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Is Microcredit Enhancing Women Empowerment?

A Case Study of Women in Jumla

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Abstract

Women have been regarded as a disadvantaged group in Nepal (Aoki & Pradhan, 2013), because of the limited opportunities in these areas, women residing in rural parts of Nepal such as, Kudari VDC in Jumla, are particularly vulnerable.

The women in Jumla normally are involved in daily household jobs like cooking, cleaning, washing, feeding the cattle etc. The Maoist insurgency (about a 10 years of war in the country), lack of food supply and globalization have forced men to migrate to safe places and seek opportunities to earn money. This significant change however has given the burden of both household jobs and income generating jobs to the women.

The majority of women are illiterate, but with the initiative of the Government and the cooperation with numerous INGOs and NGOs these women are given the opportunity to enter the formal economy through microcredit programs. Some authors claim that these programs are showing very positive results. However, other authors claim that the reality of microcredit is that it is less efficient than it promises. That is why this research empirically explores how these kind of programs are affecting women's life particularly in Jumla district, Nepal.

Keywords: Women, Nepal, Jumla, Family, Migrate, Maoist insurgency, Globalization, Income-generating jobs, Government, INGO, NGO, Microcredit, Empowerment.

List of Abbreviations

MFI	Microfinance Institutions
GoN	Government of Nepal
PAF	Poverty Alleviation Fund
VDC	Village Development Committee
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
AWON	Action works Nepal
4S	Surya Social Service Society
MEDEP	Micro-Enterprise Development Programme
NRs	Nepalese Rupees
DDC	District Development Committee
DTMP	District Transport Master Plan
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
GDAA	Govinda Development Aid Association
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
WFP	World Food Program
SEDA	Sustainable Equitable Development Academy
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

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1. Introduction

Microcredit is a small loan without any collateral, specially designed to help women and vulnerable groups to uplift their living standard by income generating programs. Basically, it is a small loan without any collateral. That is why, theoretically, it is believed that microcredit programs give poor women in the developing world a chance to start up small income-generating enterprises. Programs include an opportunity to come out of their household and explore outside community through various skill training programs, gender equity, and health issues. Thus, ample number of scholars believe that such income generation and training programs are bringing women empowerment such as/ Mahat (2015), Aoki & Pradhan (2013), Shrestha (2009).

There are diverse thoughts about microcredit programs and its impact on women. For example Aoki & Pradhan (2013) and Mahat (2015) states that most of the women in rural areas seldom have a chance to go out and participate in other activities than their household jobs. Microcredit program gives a woman, who never earned a single penny in her life, a chance to start her own income generating activities through farming, small enterprises etc. Usually, a microcredit program is followed by different skills, health, gender and equity training. The participants of such training becomes informed and they realize their rights. That is why some authors believe that microcredits bring women empowerment.

Other authors like Karnani (2007), Sharmin (2014) point out that microcredits are not actually empowering women. The small size of the loan does not make it possible to start up any sustainable activity.

The aim of this research is to shed further light on the debate presented by different scholars about the impact of microcredit on women in Jumla using Kabeer (1999) theoretical framework on women's empowerment.

In this chapter the aim of the research and the delimitations of this research will be described. In chapter 2, the socio-economic and cultural background is presented with the highlights of the Nepal research area, Jumla. In chapter 3 male immigration and its consequences i.e. the impact on women's livelihood will be discussed.

In chapter 4 previous studies will be discussed. Likewise, in chapter 5, the theoretical framework will be presented. In this chapter, women empowerment and microcredit will be discussed. Likewise, methodology and source criticism is following in chapter 6.

Towards the end of this research, in chapter 7, a critical review of the outcome of microcredit projects in Jumla will be presented. This contains case studies. The conclusions are presented in chapter 8.

1.2 Aim of the research

Microcredit, under the right conditions, promotes the empowerment of poor people and provides opportunities for poor women to become active participants in economic activities, and to attain new roles as income earners and managers of the household. With access to financial services they become more confident, assertive and better equipped to overcome cultural inequalities (UN, 2005).

Sharmin (2014) points out that the size of a microcredit is usually small. So, women may get out of the poverty for a short period of time. In the long run, when the money has run out or if the investment goes wrong, the women run the risk of falling back to poverty again. So, Sharmin argues that this is not a sustainable and right approach for women's empowerment. Empirical studies, however, have shown that

there is a progress in poverty reduction in Nepal and women are empowered due to those programs. At the same time a few other authors deny that microcredit is the right medicine to alleviate poverty.

The aim of this case study is to critically discuss if the access to microcredits is helping women to financial independence and empowerment, focusing on a single case, i.e. Jumla District in Nepal. There is no previous research in this field, particularly in Jumla. The result cannot be generalized because of the differences in various factors like geography, culture and economy. Therefore, this research aims to provide a critical examination of microcredit in Jumla. The study will explore if microcredit is impacting positively on the lives of women in Jumla. If this is true, it will further investigate how these microcredit programs are helping these women in Jumla to come out of poverty and empower themselves. The study also tries to see if there are any visible changes in gender relations, especially in decision-making processes and women empowerment.

To fulfil the aim, the following questions are being asked:

- A. How does access to microcredit influence women's participation in the formal economy and social involvement?
- B. How far have microcredit programs come to reinforce women into their own decision-making?

1.3 Delimitations

This research is based on Jumla. Due to the fact that the study period was only about two months and in a distant area, this study does not represent the entire population. The case study represents 59 women from Kudari VDC. However, the aim of the study is to shed further light on the important phenomena rather than making a statistical inference. This is why the qualitative method is used. Only two women from two different savings and credit groups and one woman a single microcredit s taken as sample. One man from Jumla is also interviewed.

First of all, finding interviewees was a difficult task. When they had been selected, due to the time differences between Nepal and Sweden, it was not easy to get connected to those interviewees. It took several attempts over several days to get in touch for the interviews. As there is no literature regarding microcredit and women's empowerment in Jumla, hopefully this research will contribute to the academic literature and future references.

2. Socio-Economic and Cultural Background

2.1 Nepal

Nepal is a small landlocked country situated between China and India. Geographically, it is divided into the high mountains in the north, the hills in the middle and the Terai (plains) in the south.

Administratively, the country is divided into five development regions: eastern, central, western, mid western and far western development regions. The five development regions have 14 zones and 75 districts altogether. Total population of Nepal is 26,620,809 and women comprise 51.44 percent of the total population (Census report, Nepal 2011 cited in Chokhal, 2013). More than 31% of the population is living below the poverty line. Extreme poverty stands as a big challenge for Nepal. At the same time the country faces social challenges like the caste system and discrimination against women. These scenarios are even worse in the rural areas with strict social norms (Shrestha, 2009).

2.2 Research Area, Jumla

This research is particularly based on Jumla. Jumla lies in the mid-western development region and in Karnali Zone. Its population totaled 108,921 in 2011. The average temperature in Jumla varies between 18 °C to 30 °C in the summer and -14 °C to -11 °C in the winter. The maximum snowfall on record is 46.6 cm and minimum 2.7 cm. Jumla has less rainfall with the annual rainfall of 1343mm (DDC, 2013).

Jumla has recently been linked by the Karnali highway. It is more of a wider trail than a proper road. Though it is risky to use small trucks, tractors and jeeps brave the road. This road link has brought some relief to the local inhabitants of this district and its neighbors. It has not only provided easy access to the outside world, but has also drastically brought down the price of basic necessities and increased their availability. Otherwise, the only means to transport in and out of Jumla was by plane, helicopter or on mule or horseback which was not affordable for the average Jumlis (Schipper, 2009-2010).

More than 85% of the Jumlis depends on the agriculture. Paddy, maize, millet, wheat, and barley are the main crops, whereas apple, potato, bean, oil-seed and herbal products are also grown (DDC, 2013). Although agriculture is the major occupation in Jumla it is unfortunately still at a subsistence level. Therefore, migration is the only way to supplement their economy (Schipper, 2009-2010).

Since, Jumla is far from the capital city and centrally based development processes it lacks provision of quality health, education and other public services. The hardship of geography, tradition, and customs are dominant in everyday life (Jumla District Profile, 2012). One of the significant problems is the caste system in Jumla. There is a clear division of groups of people according to their caste. For example Chhettris, Brahmin and Thakuri are considered high caste and Tailor, Musician (Damai), Shoemaker (Sarki) and Carpenter (Kami) are considered Dalits, the low caste Schipper (2009-2010).

The Brahmins are the priest caste so they are at the top of the caste hierarchy, followed by the Chhetris known as the warriors, Sudra, the peasants or business people and finally the Dalits, who are the untouchables; the lowest caste in the hierarchy. This means that lower caste cannot use public and natural resources which are available for the higher caste people. For example; the local water tap is entitled to everyone, Dalits as well as Non Dalits, but Dalits should be at the end of the row to fetch up water. Since it is believed that Dalits pollute the water if they come in contact with it, the higher caste people fetch the water before they touch it (Acharya, 2007).

Many upper castes such as Brahmin and Chhettri are farmers and have land, whereas lower castes do not own any land (Aoki & Pradhan, 2013). Caste discrimination has been declared illegal in Nepal since 1962.

However, due to the illiteracy and lack of education, this kind of social discrimination is still found in Jumla which is making people even more disadvantaged (Govinda Development Aid Association, 2011).

Table 1. Brief statistics of Jumla

Total area: 2,531 km ² Total VDCs: 30 Municipalities: 0 Total households: 19,303 Eligible people registered to vote: 45,846 (May 2013) Average household size: 5.60 Human Development Index: 0.348 Literacy rate (Male): 75% Proposed budget per person: 23 NRs in 2012/13 Foreign aid disbursement per capita: USD 48.00 Foreign aid commitment: USD 24 million, 78% through GoN Basic Education Schools: 124 Campus: 2 Health Posts: 9 Sub-Health Posts: 26	Total Population (2011): 108,921 Female: 54,023 (50%) Male: 54,898 (50%) Population aged 10-24: 35,872 Female: 18,205 Male: 17,667 Women's Literacy rate: 37% Higher Secondary Schools: 10 Hospitals: 1
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Source: Districts of Nepal, District Development Committee Office, Jumla, Nepal, National Population and Housing Census 2011.

Table 2. Female proportion in labor force by occupation (1981- 2001)

Occupations/ Sector	1981	1991	2001
I. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery Workers	36.4	45.1	48.1
Of Which:			
Skilled and semi-skilled (own account farmers)			49.3
Elementary occupations			36.4
II. Non-Agriculture	14.3	20.2	34.3
Administrative workers (Legislators, senior off. & managers)	6.6	9.3	13.8
Technicians and associate professionals	16.6	15.1	19.0
Of Which:			
Professionals			23.3
Technician & associate professionals			14.4
Clerks or office assistants	5.8	10.0	12.8
Service, shop and market sales workers	14.6	23.9	24.7
Production workers	19.2	15.8	44.1
Of Which:			
Craft and related workers			44.6
Plant and machine operator & assemblers			13.0
Elementary occupations (other than agriculture) \1			48.6
Not Stated / others	15.1	35.9	50.9
Total	34.6	40.4	43.2

1/ Includes fuel and water collectors for domestic use, which were not counted as economic in earlier censuses

Source: Acharya, 2005

According to Acharya (2005) in Nepal, women constitute more than 43 percent of the labour force, 48 percent in agriculture and 34 percent in the non-agriculture sectors (Table 2). Women's proportion has increased almost in all occupations to some extent, but the majority is in agriculture. Women still constitute only a small proportion among administrative, technical and professional, and clerical worker categories (Acharya, 2005).

They constitute only about 14 percent of the administrative workers, i.e. among the senior officers, legislators and managers, and 19 percent of the professionals and technicians, which comprises teachers, trained nurses, doctors, engineers, professors etc (Acharya, 2005).

2.3 Organizations Working in Jumla

There are several NGOs working all over Nepal. Among them there are a number of NGOs who are active in Jumla such as Action works Nepal, Surya social service society and Micro-Enterprise Development Program etc.

Action works Nepal (Awon)

Awon is an NGO working in various fields of development in Nepal. It started its work in 2001. It is determined to work with poor vulnerable groups for the social equality and justice through a partnership with other organizations with the same view and motto. Its ultimate goal is to empower the community. It believes in bringing in the males to promote gender equality in the community by behavior and attitude change. It also include even men in their programs. Such as gender and equality education.

AWON does not have any direct provision of savings and credit, but collaborates with organizations who are working with microcredit in Jumla. They also help those women who already are members in their previous projects and facilitates training such as in the areas of health, nutrition, gender/equity etc.

Surya Social Service Society (4S)

Surya Social Service Society is a volunteer initiative organization. The organization was established in 1994. It works jointly with other organizations within microcredit. According to their website, their main focus group is women and marginalized groups. It has 214 shareholders with 186 groups in Jumla. Their programs are not only concentrated in lending money to the microcredit members, but they also include activities like supporting cooperatives in their establishment. They also help to develop their capacity for participation in the programs such as awareness programs, training and skills to uplift socio-economic empowerment for women through the cooperatives.

Micro-Enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP)

Micro-Enterprise Development Programme, jointly implemented by United Nations Development Programme and the Government of Nepal, Ministry of Industry, and currently funded by the Australian Government, is creating systems, structures and enabling environment for sustainable development of micro enterprise sectors. MEDEP has been implemented since 1998 and has evolved as a model of entrepreneurship development with a potential for lifting people out of poverty.

The main objective is to address the issues of rural unemployment and lack of economic opportunities for the poor by creating income and employment opportunities for vulnerable women. The program's objective is to build the capacity of state and private institutions that provide necessary services required for setting up micro-enterprises.

MEDEP also provide skills and business training and other support, mainly for women, poor and disadvantaged people, to set up micro-enterprises. By 2014, MEDEP had created 70,899 micro-entrepreneurs (68% women, 23% Dalits, 36% Indigenous Nationalities, Madhesi 19% and Youth 55%). The programme has so far created 86,613 employment opportunities benefitting women (74%).

3. Male Emigration

“Extensive male migration leads to a feminization of mountain economies”

(Kollmair and Hoermann, 2011)

The history of labour migration from Nepal dates back to the period of unification, more than 300 years ago. The mass migration from the unified territory to the neighboring countries was to escape the new state's taxation system. This is considered as the first incidence of migration of labour from Nepal (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2013/2014). The same report says that it was in the early nineteenth century young Nepalese (male) recruited into the colonial British army (Gurkhas). This became the first instance of the State's involvement in formalizing labor migration through treaties between two governments. This treaty in 1815, specifically, opened the flow of migrants from Nepal for foreign employment and thus opened doors for employment beyond British India.

Until the mid-1980s, much of labour migration for foreign employment from Nepal was concentrated to India. In the 1970s, with the boom in the oil industry in the Middle East, new destinations emerged. The demand for workers in industries in Middle East countries created massive opportunities. This encouraged Nepali citizens (preferably low skilled workers) to migrate (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2013/2014).

A historical turn in the migratory pattern came with the restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1990. The Government embarked on economic liberalization in 1992 and made official moves to a market economy, which also encouraged emigration. The liberalization of mobility as well as the economy after the 1990s, coupled with the rapidly increasing labour demand in the Middle East countries, gradually increased the number of migrants traveling beyond India. The earliest record of labour permits issued by the Government shows that 3,605 Nepalese left for foreign employment in 1993/94, primarily to Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirate (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2013/2014).

Table 3. Out-migration from Nepal, 1961-2011, based on absent population (gone abroad)

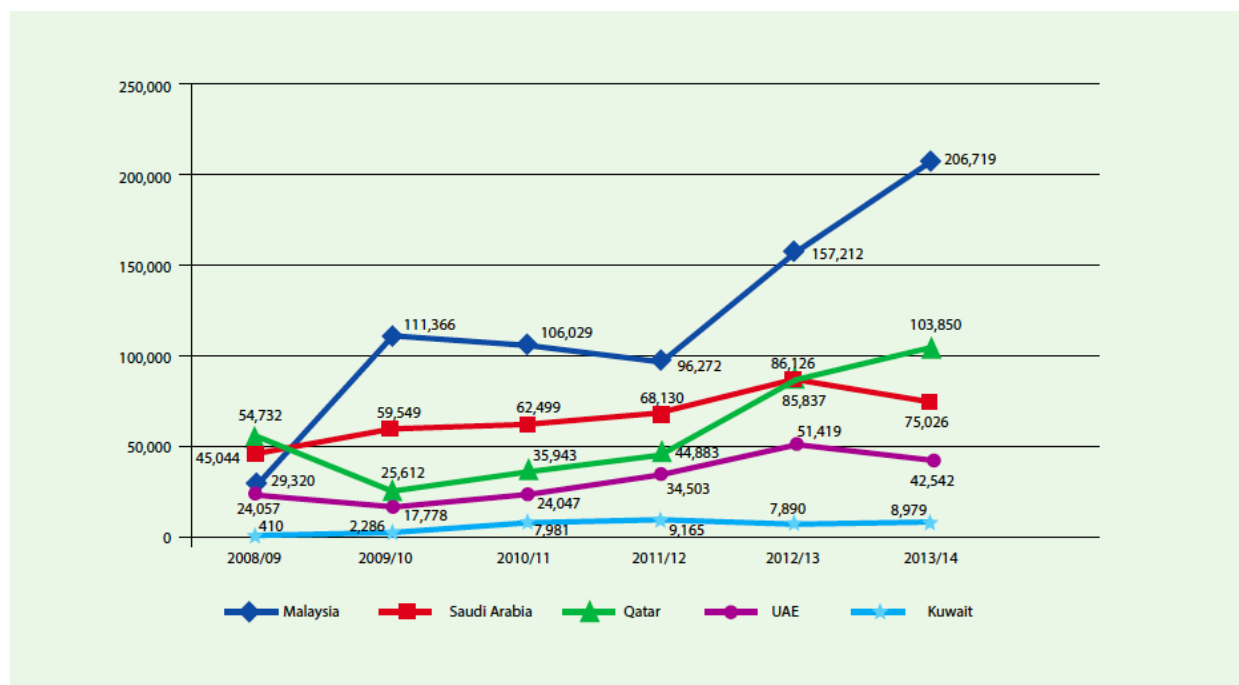
Population census	Total population	Absent population	Percent of total population
1961	9,742,466	328,470	3.4
1971	NA	NA	NA
1981	15 425 816	402,977	2.6
1991	19 149 387	658,290	3.4
2001	23 499 115	762,181	3.2
2011	26 494 504	1 921 494	7.3

Source: Kansakarr (2003); CBS (2011)

The National Population Census, which is carried out every ten years, elaborates further on the immigration status of the Nepali population. Since 1961, the Census has collected information on the absent population (as noted, the people not residing in Nepal at the time of the Census), with the records revealing a substantial increase in absolute terms. The increase in the absent population as a proportion of total population, however, is not so compelling.

In the 1991 Census, there was an increase of 63.4 percent in the absent population in absolute terms from the previous Census, but it accounted for only 3.4 percent of the total population. In the subsequent decade's data (2001), the rate of increase in absolute terms slowed down significantly, to 15.8 percent, accounting for 3.2 percent of the total population (table 3). The percentage of the absent population in the 2011 census reflected a rise in numbers, with an increase of 152 percent in absolute terms and accounting for 7.3 percent of the total population (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2013/2014).

Figure 1. Trend in the top-five destination countries for all labour migrant for Nepal



Source: Department of foreign Employment cited in the Ministry of Labour and Employment 2013/2014

According to the study done by the Ministry of Labor and Employment 2013/2014, there was a huge surge in migrants obtaining labor permits for Malaysia, with more than 600 percent increase between 2008/09 and 2013/14. Such a meteoric increase occurred in four other countries as well: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Kuwait.

Whereas migration from Jumla has been going on for generations it is a part of their livelihood strategy. It provides the people with a possibility of improving their existing economic condition (Schipper, 2009-2010). Nature and man-made disaster, for example drought, flood, Maoist insurgency which prevailed for almost 10 years in Nepal (1996-2006), together with the globalization process and ever growing poverty and inequality, have been the main causes of migration of male population to other countries (Sherpa, 2010).

Daily necessary products are not produced in Jumla and that is why this kind of migration is necessary to supply salt, tea, iron, spices, sugar, clothing etc. Though this kind of migration has been going on for centuries, it does not necessarily give Julmis better economic lives. It often merely helps them to sustain their livelihoods (Schipper, 2009-2010).

Most importantly international migration is often a risky process. There are several reports related to violence against migrants, for example unsafe living and working conditions (WFP, 2008). Men are compelled to migrate for various reasons but the sad part is that returning migratory men do not always

bring back money. Instead they may return infected, in the worst case with the dangerous HIV/AIDS disease. Women from Jumla reported that their husbands have been working in India for several years. Some of them do not even bring back a single penny when they return home. That even worsens their situation if they have taken a loan to pay for their travel expenses (Bhattarai, 2008).

Following tables are data collected by Sherpa (2010) from her studies based on male focus group discussions.

Table 4. Male Population migrating annually for Work (3 Districts in Nepal)

District	Percent of male population migrating annually	Average (percent)
Bajhang		
Dantola VDC	60	77.5
Khera VDC	95	
Dailekh		
Chauratha VDC	90	82.5
Chheudi VDC	75	
Jumla		
Chandanath VDC	70	80
Talhyum VDC	90	
Average		80

Note: Based on male focus group discussions

Table 5: Age of Labour migrants (3 Districts in Nepal)

District	Minimum age	Maximum age	Highest frequency age group
Bajhang	15	65	20-50
Dailekh	12	70	16-40
Jumla	13	60	18-30
Average	13.3	63.3	18-40

Sources: Sherpa, 2010

Table 4 and 5 show that Jumla has about 80 % of male emigration with a minimum age of 13 to maximum age of 60. This means the important time of their life is spent outside Jumla. Labour migration is a way of life in Jumla as the district cannot sustain people's livelihood (Sherpa, 2010). This will be discussed further on the next chapter.

3.1. Women's livelihood and their social position in Jumla

In Jumla, only men take part in migration while women stay behind to deal with farm work, livestock, household work, raises children, etc (Schipper, 2009-2010). This implies that women become the de facto household head. However, despite the fact that they become heads of their household, they have limited legal rights over the land, as well as other resources (Bhattarai, 2008).

Women are not usually allowed to speak in public places. It is called outrageous, if she does she is considered as having low moral. It is even worse if the woman is from a low caste. The widow women are generally marginalized and sometimes even excluded from their own houses (Bhattarai, 2008). Thus, women are discriminated and lag behind in many areas such as education, healthcare, and opportunities.

Traditional practices, such as the “Chhaupadi” where women are considered as being bodily polluted during their menstruation and child delivery period, are still prevalent in Jumla. During this period, women are not allowed to enter the house and have to spend the night in the cowsheds. They also have limited access to food and basic facilities (Bhattarai, 2008).

Usually it is the men who go out to earn an income and the women who take care of the household. When the men are away the women carries double responsibility at home. The absence of men leads to a feminization of mountain economies and women have both the responsibility of economic activities and of the household. That creates opportunities as well as increase the workload in their lives (Kollmaire and Hoermann, 2011).

“I like to be the household head. I like to take my decisions on my own. When my husband was still in the village, I did not think about that.”

29-year-old women, interview collected by
Kaspar, 2005 cited in Kollmaire and Hoermann (2011)

When men migrate they often take a loan from local money lenders. At the same time, when these men are gone the responsibility to bring home money and take care of the family falls on women's shoulder. Since the majority of women are illiterate, they cannot go out and get a job. Instead they have to indulge themselves to some less skilled jobs or start on their own with something that does not need literacy at all to begin with.

4. Previous Studies

According to Karnani (2007) the major selling point of microfinance is its ability to empower women. Research shows that microcredit increases women's bargaining power within their homes, centrality to the community, awareness of social and political issues, and mobility. It also increases their self-esteem and self-worth (Sabharwal, 2000).

According to Humle & Mosley (1996) microcredit in Bangladesh and Indonesia had a positive impact on the borrower's income with an increase over 30 percent in Bangladesh and to around 10-12 percent in Indonesia. According to Mahat (2015) in Karnali Zone, savings and credit groups have enhanced women's capacity and encouraged them. He says that microcredit has promoted agriculture based on income generation activities. Through various training, conferences, workshops and interaction programs women have enhanced their capacity and strength. Furthermore, new tools, techniques, and approaches are being slowly transferred into the agriculture. Domestic violence is also being reduced in the community. Thus, microcredit has helped in decreasing unemployment by creating employment opportunities and self-employment and bringing vulnerable women to active participation in the development process.

Even in the case study women shows highly interested in attending meetings and training. One of the interviewees said that this has given them a chance to learn and bring change in the society such as caste discrimination. When asked about using the profits in upgrading their enterprises and in the agriculture, the interviewees said that it does not fall into the priority. This will be discussed further in the case study.

Microfinance meetings are not just about collecting money but for those women who are not able to go out freely regular meetings are of very high significance. They can use these occasions to discuss their worries and exchange information. Scholars claim that microcredit leads to women's empowerment by enabling poor women to contribute financially to their household. Involvement in microcredit leads to exposure to outside community and together with the formation of networks with other women it is expected to lead to greater self-confidence and courage. Through different training and communication these women are gaining confidence and become assertive and capable of making their own decisions. At the same time, a sense of mutuality, sociality and solidarity with other women is spreading in their community. Thus, they claim that microfinance is a driving force for women's empowerment (Aoki & Pradhan, 2013).

As discussed above, microcredit goes with a series of training. These women get the opportunity to participate in informal literacy training, skill based training, gender/equality, gender discrimination and women's rights issues. As a consequence women have established a radio FM in Jumla. Mostly women's issues are raised and consulted for encouragement Mahat (2015) claims that this kind of activities empowers women.

Nepalese informal financial sector includes either individual lenders such as landlords, merchants, farmer-lenders, goldsmiths, pawnbrokers, friends, and relatives, or a group of informal institutions like Dhukuti, Dharam Bhakari and Guthi. These lenders are more flexible and are less complicated, but unfortunately, these moneylenders have very high-interest rates from 36% to over 100% per annum. In addition to the loan labor services, other small gifts are provided by the borrowers (Burnside, 2011). According to AWON's report (Aug 2011-July 2012), over 300 women in Jumla district were mobilized in a savings and credit scheme through 15 groups. These groups were very active in organizing awareness and capacity building activities, besides that women's savings and credit groups are displacing the local money lenders. The women save NRs 5 to NRs 50 on a monthly basis. They usually ask for a loan in groups to run income-generating activities, such as a small retail shop, farming, animal husbandry etc. By the end of June 2014, in Kudari VDC itself, they have 6 women groups who have collected NRs.34425.

Many reports such as UNDP (2004) and Sebstad & Chen (1996) show that, with the involvement of women in savings and credit groups, their levels of confidence has improved and the women are less dependent on their husbands. The women involved in income-generating activities have even gained more respect from their husbands and neighbours.

There are positive news from Jumla such as school attendance has increased because women are aware of the importance of education and different training methods have spread health awareness to these women. It is due to microcredit that women now have a source of income and can afford a better diet. This change has come about since 2007 after the Food Security and Agriculture Diversification project. Families have added cereals and vegetables to their staples. This has helped women to create a healthy family and consequently a healthy community (World Vision report, 2010).

Graflund (2013) says that theoretically microcredit can bring self-independence and decision-making power, but there are no real consensus among academics on the impact of microcredit on women's empowerment. Burnside, 2011 quotes a number of reports such as ADB (2009a), Shakyra (2008), Mayoux (2009), Fernando (2006), Mosley (2009) show that women use loans for consumption rather than productive activities, such as expanding their enterprise. This is disguised by high repayment rates and repeated loans, which are considered measures of success. In many cases women are bearing individual responsibility for household loans and this is not empowerment. The number of women clients at Nirdhan alone has increased from 2811 (in 1996) to 85323 (in 2010) (Burnside, 2011). Still it is inconclusive whether access to credit and savings has created individual empowerment, so more research is needed.

Karnani (2007) claims that it should not be generalized that microcredit creates entrepreneurs inside every poor woman, but in fact the reality is something else. For example, women take the burden of the loans, repay them, educate and feed the family, but the real question is what do they do with the loans? Do they have entrepreneurship or even an idea of how to start? Is microcredit their choice or would they rather earn decent money through a factory job? Employment is a key link between economic growth and poverty reduction and only that can help ensure poor people share in the benefits of economic growth (Karnani, 1997).

Sharmin (2014) further elaborates that by getting small loans, clients may raise out of poverty for a short period of time, but when the money is finished they have a great chance of falling back into poverty again. INAFI Nepal (2012) research shows that although most women work on farm-related activities, only 29% of them own any land and half of the women have limited control over any assets, livestock or bank account. As per this, many women are still dependent on their husbands. The same study shows that most skills training provided by the microfinance institutions are such as beautician training and tailoring training, training on agricultural and livestock farming which rarely challenge gender roles. It opines that non-traditional training such as computer training or off-seasonal vegetable farming may have a better scope of increasing women's economic empowerment (INAFI Nepal, 2012). This is very true even in our case study, none of three women had any ownership of land or fixed assets.

If individual decisions about savings and credit are used as a means for women to gain empowerment, the question arises whether women in Nepal retain control of the income they earn through micro-enterprises. Or does the income they earn come under the control of male household heads? Even though a woman receives a loan, it should not be assumed that she has control over the use of the fund (Sebstad & Chen, 1996). Rankin (2007 cited in Burnside, 2011) study says that while women assisted in all aspects of household enterprises, they did not generally assume primary decision-making roles with these enterprises or control and manage earnings from them. Rankin concluded that targeted lending strategies that were intended to create social opportunity failed to articulate effectively with the cultural contexts. So, social opportunity for women could not be reduced to the simple matter of capital access (Burnside, 2011). Because women have access to fewer alternative sources of credit, they are more likely to select

themselves into microcredit programs with conditions such as small initial amounts, training sessions and weekly meetings and joint responsibility (Burnside, 2011).

It is found that male loan holders generally reported sole decision-making in relation to the use of loans, and running their enterprises, whereas, in the case of women loan holders they did appear to have lots of views and influence over the wives' loan (Kabeer, 2005). Because women are illiterate and depend on their men, the men are not equally dependent on women so there is man's influence in women's projects. In my case study, Jumla, women who were illiterate had to hire a literate man to help them with their money matters whereas, a literate woman (person 2) was running her enterprise successfully without any dependency on men.

According to Aoki & Pradhan (2013)'s study, they found out that women are getting aware of caste discrimination. The women are realizing that it is senseless and neither God nor any religion, but it is the local people's responsibility to change this attitude. These positive thoughts are emerging after the training and interaction through a microcredit program. Even the women in Kudari said that there are changes in the social discrimination that will be presented in the case study.

Like Karnani says, microcredit itself cannot be the medicine that cures every disease. In fact, it depends on each woman's personal entrepreneurship skill and interest. Entrepreneurship is not a charity given by a third party; it must be claimed by women themselves through an ongoing process of reflection, analysis, and action Mosedale, (2003 cited in Kabeer, 1999). However, it does make sense, as Gurung & Udas (2016) says; often women's abilities and potential are undervalued and questioned, but women's networks and associations have the potential to increase their self-esteem and access to a range of services. They possess these abilities only if they come out of their nutshell and participate in outer activities. These activities are provided via microcredit. In this sense, microcredit gives a platform to empower women but it does not guarantee that everyone who participate in it will be successful and empowered.

5. The Theoretical Framework

5.1. Microcredit

“Give a man a fish, he will eat for a day. Give a woman microcredit, she, her husband, her children, and her extended family will eat for a lifetime”

Bono

Microfinance is the attempt to improve access to small deposits and small loans for vulnerable households which are otherwise neglected by the banks (Schreiner & Colombet, 2001). Microcredit is a component of microfinance in that it involves providing credit to poor, but microfinance also involves additional non-credit financial services such as savings, insurance, pensions and payment services (Wrenn, 2007). Both microcredit and microfinance are used in this research paper interchangeably and should be understood that both denotes to the circle of borrowing, savings and investing in order to help the poor climb out of their poverty.

Microcredit and microfinance are relatively new terms in the field of development, first coming to prominence in the 1970s Robinson (2001 and Otero, 1999 cited in Wrenn 2007). Prior to then, from the 1950s through to the 1970s, the provision of financial services by donors or governments was mainly in the form of subsidized rural credit programs. These often resulted in high loan defaults, high losses and an inability to reach poor rural households (Wrenn, 2007).

Microfinance generates self-employment. There are numerous Micro Financial Institutions (MFIs) established all around the world in the name of eradication of poverty and empowerment of women. Though their aim and the beneficiaries are same, the results are not the same in all countries. MFIs provide services to communities that have no collateral to offer, but have indigenous skills and a strong desire to undertake economic activities for self-employment and income generation (Shrestha, 2009).

Microfinance enables the poor to make changes when they increase income, become business owners and reduce their vulnerability (Shrestha, 2009). Women are targeted for microfinance because of higher levels of female poverty and because of women's role in household well-being Mayoux (2009 cited in Burnside, 2011). On a global basis, women are reported to have higher loan repayment rates than men. Thus women are considered a lower credit risk. That is why almost all the MFIs target women as their beneficiaries Cheston (2002 cited in Burnside, 2011).

5.2. Women Empowerment

Empowerment is a capacity of individuals, groups or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals. It is also the process by which individuals and communities are able to help themselves to maximize the quality of their lives (Adam, 2008). It is a long-term process of learning and development. This way individuals and communities are enabled to take power and act effectively in gaining greater control, efficacy and social justice (Keiffer, 1984). According to him, powerlessness is the contrast to empowerment. For example, a woman appears to have an attitude of self-blame, a sense of generalized distrust, a feeling of alienation from the resources and a sense of hopelessness.

Power is the core point of empowerment and it may occur at several levels as Luke (1974) presents in three dimensions:

1. Individual
2. Interpersonal
3. Institutional dimensions

According to Luke (1974) individual dimensions focus on observable behavior. It means, it focus on behavior in decision-making on issues an observable conflict of interests such as expressing policy preferences revealed by political participation. Interpersonal dimensions focus on converting control of the norms, discussion or agenda in a way that limits behavior. Institutional dimensions focus on the set of ways in which the powerful transform the powerless in such a way that the later acts accordance to the former's wishes without any coercion. Thus, empowerment is to get control over all these three dimensions.

Kossmann (2008) defines women empowerment as women's better role in household decision making, having access to financial and economic resources, having better social networks, having better bargaining power and having greater freedom of mobility.

To operationalize the impact of microcredit on female empowerment, I will use the work of Kabeer (1999) where she clarify women empowerment in two simple meanings. One is the change and the other is the ability to make a choice. This means to get the ability to make choices that she was denied before. This is the phase of moving from disempowerment to empowerment where women reach the ability to make a difference in their settings, which in turn affects their life. It also relates to the influence of an individual on social and cultural norms of the society. Kabeer (1999) further says that to make the ability to exercise choice, there are three interrelated conditions:

1. Resources
2. Agency
3. Achievements

Resources

According to Kabeer (1999), resources should not be included only in economic terms but also in human and social terms. This helps women to enhance the ability to exercise choice, for example knowledge, skills, creativity etc. She points out that resource is an important precondition for empowerment.

Agency

This second dimension of power relates to the ability to define women's goals and act upon them. According to Kabeer, the agency is about more than observable action. It also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose that individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or the power. Such agency tends to be operationalized as decision-making in the social science literature. It can take the form of bargaining, negotiation, deception and manipulation, suppression and resistance as well as more intangible cognitive process of reflection and analysis. It can be exercised by individuals as well by collectives. Kabeer (1999) views the agency as a process where these women learn and apply the knowledge in their lives.

Achievements

According to Kabeer, 1999 resources and agency together constitute what Sen (1985b) refers to as capabilities; the potential that women have for living the lives they want.

These three dimensions of women empowerment; preconditions, process, and the outcomes determine if a woman is empowered or not. Therefore, combining these dimensions this research will empirically determine if the respondents in Jumla have achieved any changes in their lives and if the agency has been favorable or unfavorable. We will study these women's power in decision-making at home as well as in the community, their mobility and any change in attitude towards social discrimination. Finally, we will study if these women have achieved any visible changes in their lives.

My research follows the key concept of women empowerment by Kabeer (1999). I will try to present the theoretical framework of women's empowerment in the context of women in Jumla through microcredit programs. Case studies combine specifically into (Kabeer, 1999) the theoretical framework as she suggests and try to see if the framework fits for the women in Jumla. The result from Jumla also try to answer my research question if microcredit has enhanced their empowerment.

6. Methodology

The most fundamental characteristic of qualitative research is its ability to express commitment to viewing events, action, norms, values etc. From the perspective of the people who are being studied (Bryman, 2012). This research is to see if involvement in microcredit has brought empowerment to the women in Jumla. This research is not just about seeing numbers, it is also about understanding changes in people's perspective over time. The real picture is not evaluated by numbers so the qualitative method was implemented. The quantitative method was not possible because of the lack of access to resources and because of the distance.

In qualitative research the case study aims to understand the case in depth and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and its context. It also has a holistic focus, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of a case (Punch, 2005). This research will follow his idea and take the case study of women in Jumla as a strategy to understand their experience rather than a method.

All information for this research was collected from primary and secondary sources. This information was collected through unstructured interviews via telephone with the help of a professional (person 5) working in Jumla. At first structured interviews (questionnaires) were given to the women via person 5. However, responses to the questionnaires were not satisfying, so telephone interview were conducted again.

Case study aimed to develop lessons learned, rather than quantify the impact. Due to this aim only one VDC in Jumla was selected for the interview. Personally, I interviewed 3 women. And received information about a fourth person 4 (via person 1). These women represent one group with 25 women by person 1, another group with about 31 women in person 3's savings and credit groups whereas person 2 represents the higher caste as a single microcredit lender. Person 1, person 3 and person 4 are so called low caste group. These four women were considered enough to represent the women in Jumla since they are from different caste groups. All of them were chosen by Social mobilizer person 5 from Jumla.

Secondary data such as annual reports, project documents from the government and NGOs, working papers, online newspaper and other literature were collected from the internet. The research period was unfortunately only two months, which is a very short time to achieve a deep research.

6.1 Source Criticism

Bryman (2012) suggests thinking deeply is very necessary for adopting secondary sources. He points out that it is very well known that sometimes, the second hand accounts of thesis or findings are misleading. As Kc (2016) also mentioned in Nepal there is a tendency to impress donor agencies with positive (falsified) reports. During research great attention was given to this risk.

As person 5 is working with these women in savings and credit projects there is a great risk that his perspective will neglect the real scenario. Therefore, to add reliability and compare between person 5's version and the women's version, telephone interviews were conducted.

For literature, I have tried to only select from reliable sources such as our course book in this Development Studies program, Lund University's search engines, Scholar Google and working papers from different authors from famous institutions as well as reliable online news agencies.

7. A Critical review of the outcome of Microcredit project in Jumla

Due to the extreme climate and lack of basic infrastructures such as roads and communications Jumla is isolated from the market and development. Lack of food supply and opportunities, men are forced to take the risk of migrating from Jumla. When they have left they leave their wives behind with the children and their old parents to become the wife's responsibility. She becomes the defacto boss of the house and has to feed them and take care of them.

Women in Jumla is a suppressed group with almost no involvement in the formal economy. Their mobility is constrained to household activities. Their participation in decision-making is also very negligible. This changes when their men leave Jumla. They are forced to work outside the household to carry the responsibility of the breadwinner as well as of the household. In this chapter, I will discuss if they are able to take this responsibility and if microfinance is helping them.

Microfinance institutions are different from traditional banks by their social mission. It's social mission is poverty alleviation, women empowerment and economic inclusion of a caste or ethnic group. They allow very poor access to microfinance and have an impact on income generation, thus contributing to poverty alleviation Burnside (2011). Mosley (2009 cited in Burnside, 2011) when the very poor are able to borrow their small loans, they seldom invest in new technology, fixed capital or entrepreneurship. The loan is usually used for consumption. This particular case is very common in Jumla which will be presented later in this chapter.

Different scholars opined that microfinance in Nepal has proven to be a strong mean to alleviate women's situation. They say that it has reduced poverty; it was even possible to survive during the Maoist conflict and has been effective, especially for women. Mayoux and Hartl (2009) studies have shown that the women who participated in the microfinance program were socially and economically empowered.

This chapter deals with getting answers to our research questions if microcredit is the right tool to enhance these women's empowerment in Jumla through the theoretical framework of Kabeer (1999). I will try to compare these with the case study in Kudari VDC, Jumla. Resources in this sense are not only financial independence but also include the social capital. When these women gain access to microcredit, they have increased their access to human and social resources. At first they create a job for themselves through skills, knowledges and their own creativity. In the long run this gives them access to economic capital as well. The second dimension, agency, is the process of defining and acting upon one's goal. It is related to powers such as decision-making and the ability to define women's goal and act upon them. According to Kabeer, the agency is about more than observable action. It also encompasses the meaning, motivation, and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency or the power within. It can take the form of bargaining, negotiation, deception and manipulation, suppression and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive process of reflection and analysis which can be exercised by individuals as well by collectives.

Kabeer (1999) views Achievements as the outcomes of the preconditions and the process of empowerment i.e the well-being outcomes. For example, the agency is a process where these women learn and apply the new knowledge in their lives whereas achievement is the outcomes and new capabilities of a woman. In other words it is the consequence of exercised agency.

Resources

Access to economic resources and human and social capital are also considered as the precondition of women's empowerment. A field survey in Myagdi District, Nepal, during 2012 done by Chokhal (2013) shows that 28 percent of her respondents joined the microcredit with the aim to be self dependent. Similarly, most of the respondents, about 52 percent, said that they joined the program to improve the condition of their family. 14 percent of her respondents joined microcredit to earn more income. 89 percent of her respondents responded that their self-confidence has increased due to the social participation via microcredit.

According to the interviewees, the main reason to involve themselves into microcredit is the opportunity to start some activity to generate an income. The case study shows that this has been a very important precondition for women's empowerment in Jumla. After getting access to the microcredit they have gained skills and knowledge. For instance, these four women have felt that their responsibilities have increased as well as their value in the household and the community. They claim that this was possible only after involving themselves in the microcredit program. All of them were dependent on their men before joining the microcredit programs.

"When my husband was alive, I did not have to think about learning anything or decide anything for that matter. He used to work and bring home money. I stayed home and looked after the family. Now when he is gone, I have to think both of earnings and the house. It is not that I do not like my responsibilities, but it is just that I never thought I could take such responsibilities until I was forced to. This is only possible because microcredit gave me confidence and opportunity."

Person 3
(so called lower caste)

"About three years ago, I dared to take a loan of 60000 Nepalese Rupees and started a small restaurant in the village. Now I have skills, and confidence and I feel very empowered indeed to stand on my own."

Person 2
(so called higher caste)

"After joining the microcredit programs, I have learned a lot of things such as the importance of good health, education, gender and equity and fighting against discrimination. I do not feel inferior anymore."

Person 1
(so called lower caste)

The interviews conducted with the women reveals that majority of these women's life have changed positively compared to 5 years ago. Besides being from different castes, all four of them show the same kind of proudness to gain access to resources. (However, person 4's situation is exceptional). It shows that after joining the microcredit programs, these women have gained self-confidence, better health knowledge, information about their surroundings and are creative in their own way to survive. Before the involvement in the microcredit, they barely had access to any kind of resources.

Agency

Kabeer (1999) defines agency as the ability to define a woman's goals and act upon them. It is more related to the meaning, motivation and purpose that women bring to their activity, their sense of agency or the power within. Just in achieving these women in Jumla have come a long way within a few years. As the respondents show, so-called old thoughts have been replaced by the newer thoughts.

The power of decision-making is a very important aspect of empowerment. After joining a microcredit program these women have built confidence in public speaking. On the telephone one of the women said:

“It is because of the training and different gatherings we now know that saying one’s view is not bad, and that the worst thing is to keep silent.”

Person 1

“There is a huge change in my husband’s attitude now. Before, I was not included in the decision-making in the household since I live in his house and with his family. He and his father used to decide everything. But now he includes me as well. Even in the community, men would say that I am trying to be a leader when I speak, but I do not care anymore because my voice is also important.”

Person 1

“Going out in the public was not possible before. We would go to the jungle to collect woods for cooking or go to the tap to fetch water, that’s it. Now we have the opportunities to go to attend different training and seminars in the village and sometimes even in the district. It helps us to meet our sisters in the village as well as sharing new ideas. We even sometimes get paid to attend such programs”.

Person 1

Burnside (2011) claims that there are many surveys that show that Nepalese women’s participation in microcredit programs can increase their decision-making power, but in some cases, even they have access to resources. Women do not have decision-making power. For example, she recites, Rankin (2001 cited in Burnside, 2011) survey that despite women in Newari community (not in Jumla though) assisted in the household enterprise, they did not have power in decision-making within these enterprises. Therefore, Rankin concluded that social opportunities could not be reduced to the matter of capital access, but maybe access to human and social capital can eventually lead to decision-making power as this research shows after they gained skills and knowledge they started being aware of their surrounding and thus reacted to it and gradually they could say no to injustices in the society and thus, they are gaining decision-making power. There is a noticeable improvements in their confidence, exposure and mobility.

Achievement

Kabeer (1999) says that resources and agency together constitute capabilities; the potential that women have for living the lives they want and for achieving valued ways of being and doing. In other words, it is an outcome of the microcredit programs.

It is a big achievement for these women to come out of their household and have skill based jobs. They have made a success coming out from social isolation and involve themselves in a formal labour market. Previously their labour was bounded within household jobs which did not give them any income or empowerment. Particularly dependent on men. Likewise in the community, due to the gender and inequality, especially women were being outcasted.

“ We learned at the training that there is no sense in discriminating a person just because that person is born in a certain caste. I do not see why we should not fetch water before others in the village. Just because we are born as Dalits does not mean that we have done anything wrong, that we should not touch other humans or fetch water. So now (almost 3 or 4 years later) we do not care, we dare to fetch water, whenever we need. If God wants to be angry about that, let him be.”

Person 1

She said that different training has helped them to understand that there is no logic behind them being suppressed for ages, so they have now started saying no to the bias attitude in their village.

“In the beginning it was nearly impossible to see any women’s participation in village district committee programs, but now their presence are good and they are active in the programs with their views as well, on a regular basis.”

Person 5
Social Mobilizer, Kudari VDC.

Person 5 is working as a Social Mobilizer at a local NGO in Jumla and he is from Kudari VDC, Jumla. The reason I choose him is that he is working in the field of microcredit with women dominated groups. There are some reports from Jumla that most of the women are illiterate and thus are not able to take part in the project more than as group members. Even if they can they hesitate to take on more responsibility so there are men working in female only groups as well.

“Just like other women she (person 4) took a microloan and started a small shop in the village. Despite microcredit and participation in numerous skill programs, she has not been able to uplift her life. This has made her more vulnerable because she has nothing to save and her income is not sufficient. Since she is a widow with a sick child, she barely has any time or money left to live. She has taken numerous loans just to pay off the older ones.”

Story told by person 1

In such case, it is not microcredit that can help her but some other remedies must be used. A lot of research is needed for cases similar to her in order to understand. Moreover, there is a risk that her repeated loans will be considered as the success of microcredit since it shows an increase in the number of loans). According to Fernando (2006 cited in Burnside, 2011) this kind of quantitative indicators do not provide institutional processes the correct information about which outcomes are achieved. That is why this case study (qualitative method) is the proper method to show how microcredit is impacting women’s real life.

Niimi (2010 cited in Burnside, 2011) that her studies has shown that well off households were more benefited from microcredit and Dalits were less likely to move out of poverty than another castes. This is exactly what we see in our case of person 2, who is a university graduate as well as from a higher caste. She had taken a single loan and had her own enterprise. In her case, she probably does not need a special program to empower her because she is not disempowered on the first hand to be empowered (Kabeer, 1999). Unlike other two other women, person 1 and person 3, who are low caste and illiterate, were taking a group loan with 25-31 other women in the same project.

“We only know that our retail shop is doing well but we have no idea how much we are profiting. Since none of us can read and write we have to trust a guy who works and takes care of all the money matters in the shop”.

Person 1

Like person 1, most women depend on literate men for number-related matters. Particularly when dealing with money, even the simplest calculation place immense pressure on them. As a result, these women hesitate to lead in lack of confidence (Sthapit & Shrestha, 2014). But in the in the case of person 2, a graduate had a restaurant and she was doing very well without dependency in any man directly. This shows that literacy is very important toward getting independency.

“There are incidences when men try to stop women from speaking in the public and dislike their participation” as person 1 said in the interview. This, as Kabeer says, reflects the patriarchal system in Jumla. This can not be eradicated in a few years even though these women now dare to fight for their rights, but I believe that this is the start of a good process.

As we saw in our case study these women have small projects like goat farming, retail shop and a small restaurant that creates jobs for themselves. Though microcredit has the potential to have a positive impact on women empowerment in Jumla, both socially and economically, our case study also showed that not all the women had the same positive impact. Microcredit had been an input to start the change in their life (ie way to empowerment) but it did not guarantee empowerment and progress as in the case of person 4. The common thing we saw was that women now have more confidence, information about their community and were curious on the happenings in their environment. Also their decision-making power have increased over the years.

Kabeer (1999) states that empowerment means the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability. Microcredit programs might not necessarily empower women directly but it can help them through training and awareness raising to challenge the existing norms, cultures, and values and have greater control over resources and their lives. The case study shows that these women have a better role in household decision-making compared to having no role before coming to the training. Having access to resources have helped them to build up their confidence. This could eventually pass down to their children, i.e .through these women’s interest and investment in their children's education. In the end this social capital leads them to economic capital and to live an empowered life.

Also the savings and credit groups have a better social network and this has given them greater freedom of mobility. Due to the participation in different training and due to exposure women have become able to say no to injustice in the community such as gender and caste discriminations. These are definitely positive aspects of microcredit which let them confidence and learn them to think as rational humans. This clearly shows the connection to the Kabeer (1999) preconditions for empowerment.

As the results show due to the active participation in microcredit there is a decrease vulnerability and an increase in the active participation of women. Like the theoretical framework of Kabeer (1999), resources, agency and the achievements, women in Jumla definitely are on the right way to be empowered. However, they might not fall into the category of being fully empowered but they have definitely started a very good process.

8. Conclusions

Microcredit is the right tool to deal with poverty and economy in Jumla. Just because Jumla is vulnerable, and has an impoverished economy, microcredit programs can be of great help. Larger factories and business enterprises cannot be sustainable in Jumla because of its small population and lack of proper infrastructure. Most people in Jumla are illiterate and there is a risk that they might not be able to resist large projects. For a sustainable development, smaller projects are needed, for example microcredit programs.

However, microcredit programs have to be very careful in understanding women's needs. Microcredit should not be used as a temporary solution. Microcredit should concentrate on larger loans so that women have a better chance to widen their enterprises. It is preferable to look beyond small agriculture and retail shops. Technological and skill oriented training is necessary as well as to focus on the markets needs also beyond Jumla. Most of the women have small children so establishing a daycare center for those children needs to be considered. This can make the mothers concentrate on learning new skills and getting information.

Expanding the enterprise was not the priority for any of the interviewees in the case study, even though they want to develop themselves. Their first priority was to invest in their children's education and better future. Only if there is a surplus after household need and the children's education, they want to invest in expanding their business. It was taken for granted that when the parents get old and the children have a better future, they will take care of their parents. Women should be somehow motivated to invest part of their income in the expansion of their enterprise and look for new opportunities to realise true women empowerment.

In the study, women did not realize that they were able to earn their livelihood and use the freedom of expression and movement until they came out from the household and involved themselves in microcredit. That clearly shows the positive impact in Jumla. Microcredit gives a platform to empower women but does not guarantee that all participant succeed and become empowered. However, from what I have seen so far, poor and vulnerable people are bankable. These type of small loans make a big difference in their lives. Especially, loans without collateral is a very appropriate part of the microcredit to bring these vulnerable women to join the formal economy and be socially included.

Microcredit programs not only meant to collect money and save them, programs mostly also come with skills training. Such training, for example education in gender/equity, health and rights, help women to reflect on themselves and improve their lives. After all this basic training, microcredit should take a further step in challenging women's capacity. A series of newer technology and skill-based training are equally important and could be a way to create links between technology service providers.

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Appendix - Questionnaire

Questionnaire

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Place:
4. Are you married?
5. Was it an arranged marriage?
6. Husband's activity:
7. Do you have children?
8. How many?
9. Who decided to have children?
10. Who decides on their clothes, food, and schooling during the past 10 years?
11. What do you do?
12. How long have you been doing this?
13. How much loan did you take?
14. How did you participated in microcredit program and who organized it?
15. What did you learn from this program?
16. How much do you earn now?
17. Do you have control over your earnings or does any other take control of it after you join microcredit programs?
18. Did you earn before involvement in microcredit program?
19. Do you have any fixed assets?
20. Do you ask your husband before you go out?
21. Do you ask your husband before you buy anything for yourself?
22. Do you ask your husband before you buy any machinery, seeds, fertilizers or any important thing for you?
23. Does your husband ask you before he sells/buys anything?
24. Have you ever convinced your husband if they ever said no (During the last 10 years)?
25. What do you do if he is says no to your decision?
26. Have you heard about women empowerment?
27. Do you know anyone in your group who did not succeed like you after involving herself in microcredit programs?
28. Would you rather do some other kind of factory job than what you are doing?
29. What are your dreams (If you have any)?