had prior experience with formal education found the functional literacy classes very useful and refreshing. Formal education in Nepal is far from the learner's lives. The curriculum hardly prepares one to handle their realities. The curriculum is more abstract, so when women who had prior experience with formal education, come to the functional literacy classes, they find it more concrete and closer to their realities. They find it very useful. When women learn efficient ways to cope with their realities and practice them, they feel more powerful. The process gives them a sense of control over their situation. This is where Bandura's notion of self efficacy comes in. Within the realm of women and empowerment, having the power to change one's situation for the better helps "women fight their own fears, and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority" (Bhasin, 1992, pp. 19).

Any functional literacy program thus needs to balance short term and long term goals. Those goals are most meaningfully informed by the practical and strategic needs and interests of the learners, as well as the qualities that they value most.

Dialogue is a noteworthy element in the context of the mothers' groups. The group members are continuously engaged in dialogue among themselves and with the UAKWMP staff around matters regarding their situation and experiences. This is informed by Freire's approach to dialogue. However, the Freirean notion that the teachers assist learners to question the barriers constructed by their fatalistic perceptions and move them towards critical consciousness (Chapter 2) does not seem appropriate to the context of the mothers' group members. For the mothers' group members it is not the fatalistic perception that blocked their road, it is just a matter of lack of opportunity and relevant support. As the women got opportunities, a conducive environment, exposure and skills, they began to understand their situation as well as to gain the abilities to change that situation.

This implies that moving forward, getting involved in actions and understanding ones' capabilities to contribute to the welfare of the community and family, leads to the understanding of the need to affirm or reject the elements of their own culture and history. This seems to take place after taking action, rather than needing to occur as pre conditions, prior to action (see Giroux, 1983, Chapter 2). Similarly, the idea that literacy is a tool that enables learners to think deeper into any given issue affecting their lives, consequently enabling them to better identify their needs and ways to address such needs (Chapter 2) is not what's happening with the mothers' group members. The group activities, such as Ward level meetings, hands-on experience with agro-forestry,

foot-trail construction, tours, interaction with the project staff members outside of classroom, and saving and credit schemes enabled them to identify their needs and ways to address such needs. This study thus indicates that the best educational intervention in the given setting is functional education as defined earlier in this section.

Collective Action

Involvement in the groups provides a means for women's participation in the larger context of community development. This is what Stromquist (1995) calls a political element of empowerment. The group offers a safe and comfortable space to build collective efforts which lead to self-reliance, self-confidence and empowerment (Moser, 1993, Wacker, 1994, Hillhorst, 1997). The mothers' group members who were originally introverted, and posed little or no self-confidence, slowly gained self-confidence, and subsequently came out more in public. They began to express their opinions in the public meetings and show considerable leadership capacities.

Participation in group interaction created by the literacy class and the mothers' group meetings have provided women with space to discuss issues of interests. The issues that they discuss in the literacy class and mothers' group meetings include farming, politics and social events, foot-trail construction, conservation, visits and budgets. The discussions not only allow women to reflect on what went wrong and what went right, but also how should they approach a task in the future. It is relevant to look at Stromquist's (1992) vision of the process of empowerment at this point. She suggests that "the creation of critical mind requires a physical and reflective space where new ideas may be entertained and argued", and the use of groups "as the

pedagogical unit so that it emerges as a space of and for collective production"(pp. 57).

Stromquist further argues for "the creation of affective spaces-where adult women can relax, feel appreciated, share pleasant moments, exchange good news..."(ibid. 57).

Stromquist's arguments have been, to some extent, reflected in the literacy classes and the mother' group meetings observed for this study.

Additionally, when the collective actions produce some tangible benefit, women tend to maintain their collective force. For instance, the financial support which is readily available from the group has been one of the major incentives for women to keep the groups functioning. The savings and credit scheme is an important motivational factor for group formation. This has provided women a sense of security, subsequently helping them to raise households living standards to some extent, and to meet emergency needs from group funds at a reasonable interest rate. Direct support to the household in the form of cash helps redefine women's relationships with their family members. The feelings that they are making a tangible contribution to the maintenance of their family will also help develop women's self-esteem. This, for instance, motivates women to get involved more in collective actions, such as fund raising. As Stromquist (1995) views it, this kind of activity provides a leverage for economic empowerment.

The recognition of the women's contributions at the family and the community level, by their family members and the local community, seemed to be the most valued aspect of the mothers' groups in Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke. According to Bhasin (1992), gaining this kind of recognition in the community is empowerment. The women have found that their participation in the mothers' group activities, and their

contribution to the community, have been a very self satisfying experience. In Bange Fadke, however, due to cultural differences, the case is slightly different and this will be discussed later in this chapter.

Though the mothers' groups examined are at different stages in terms of their sustainability, they are contributing to the empowerment process. The involvement in group activities has helped members to develop a "sense of collective efficacy" (Bandura, 1986, pp. 449). This collective efficacy, or empowerment, has been generated from the members' understanding of the implication of their actions, and their knowledge and skills regarding the effective functioning of the group itself. This is where the critical, Freirean and participatory perspectives discussed in chapter 2 come in. All the three perspectives emphasize enabling the participants to collectively take actions for desired change.

Organizing themselves into a collective force, thereby changing their roles and responsibilities, contributes to the changed notion of women's status in the community. According to Bhasin (1992), this act of organizing and strengthening women's groups is one of the indicators of empowerment. If we break it down and view it through Stromquist's (1995) notion of empowerment, the collective actions of the mothers' groups may strengthen the "political element" of empowerment.

Time Factor

The project intervention helped the mothers' group members meet some of their practical needs. This lightened their drudgery. Less drudgery means more free time to think about secondary issues such as mother's group activities and literacy classes.

Also, the reduction in the burden of work within the household is also one of the factors of empowerment (Bhasin, 1992). Due to massive deforestation, besides child care and fetching water, gathering fuelwood and fodder are the primary and the most time consuming and exhausting jobs of women in most villages in developing countries. But most members of the mothers' groups, examined for this study in Bangsing Deurali and Bange Fadke, who have some land have started practicing agro-forestry. As a result, they have generated enough fodder and fuelwood around their houses and farm. They do not have to climb up the hill spending the entire day collecting for fodder and fuelwood. This has provided women with more time to think about and act on concerns outside of their domestic lives.

Women who have control over how and when to do their household chores are more likely to contribute to the group work including participation in local politics. Similarly, those who have fewer burdens or more helping hands at home, or are young (mostly daughters-in-laws fall into this category), or those who have been to school before, are eager to participate in activities outside of their homestead.

The women know that unless their daily concerns are taken care of they can not think of other issues, not even reading and writing. As many women in the interview mentioned, if they were still spending the same amount of time and energy in meeting their daily needs such as gathering fuelwood, fodder, and water, cooking, or livestock raising, they would not be participating in community activities. Though this seems to be more related to the discussion on functional knowledge and skills, it is relevant to discuss it here as well. As a result of functional knowledge, skills and facilities, the mothers' group members found more time to participate in other activities, such as

mothers' group meetings, visits and trainings. This exemplifies the notion that it is very important to take care of women's immediate concerns at the same time we work for a long term change (Molyneux, 1986; Moser, 1993).

Additionally, the program activities provided them time and space to sit and talk about matters important to them. As mentioned in chapter 6, mothers' group members take class time to discuss issues pertinent to them at that point. They also have mothers' group meeting where they can interact with one another. This factor is inter-related with previous factors regarding collective actions.

Non-Programmatic Factors

Cultural Tradition

The Brahman and Gurung cultures are different in many ways. Especially in matters of women's status, these two ethnic groups are very different. As mentioned in chapter 4, the Gurung cultural arrangement allows room for freedom to their women. By including them in the traditional community groups and financial dealings, Gurungs allow women to participate in activities outside of their immediate families. Because of this, participation in the mothers' group activities is not new to the Gurung women of Bange Fadke. The mothers' group members in Ward # 5 and 7 of this village were already motivated to participate in the community development activities. The Gurung culture, which does not restrict women from participating in the public, its tradition of taking a communal approach to problem solving, and a desire among women to do service to the community are important factors that cannot go unmentioned.

However, in the Brahman communities, women getting involved in the public is very unusual because it totally contradicts the Brahman culture. The situation is changing, but still, it is expected that the women do their jobs politely and efficiently and head home straight afterwards. In this context, to organize into groups and participate in tours and community activities, is a major break through in the lives of Brahman women from Bangsing Deurali. This is where Freire's notion of culture comes in. According to Freire (1970) culture is a process, which involves conflicting situations, possibilities of transformation, and choices to select from. From this notion, Gurung women are following their own tradition and giving it a new image. But Brahman women are seeking possibilities for transforming their cultural tradition by getting involved in non-traditional roles and activities.

One of the important factors for change in the lives of Brahman group members has been the change in the men's attitudes towards women's participation in community activities. However, it is not clear whether men are supportive of women's participation in group activities because it is making them less responsible for the improvement of their community or because of political interest (since women are now required to be represented), or if it is because of the genuine change in their attitudes towards the women's contribution to the livelihood of the family, and to the management of the natural resources.

Socio-Economic Condition

As mentioned earlier, through its literacy, mothers' group activities and conservation activities, the UAKWMP aims to increase women's participation in

planning and decision making regarding the natural resource management and other community development activities. However, the marginal groups seem to remain still outside the process. The strategies do not necessarily ensure the participation of women from lower castes, most of whom are financially weaker.

The project has special incentives for such groups of women. The UAKWMP provides a revolving fund to the group for income generation activities. This still seems to be inadequate to allow lower caste women to fully participate in the mothers' group because of the social standard set by the caste system. Both Gurungs and Brahmins observe the caste system. They do not accept food or drink from the women from lower castes. Moreover, families of the women from those groups do not own enough land or livestock. Their livelihood is dependent on daily wages that they earn working in other people's field. Such situations make it difficult for lower caste women to fully participate in the group or community activities, including literacy classes.

Subsequently, women whose families own enough land, and livestock, and are financially secured, are more likely to participate in the group activities.

This indicates that the socio-economic factors also plays a crucial role in the process of empowerment. This necessitates a different kind of, or more inclusive, strategy, which is more likely to allow women from lower socio-economic class to share the benefits of participating in program activities.

National Policy Intervention

Along with the integrated approach of the program, a national level intervention is equally important. In this case, I found that the government policy has also impacted

the change in women's lives. Those policies have increased women's participation at the community level. This, however, does not suggest that the government policies automatically increase women's participation in the public, but in this case they are definitely a positive and long-term intervention.

For instance, the mandatory representation of women in locally elected institutions seems to be one of the major factors that contributed to the women's participation in the public. Women are interested in talking about local politics and are happy that they are a part of it. This, I believe, is contributing to the community empowerment. This indicates that a positive national policy can be viewed as a long-term intervention.

Similarly, the community forestry guidelines, which require that at least one-third of the members in the forest user groups should be women, is another example which can be viewed as a long-term intervention. In societies where women are not readily accepted as a part of institutions outside of their households, it will take a long time before we see a policy of this kind working fully at the ground level. However, as long as the requirement is there, women who are interested, and are ready, can participate in the group. This definitely opens up the door for many other women. It is more a matter of time.

However, at the same time, some policies and Acts can also be disempowering. For instance, the law regarding the non-government organizations are not favorable to the informal ways of the rural community groups such as mothers' groups. They are either restrictive as to the number of participants, or bound by the policy that if they become non-functional their assets are seized by the government. The mothers' groups

examined in this study, who collect considerable amounts of funds, are afraid that their funds may be taken away by the government. In this context, the grassroots level self-help groups have no legal identity, though they contribute a great deal to the development of the local communities.

Concluding Remarks

These days, most literacy programs for women are linked to some kind of follow-up activities. For instance, the community development and conservation project of the Save the Children US in the Gorkha District, was initiated in the mid eighties with the literacy program for women. After the completion of the classes, women were organized into groups, and they were provide with additional support and resources, such as vegetable seeds, and income generation activities. The women who joined the literacy class are found to be still active in the community, even after ten years, and they feel empowered (Leve, Leslie, & Manandhar, 1997). Save the Children attributed the sustainability of changes to the literacy classes. Though literacy classes might have contributed much to the changes, it would be interesting and helpful to learn if there are other factors, including collaborative actions emerging from the group, that might also have contributed. But the tendency, however, has been to overlook other aspects of women's experiences, such as group activities, cultural practices, family influence and political participation, while determining the factors of change. It exemplifies the fact that, "how the dynamics of human interaction, group tasks and processes, and issues of political power can be integrated into motivational and learning models has yet to be fully determined" (Whitmore, et al., 1986).

The findings of this study thus indicate that there are innumerable factors that contribute to the empowerment process. Those factors do not necessarily work alone. They interact with each other. We just need to acknowledge them, and wherever it is possible include them in program strategies. This will help design a more appropriate intervention. The intervention may impact individuals differently because of their political convictions, cultural and socio-economic situations, and also because of the attitudes of their family members. But this acknowledges the fact that the participants are a part of a whole system.

This study brings out several salient issues that not much research on women and literacy programs discuss. These features include long-term interventions, functional knowledge and skills, participation in collective actions, national policy, cultural traditions and socio-economic conditions.

The first salient issue is a long-term intervention. In this study I found that empowerment is neither caused by a one shot program, like a six to twelve month long literacy program, nor a short term one layer intervention. In other words, it is a long process which requires more than class room instruction, reading materials or savings and credit scheme. The arguments put forth by the critical perspective, the participatory perspective and the conceptual notion of empowerment itself, emphasize the collaborative transformative practices which cut across social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of the participants' lives. This kind of comprehensive process requires more than the knowledge and skills required for the participants' daily lives.

Because of what I found in my research I believe that any educational programs designed to achieve the goal of empowerment require an integrated approach and a

long-term commitment. In this case, the long-term intervention that the UAKWMP has been pursuing has contributed to community groups- like mothers' groups- take off the ground. The long term, multi-layer interventions have helped women build their self-confidence at the individual as well as group level. A long term project with multiple interventions also seems to be more successful in keeping the women motivated. Increased confidence, and alive motivation eventually leads to a community empowerment process.

The UAKWMP, through various channels, including literacy, aims at empowering the community groups, thereby enabling them to take the responsibility for the improvement of their communities. Since the project used other techniques as its entry point, literacy alone has not been the decisive factor of changes in the lives of the mothers' group members. Continuous interaction with the group members, Women Motivators, Development Assistance and their participation in the literacy classes together, have made women more out going and confident. The role that the UAKWMP's field staff play, to some extent is parallel to Giroux's (1983) view of the teachers' roles. The UAKWMP field staff, through workshops, trainings, home visits and meetings, provide time and space for women to dialogue about their experiences and problems, and possible measures to overcome the problems. This has, on one hand, helped to keep women's motivation sustained, and on the other, helped them to be more confident in voicing their opinions.

The second salient issue is functional knowledge and skills. The literature and the cases show that functional literacy, which is assumed to be thought-controlling and mechanical, can also contribute to empowerment. Functional literacy which promotes

knowledge and skills needed for the learners' daily lives raises motivation and participation in actions. When women are engaged in action which make their daily lives easier, and given opportunities and support, they find it useful to explore other possibilities to improve their situations. This trend keeps women engaged in action, reflection and dialogue, thereby enhancing their confidence, self-esteem and ability to take charge of their situations. Very few have looked at functional literacy as a possibility for empowerment processes. The functional literacy programs that incorporate holistic approaches contribute to the empowerment process, contrary to the typical view of functional literacy. This case study confirms it.

The third salient issue is collective action. Looking at it through programmatically, this study shows that functional literacy programs, together with collective actions, can be an effective way to generate empowerment processes. The collective or group activities have been a very appropriate environment for women to foster qualities that they view as important. Additionally, if women are provided with a conducive environment, such as group settings in which to talk, reflect and work, it not only develops confidence and courage, it also provides leverage for collaborative action. This makes it clear that the factors that contribute to empowerment are inter-related. They are in interaction with one another all the time. So all the elements that contribute or contradict to the empowerment processes are equally important to investigate.

Cultural traditions, socio-economic conditions and policy interventions also bear equal importance in the empowerment process. The cultural traditions and socio-economic factors of a given community hold both empowering and disempowering features. Therefore it is appropriate to embrace positive elements while enabling

participants to diminish the negative elements. The socio-economic conditions are found to be working both positively and negatively. Since most women from rural areas of the developing countries lack access to cash, the group actions which offers support in the form of cash to take care of their immediate issues, motivates women to actively participate in activities outside of their homestead, such as fund raising. This activity, along with the savings and credit scheme, on the one hand slowly encourages women to get involved in activities outside of their homestead and on the other, changes their status in and outside of their households. However, in this case study, women who lacked enough land, and a stable income to run the house, could not participate in the group action because they had to work on daily wages outside of their homes for their livelihood. They can not participate regularly in the meetings, fund raising activities, and other activities, because in most cases they cannot afford to miss their wage earning work.

As I mentioned earlier, functional knowledge and skills through literacy programs, and collective action through groups, develops women's knowledge, skills, personality, and motivation to work. However, the impact of this kind of intervention is not limited to women alone. When women begin to make visible contributions to the family and community, and acquire the knowledge and skills that are accepted as valid by the community members, it is likely that the men and other community members will change their attitude and behavior towards women. Subsequently, it helps change women's socio-cultural status.

This implies that in any given context, if the literacy programs are to be more meaningful to women's lives they should work at developing a "feeling and sense of

self-confidence among women that they can improve their conditions and succeed in their efforts" (Bhalalusesa, pp. 27). This however, again indicates that no one method or strategy is sufficient. The methods and strategies have to address the needs and interests of the learners, and the learners should participate in the activities, as the cases reported in this study. Given this, the major implication of this study is that literacy programs intended for women need more time and support. In other words, the functional literacy programs intended for women need more trained staff in the field other than just the literacy class facilitators. The short term programs, such as one year or even two year projects, do not produce a long-lasting and positive impact. Not only this study, but others have indicated that the processes of empowerment are complex, and occur at multiple levels/aspects of women's lives, so a long-term, integrated approach seems to be the best option to address the issues of empowerment. Additionally, the programs that aim at empowering women, in particular, should have a thorough conceptual and well as contextual knowledge of the term, and be able to calculate what it entails in terms of human resources and time to achieve an overarching goal like "empowerment".

Given this, the major factors that I found contributing to the empowerment processes include functional knowledge and skills, participation in group activities, national policy intervention, cultural tradition, and financial conditions. Nevertheless, in any given case of intervention the issue of sustainability always remains unanswered. Thus, it is hard to predict how and where the mothers' groups examined for this study will be in another ten or fifteen years after the project phases out. It would be

interesting to follow them over a period of time to see how the dynamics of the different factors I found in this study play out.

Given this, how does this research contribute to the body of knowledge? I have contributed to the study of women's self-help groups, literacy programs and issues of empowerment along the lines advocated by senior researchers and educators (Bandura, 1986,1997; Bhasin, 1992; Rogers, 1994; Stromquist, 1995). My study shows that a wider community-level conception of empowerment will contribute to the understanding of how collective action, functional literacy and other factors surrounding women's lives impact the processes of empowerment.

I have also clearly outlined the implication of these findings for policy makers and program organizers. The study also implies that the best way for programmatic intervention to have lasting effect, is to use women's existing experience, knowledge and skills as a starting point. Women do not enter programs as wholly naive and fatalistic. They simply need space, support and a favorable environment in which they can enhance their knowledge and skills, and discover their strengths.

This study has also clearly shown how valuable it is to include women's perspectives in the investigation. It is their voices which led me towards understanding what the processes of empowerment include, and whether they supports or contradict the perspectives found in the literature. Also, I have definitely opened up additional areas for research, some of which are mentioned below.

Issues that Need Further Exploration

Nepal is a heterogeneous society with diverse socio-economic, cultural, religious and language groups. Additionally, there are regional differences, which cannot be ignored. This exploratory inquiry examined the situation as it occurred in one specific context (one project area). In this sense, the study represents neither all the literacy programs nor all the women who have been through the literacy training or mothers' groups in Nepal. I can not claim that the findings of this study are generalizable to other contexts, though the knowledge generated will give insight into the area of functional literacy, women's informal groups and the empowerment processes.

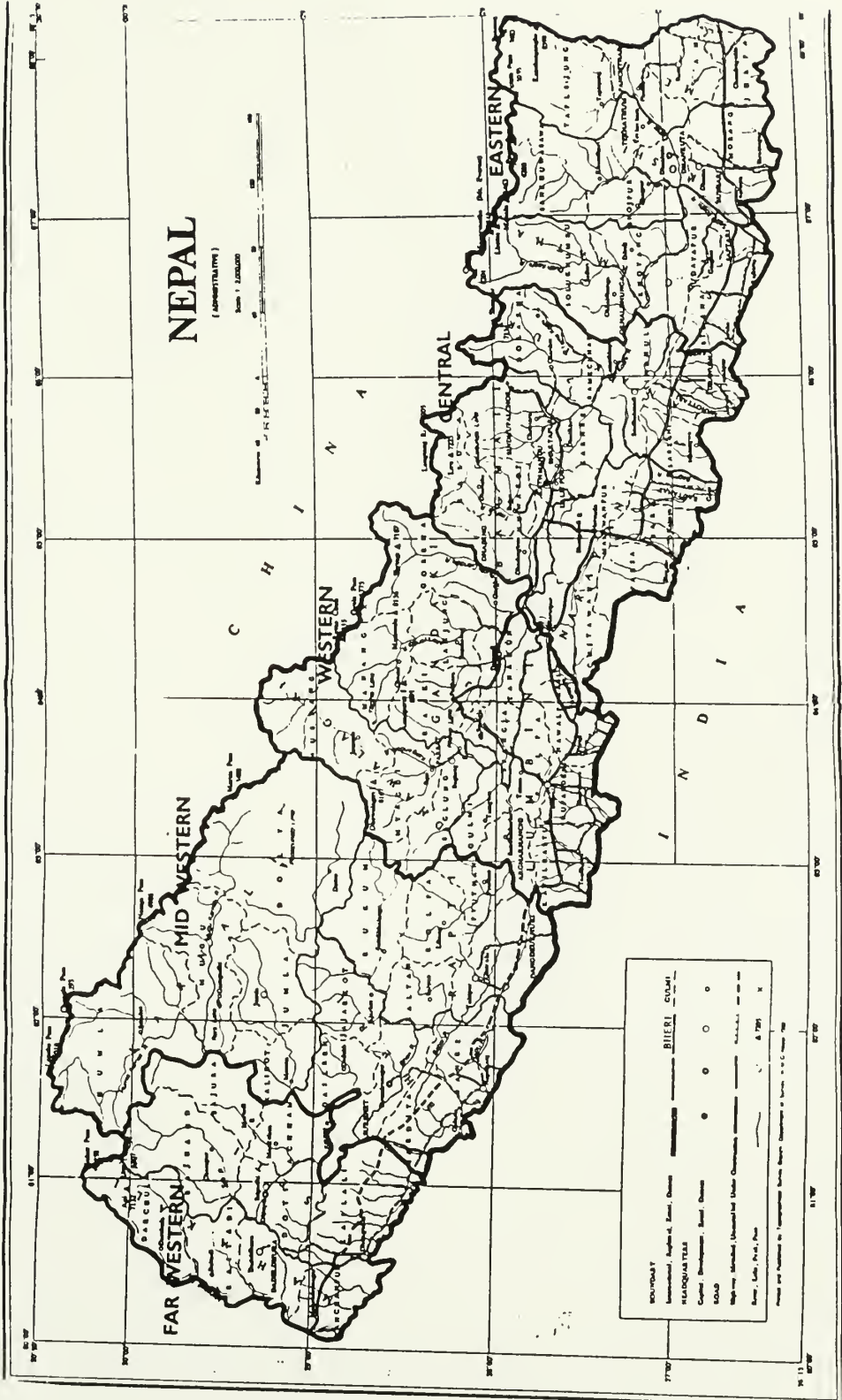
This study definitely indicates that there are countless areas surrounding women's literacy programs waiting for investigation. It also indicates that if the research in women's literacy moves beyond just validating what one thinks is right, it will provide extensive knowledge and alternatives for program planners and program organizers. Given this, the specific issues and questions that I found to be important for further investigation include:

- o How can positive socio-cultural traditions be built up to strengthen community-based women's groups?
- o What roles and attitudes do men hold regarding women's participation in individual and community development processes?
- o How can an educational intervention for men regarding the gender issues in the community be included in the programs?

- o How can the mechanisms for raising men's awareness about, and participation in, family health and sanitation issues be incorporated into the programs?
- o How can a multi-caste group function as a cohesive unit, and how much do issues of caste, as opposed to economic conditions, affect the process? and, what can be done to address these issues?

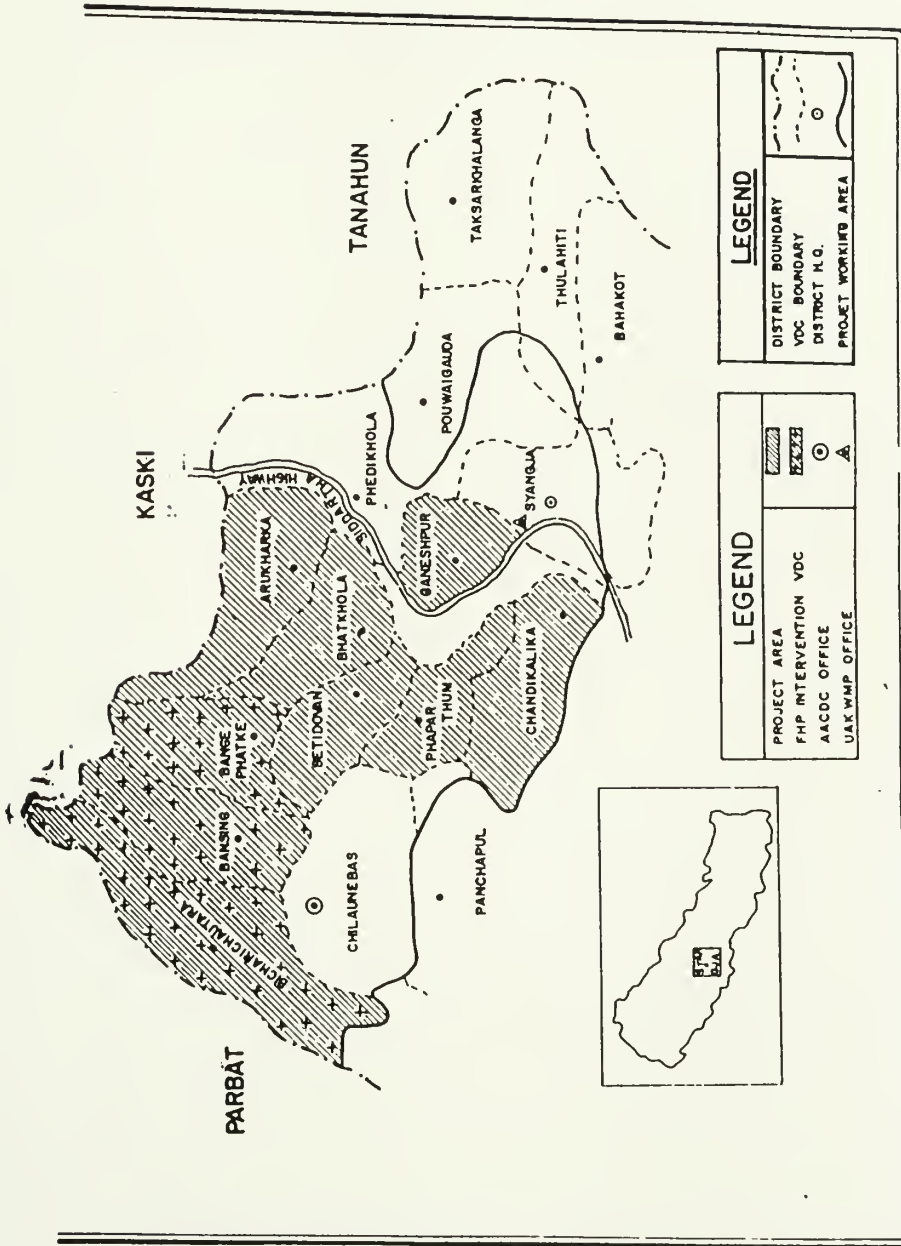
The findings of this study show that sustainable processes are in fact often the most desirable outcomes. The findings of the study are based on the factors, including functional literacy, that contribute to empowering women as a collective group. The major factors that contribute to the processes include both programmatic interventions and non-programmatic interventions. This thus implies that to look at empowerment of women in developing countries through one lens and draw conclusion on that basis is quite premature. Women's lives are influenced by various conditions engendered by political, social, cultural, economic and educational components. Therefore, to pay attention to one component in isolation does not seem appropriate, if the objective is to achieve a multi-faceted goal like empowerment. The findings imply that, since empowerment occurs at different levels, which are supported or limited by various aspects at different points in one's life it is a fluid process. The findings will thus be of interest to the practitioners, educators and program organizers who are interested in the qualitative impact of un-explored elements in the community on the empowerment processes of women at individual, group and community levels.

APPENDIX A
MAP OF NEPAL



APPENDIX B

MAP OF SYANGJA DISTRICT: UAKWMP AREA



UAK-WMP PROJECT AREA (SYANGJA)

APPENDIX C

PROFILE OF CONSERVATION CLASSES FOR WOMEN
IN BANSING DEURALI AND BANGE FADKE

Bangsing Deurali

Ward	FY93		FY94		FY95		FY96		FY97		Total	
	B	F	B	F	B	F	B	F	B	F		
5	-	-	1, 7, 9	5	1, 2, 6, 8	1, 7, 9,	8	1, 2, 6, 8	3, 4	8	11	9

Bange Fadke

Ward	FY93		FY94		FY95		FY96		FY97		Total	
	B	F	B	F	B	F	B	F	B	F		
6	-	-	1, 4, 9	-	3, 5, 7, 8	1, 4, 9	-	5, 7, 8	.*	-	8	6

B = Basic

F = Functional

* Basic literacy class has been conducted by the Department of Education in ward # 7 & 5

Source: CARE field office file

APPENDIX D

STATUS OF MOTHERS' GROUP FORMATION IN
BANGSING DEURALI (UPDATED JAN. 1997)

Status of Mother's Goup Formation in Bangsing Deurali

Group/Ward	Formed Date	Total member	Female member	Low caste member	Total Household	Low caste Household	Fund (in NRS.)
Bharsyang # 1	1993	7	7	0	29	0	3257.00
Lausibot # 1	1994	9	9	0	60	0	22200.00
Sepathi/ Bahadhunga # 2	1994	9	9	4	98	35	10336.00
Kamere #3	1994	9	9	2	56	24	4335.00
Thulakhet/Daha # 4	1993	7	7	0	28	0	14362.00
Narikot/Baskot # 5	1993	7	7	3	43	22	6348.00
Rimal Swara # 6	1993	7	7	0	33	0	14362.00
Kothi/Mulabari # 7	1993	11	11	1	42	3	17909.00
Thami/Batase (Odara) # 8	1994	9	9	1	58	4	10446.00
Deurali # 9	1993	9	9	0	63	0	5733.60

Source: CARE field Office file

APPENDIX E

STATUS OF MOTHERS' GROUP FORMATION IN
BANGE FADKE (UPDATED JAN. 1997)

Status of Mothers' Group formation in Bange Fadke

Group/Ward	Formed Date	Total member	Female member	Low caste member	Total Household	Low Caste Household	Fund (in NRS.)
Samress # 1	1993	7	7	0	52	0	5000.00
Ilim Chilim # 2	1992	7	7	0	13	0	5000.00
Nunthek # 3	1992	9	9	2	34	7	7300.00
Jugle # 4	1992	9	9	0	24	0	-
Danda Gaun # 5	1992	10	10	2	29	11	5200.00
Fadke # 6	1992	9	9	7	17	12	5435.00
Puchhar # 7	1992	9	9	0	21	0	25000.00
Bahunthar # 8	1993	11	11	0	29	0	23000.00
Siranchaur # 9	1993	7	7	0	25	0	700.00

Source: CARE field Office file

APPENDIX F

STATUS OF CDCC FORMATION IN BANGSING DEURALI
(UPDATED JAN. 1997)

Status of CDCC Formation in Bangsing Deurali

Group/Ward	Formed Date	Total member	Female member	Low caste member	Total Household	Low Caste Household	Fund (in NRS.)
Bharsyang # 1	1993	7	2	0	29	0	5005.60
Lausibot # 1	1994	9	2	0	60	0	300.00
Sepathi/ Bahadhunga # 2	1994	11	1	3	98	35	23200.00
Kamere #3	1994	9	3	3	56	24	1100.00
Thulakhet/Daha # 4	1993	5	2	0	28	0	90.00
Narikot/Baskot # 5	1993	7	1	3	43	22	500.00
Rimal Swara # 6	1993	7	2	0	33	0	2200.00
Kothi/Mulabari # 7	1993	7	1	0	42	3	1500.00
Tham/Batase (Odara) # 8	1994	9	2	0	58	4	130.00
Deurali # 9	1993	9	1	0	63	0	283.00

Source: CARE field Office file

APPENDIX G

STATUS OF CDCC FORMATION IN BANGE FADKE
(UPDATED JAN. 1997)

Status of CDCC formation in Bange Fadke

Group/Ward	Formed Date	Total member	Female member	Low caste member	Total Household	Low Caste Household	Fund (in NRS.)
Samress # 1	1993	10	2	1	52	10	2000.00
Ilim Chilim # 2	1992	5	1	0	13	0	2300.00
Nunthek # 3	1992	7	2	1	34	7	1880.00
Jugle # 4	1993	5	1	0	24	0	1233.00
Danda Gaun # 5	-	7	0	2	29	11	.*
Fadke # 6	1992	5	1	2	17	12	150.00
Puchhar # 7	1992	5	1	0	21	0	1300.00
Bahunthar # 8	1993	11	2	0	29	0	.*
Siranchaur # 9	1993	7	1	0	25	0	300.00

* Fund is in Mothers' Group fund.

Source: CARE field Office file

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