1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Nepalese population consists of almost equal proportion of males and females. This decomposition varies only slightly according to the country's regions and belts. The population breakdown by gender tallies with more recent census figures stating that in urban areas, males make up 52 percent of the population while females make up 48 percent (CBS, 1995). The proportion of young males has also been expanding. The percentage of the under-15 population has risen over the past two decades with the proportion of males increasing from 40.9 to 43.5 percent and females from 40.0 to 41.3 percent (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Composition of population by age and gender (%)

	1971			1981			1991		
Age Group	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
0 – 14	40.9	40.0	40.4	41.9	40.7	41.3	43.5	41.3	42.4
15 - 59	53.7	54.1	53.9	52.2	53.7	52.9	50.6	53.0	51.8
60+	5.4	5.9	5.6	5.9	5.6	5.8	5.9	5.7	5.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Population Census, 1971, 1981 and 1991, CBS.

By nature, male children are physically weaker than female children and thus a smaller proportion of males survives (United Nations, 1991). But by the age of five, the female advantage is apparently lost. South Asian countries have generally had reverse overall sex ratios due to socio-economic discrimination against females, although that seems to be changing in Nepal. In 1981, 48.8 percent of the total population in the country was female with a sex ratio of 105 males per 100 females. In 1991, the percentage of females was 50.3 percent out of a population of 18.5 million. Thus, while the overall sex ratio observed in 1971 and 1981 had been in favour of males, the 1991 census shows a slight dominance of females in the population. In 1996, the male-female ratio stood at 10.6:10.5 (NHDR 1998). There is, however, a large probability that the mobile population had been left out (Acharya, 1994).

The participation rate of females in the labour force is lower than that of males. The Nepal Living Standard Survey shows an activity rate of 66.4 percent for females compared with 71 percent for males. The reason is that many of the activities women engage in have yet to be classified as productive work. However, the participation rate of women has been rising through time (e.g. it was 35.1 percent in 1971 but 66.4 percent by 1996). This indicates that more of the work performed by women is being recognized as productive now than before. About 91 percent of the total female labour force can be found in agriculture.

Impelled by poverty and increasing male unemployment as well as increased job opportunities owing to globalisation, a growing number of South Asian women have begun to enter the paid work force. Factors that determine women's labour participation include the state of the economy, government policies regarding employment, gender-specific opportunities for female employment and attitudes towards women's entry into the paid workforce.

Table 1.2 compares participation rates of females in the labour force of various South Asian countries. As the data reveal, the proportion of women in the work force equates to about 40 percent in Nepal and Bangladesh, compared with only 27 percent in Pakistan. The participation rate of females in Bangladesh results from an expansion of the overall labour force whereas in Sri Lanka, it is the complement of a declining participation of males in the work force (HDR, 2000). In Nepal, the increase in labour participation is higher for women workers than for men. For both genders, however, this can be attributed to people returning to agriculture as a means of subsistence due to a shrinking urban market and to competition from non-Nepalese workers willing to work for lower wages.

Table 1.2: Percentage of females in the labour force

Countries	Females in labour force (%)
Nepal 1997	40
Bangladesh 1997	42
Sri Lanka 1997	36
India 1997	32
Pakistan 1997	27

Source: World Bank 1999; UNDP 1995a.

A shift of labour to agriculture is likely to have negative implications for women, since they do not own land and are likely to be engaged in labour-intensive and poorly rewarded agricultural work. In the urban hill regions of Nepal, however, non-agricultural employment opportunities for women have been increasing (Acharya, 2000).

Women constitute a relatively deprived group because they are discriminated against in relation to men even in their own households, in society and in many aspects of life (Acharya & Bennett, 1981). In fact, gender disparity starts right from the birth, lasts through the different stages of female life and is perpetuated through various sources. As a result of discrimination, women are less endowed with productive resources in terms of education, health and productive assets, which are pluses that can bring higher return to their labour. Women from poor households tend to live in even more precarious conditions than their richer counterparts because of limited household resources and low household income.

In general, the socio-economic status of women in Nepal is very low. Among them, *Dalit* women face the worst conditions and oppression. They live a history of pain, agony, sorrow, maltreatment and suffering. They are not only victims of gender discrimination but also of caste. Untouchability related to women is practised in many ways that affect *Dalit* women daily. For instance, when Dalit women fetch water from water taps, wells or other public sources, they suffer from mental as well as physical assault.

Most *Dalits* have their traditional occupations, but they are economically exploited. Females in general have no economic power in their own family. This clearly indicates the severe economic conditions of *Dalit* women. They typically have to work as hard as labourers to earn a living yet receive very little in return. Moreover, payment is mostly in kind and does not justify the intensity of their work.

Dalit women are more economically exploited than their counterparts in the upper caste of society. Because of poverty, ignorance and illiteracy, *Dalit* women and their young girls are compelled to prostitution. Because of the untouchability problem related to caste, they are deprived of the opportunity to work in legal moneymaking professions and their time is spent on earning subsistence wages.

Human deprivation such as malnutrition, illiteracy, illness and poor health are closely related to the level and structure of income and consumption. Absolute poverty severely limits the capability of households to meet even basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, primary education, basic health facilities and safe drinking water. Nepal's level of income (US $ 210 per capita) is one of the lowest in the world.

During the 1970s, GDP growth averaged 2.1 percent per annum. With the population growing by 2.6 percent per annum, real per capita income declined by half of a percentage point. As the agricultural sector grew by just as 0.5 percent, per capita agricultural income declined by 2 percentage points. During the 1980s, growth rates in both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors exceeded the rate of population growth. As a result, per capita income in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors rose by 2.3 and 2.9 percent, respectively. In the 1990s, although growth in per capita income remained at 2.9 percent on average, per capita agricultural income recorded a decline (NHDR, 1998).

Table 1.3 shows the population and Agricultural Gross Domestic Product (AGDP) rates of Nepal. From the fiscal years of 1991/92 to 1994/95, AGDP surpassed the population growth rate in all four ecological regions. This implies that per capita income increased between 1991/92 to 1994/95. Provided that growth is equally distributed, the implication is a reduction in poverty.

Table 1.3: Distribution of population and agricultural GDP growth rates

Ecological belts	**1981**	**1991**	**Growth (%)**	
Population				
Mountains	1 302 896	1 443 130	1.03	
Hills	7 163 115	8 419 889	1.63	
Terai	6 556 828	8 628 078	2.78	
Nepal	15 022 839	18 491 097	2.10	
AGDP[a]	Mountains	Hills	*Terai*	Nepal
growth rates 91/92-94/95	2.58	2.57	3.40	2.96

Source: CBS, 1999 and APP calculation.
[a] = Agricultural GDP

1.2 Gender and Human Development

Children under 15 years of age constitute about 43 percent of the total population. Approximately 20 percent fall below 6 years of age. According to population estimates for 1995 (CBS, 1994), a little more than 2.7 million (13.1 percent) are of primary school age (i.e. 6 to 10 years). Only

about three-fourths of these children (72 percent) are enrolled in schools (NPC-UNICEF, 1996b). Approximately 928 000 thousand children 6 to 10 years of age have no access to primary education. As a result, a very large number is denied even the opportunity to enroll in schools and acquire basic literacy. Examining the labour force participation rates of the population under 10 years of age in Nepal, one can see that about 23.6 percent of girls and 18.4 percent of boys have already joined the labour force (Table 1.4).

It is worth noting that the participation rates for children, especially girls, are by no means insignificant. This is especially so in rural areas where even among children aged 5 to 9, about a fifth of the boys and a quarter of the girls are economically active. Roughly two-thirds of the 10 to 14 age group is economically active, with the rate for girls exceeding the rate for boys.

Table: 1.4: Labour force participation rates of population by sex, age and locality, 1998 (%)

	Nepal			Urban			Rural		
Age group	**Both**	**Male**	**Female**	**Both**	**Male**	**Female**	**Both**	**Male**	**Female**
All	72.3	73.3	71.3	58.5	65.0	51.9	74.2	74.5	73.9
5-9	20.9	18.3	23.6	7.3	6.4	8.4	22.6	19.8	25.4
10-14	60.9	55.2	67.1	30.3	27.5	32.7	64.9	58.8	71.5
15-19	77.5	77.1	77.9	53.8	55.7	52.0	81.0	80.3	81.5
30-44	94.1	97.8	90.8	85.8	94.4	74.2	95.3	97.8	93.1
60+	63.2	75.1	51.2	48.2	62.9	34.1	64.9	76.4	53.2

Source: NLFS, 1998/99.

If these economically active children can be motivated via policies and programmes of government, they do not have to be deprived of their educational capabilities even at a very early age (e.g. before they enter the primary level). Education is the key to breaking the vicious circle of ignorance and exploitation and the most potent way to empower women. Gender-based inequality in enrolment remains a persistent feature of the primary education system and this is due partly to the high participation rate of females under 15 years of age in the labour force.

Many studies undertaken in developing countries present evidence that women have lower welfare levels and weaker access to adequate health care and nutrition than men (World Bank, 1992). They usually receive less medical care and their food consumption tends to be lower. Hence, due to mass illiteracy, social prejudice and chronic poverty among women, a number of rural females aged 16 years and above are either lactating or pregnant and, in their lifetime, give birth to an average of 4.6 children during their reproductive years (DHS, 1997). Such children suffer from low birth weight, acute respiratory infection, diarrhea, vitamin A/iodine/protein deficiency, which result in a high infant mortality rate or very poor health even if they survive. This cycle is likely to be repeated unless gender inequality is eliminated. The Gender Related Human Development Index in Nepal (1997) ranked among the lowest (0.441) in South Asian countries, where the average was 0.511 (HDR, 2000).

Table 1.5 presents the different gender-related development indicators. Nepal apparently has the lowest adult female literacy rate and life expectancy in South Asia. The mean number of years of schooling women in the region is very low, with Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal exhibiting the poorest results. Moreover, the gender gap in education in South Asia is particularly glaring, being the largest in the world .

Table 1.5: Gender-related development data of South Asian countries

	Nepal	India	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh
Adult female literacy (as a % of male)					
- 1970	12	41	35	80	35
- 1997	37	59	46	93	55
Female life expectancy (as a % of male)					
-1970	97	97	99	103	97
-1998	98	102	103	107	100
Mean years of schooling (female as % of male)					
- 1980	33	32	25	79	29
- 1982	31	34	23	79	29
Maternal mortality rate (per 100 000 live births) 1990-98	540	410	340	60	440
Human Development Index (HDI) 1997	0.463	0.545	0.508	0.721	0.440
Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) 1997	0.441	0.525	0.472	0.321	0.304
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) 1997	__	0.240	0.176	0.321	0.304

Source: HDR, 2000.

Every year in the developing world, 585,000 women die from preventable pregnancy or childbirth complication (UNICEF, 1999). Over one-third of these deaths take place in South Asia. These deaths represent an important indicator of the social and economic inequalities between women in industrialized and developing countries. In industrialized countries, maternal mortality is rare, and can be as low as 13 deaths per 100 000 live births. In South Asia, this rate is rather high, averaging 480 deaths per 100 000 live births (HDR 2000). Maternal mortality rates in Bangladesh and Nepal are 440 per 100 000 live births and 540 per 100 000 live births, respectively. Such high maternal rates are a consequence of nutritional deficiency as well as the overall poor health of women in South Asia. Nearly a tenth of maternal deaths in Nepal are attributed to various delays in seeking care, in reaching health institutions and in receiving health services and facilities.

As mentioned earlier, the Gender–Related Development Index (GDI) value of Nepal is the lowest among South Asian countries. South Asia's regional GDI value is 0.51, slightly lower than its HDI value

of 0.53, and the second regional lowest value in the world. Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh all have GDI values of less than 0.5. HDI values of Nepal and Bangladesh are the lowest, while Pakistan's HDI, at 0.51, is only slightly below the South Asian average. Similarly, Bangladesh has a Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) of 0.3, which is relatively high compared with India and Pakistan. South Asia's GEM score, at only 0.24, is the world's lowest.

Thus, human development including poverty alleviation cannot be fully achieved without prioritizing gender equity and women empowerment issues. Empowerment of women will allow them to participate equally with men in all socio-economic development activities. Recognizing aforementioned facts, His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG/N) began to address the importance of women's participation in development since the Sixth Plan (1980-85) period. The Seventh (1985-90) and Eighth (1992-97) Plans placed similar emphasis on women with slight variations in programmes. The Ninth Plan (1997 - 2002) has been further progressive in the sense that it specifically enumerates problems and shortcomings of the government planning process with regard to enlisting women's participation in the development process.

To systematically analyse critical food security and poverty concerns at the national level within the context of the Agriculture Perspective Plan (APP) and assess the issues related to these concerns at the district and household levels, FAO Regional Office Bangkok conceived a Sector Policy and Programme Development (SPPD) study for Nepal. The National Labour Academy (NLA)of Nepal was assigned as national counterpart to the FAO SPPD team. The overall objective of the SPPD study was to identify the major issues surrounding poverty and food security and examine the underlying causes, including the policy and institutional constraints, based on review of past work and available statistics at the national level and through participatory assessments of selected districts (i.e. representing the mountain, hill and *Terai* regions). This exercise has looked into how and to what extent the macroeconomic policies and priorities are translated into actions at the meso and micro levels, the impact they have on people's livelihood opportunities and food security, and the manner by which local level concerns are fed back to the policy making level. Staying true to the broad objective framework of the SPPD exercise, this annex is devoted mainly to the assessment of nutritional and gender concerns relating to poverty and food security.

1.3 Objectives

The broad objective of this annex is to generate an in-depth understanding of the nutritional and gender aspects of poverty and food security issues. Specifically this annex has performed the following tasks:

- Reviewed national level policies and programmes related to human nutrition and gender aspects in the context of poverty and food security analysis;
- Assessed the extent to which the above policies and programmes have been implemented and how they have influenced nutrition and the gender dimensions of rural poverty and food insecurity including identification of key constraints;

- Reviewed and conducted participatory assessments of the nutritional and gender dimensions of poverty and food security issues at the district, household and intrahousehold levels; and
- Recommended necessary policies and programmes to properly integrate nutrition and gender concerns into government's objective of poverty alleviation and food security.

1.4 Methodology

The study has been based mainly on a review of documents published by the government, the donor community, research organizations both in the public and private sectors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It has also made good use of published information. The findings of the review exercise have been discussed with government, the public sector, NGOs and private sector stakeholders through both formal and informal means. Apart from these, the study also made use official records of related institutions at the central, regional and district levels. For the microlevel study, one village in each of the four districts – namely Mugu in the mountains, Achham in the hills and Kailali and Sunsari in the *Terai* region – were selected following procedures outlined in the main report.

Different Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques were used to generate required information on different aspects of the microlevel study. Analysis at the Village Development Committee (VDC) level includes a general description of the areas covered, preparation of profiles, analysis of seasonal dimensions of poverty and food availability and gender dimensions of poverty and nutrition, an account of coping strategies and institutional analysis. The PRA in each of the VDC under study took 2 to3 days.

Major findings of the VDC assessment were presented to concerned district and regional level authorities.[1] The main purposes of these presentations were to validate and refine the findings, explore possibilities for extrapolating the findings to the district, regional and national levels and to seek answers to pertinent issues related to rural poverty and household food security with special focus on the processes relating to policy flow and feedback systems.

1.5 Report Organization

This annex has been organized into four chapters. This chapter discusses the introduction, background, objectives and methodology of this study, while the second chapter deals with women's status with respect to education, health, nutrition as well as agriculture policies, programmes and programme implementation. The third chapter presents the major findings related to poverty and food security and the situation of women. The concluding chapter then presents a summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

[1] In Kailali, district and regional consultations were held separately. Only district-level consultation was held in Achham due to accessibility problems.

2. WOMEN'S STATUS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

Gender is a key locus of the cultural structure in Nepal. The construction of gender and gender relations varies to some extent by factors such as age, life-cycle-related position within the family, caste, ethnicity, class and region. Patrilineality and patrilocality contribute to an extremely unequal level of opportunities available to women as compared to men.

Given the patrilineal inheritance regime, high public exclusion of women and highly limited rate of expansion of the economy, few parents expect their daughters to earn an independent living and fewer still expect to be supported by married daughters during their infirmity and old age. These structures and rules of social organization have wide and intense ramifications on the life experiences of the two genders.

Infant and child mortality rates are significantly higher for the female than the male child. Compared to boys, girls spend approximately 1.4 times the amount of time boys spend in household and production responsibilities, including sibling care and farm work. Partly because of this, girls have more limited exposure to schooling and other public experiences.

The demographic composition of households—the proportion of household members in various age groups (e.g. 0 to 14 year old and 15 to 19 years old age)—is shown in Table 2.1. In the mountain, hill and *Terai* regions, about 37.03, 38.25 and 38.60 percent of the population, respectively, are below 15 years of age. The percentages of females in the productive age group in urban and rural areas are almost similar whereas the dependency ratio varies significantly across urban and rural areas. The ratio is 116 in rural areas and 89 in urban areas, which indicates that rural households have more dependent members compared with urban households.

Table 2.1: Gender distribution by broad age composition and dependency ratio, 1996

Ecological belt	0-14yrs (%)	15-59yrs males (%)	15-59yrs female (%)	Dependency ratio
Mountain	37.03	25.31	28.48	111.6
Hill	38.25	23.80	29.23	117.58
Terai	38.60	20.79	27.94	112.34
Urban	32.73	30.41	28.76	88.98
Kathmandu	27.49	35.71	30.87	63.96
Other Urban	36.27	26.84	27.34	106.25
Rural	38.75	23.94	28.56	116.71

Source: NLSS Survey, 1996.

As discussed earlier, women have limited access to land due to biases against them in inheritance legislation and tradition, which generally favour males. Comparison of land operated by female- and male-headed households provides evidence of the disadvantaged position of females in terms of access to land. It becomes clear from Table 2.2 that in all the regions, landholdings are consistently

smaller among female-headed households. Households headed by women on average operate 0.6 ha of land in the mountain regions, 0.44 ha in the hills and 0.48 ha in the *Terai*, respectively, compared with 1.28 ha, 0.87 ha and 1.02 ha, respectively, run by male-headed households.

Table 2.2: Women's access to land, 1996

Ecological regions / Other details	Household size (no)	Households w/o land (%)	Average area operated (ha.)
Mountains			
Men-headed households	5.8	0.87	1.28
Women-headed households	3.6	8.36	0.60
All households	5.4	1.96	1.18
Hills			
Men-headed households	5.7	10.52	0.87
Women-headed households	3.8	16.01	0.44
All households	5.3	11.48	0.80
Terai			
Men-headed household	6.3	21.76	1.02
Women-headed households	3.9	42.23	0.48
All households	6.1	24.20	0.97

Source: NLSS Survey, 1996.

Likewise, the incidence of landlessness is more pronounced among female-headed households compared with male-headed households. Some 8.36 percent, 16.01 percent and 42.23 percent of female-headed households in the mountains, hills and *Terai*, respectively, are landless against 0.87 percent, 10.52 percent and 21.76 percent of male-headed households in the respective belts. With respect to household size, female-headed households are smaller than that of male-headed household in all ecological regions.

2.1 Gender Disparity and Poverty

Prior to the formal assessment of government policies and programmes on women, it is useful to discuss gender equity and equality in the context of Nepal. The country's socio-economic indicators reveal a wide gap in gender-disaggregated figures. Information in Table 2.3 presents the situation of gender discrimination in Nepal.

Table 2.3: Situation of women in Nepal

Activity	Unit	Female	Male
Literacy	percent	28	63
Working hours per week	hrs/week	72-77	55-57
Employment	percent	63.7	71
Employment in formal sector	% EA Pop'n	4	12
Employment in unpaid work	percent	63	24
Daily wage rate in agriculture	Rs/day	35.1	44.38
Daily wage rate in non-agriculture	Rs/day	56.69	35.10

Source: CES, CBS, 1998, and CCA, 1998.

Only 27 percent of the female population is found to be literate. This contrasts with the literacy rate of males pegged at 68 percent. The average working hours of women ranges between 72 to 77 hours a week, which is 15 hours more than that of men. Only 4 percent of all economically active women work in the formal sector compared with 12 percent of men. Similarly, 63 percent of women are employed in unpaid work in contrast to 24 percent of men. Average daily wages of women in both agriculture and non-agriculture sector falls far below that of men. This information shows that females are discriminated in every sector.

Nepal has achieved substantial progress in the field of education in the last two decades. Male literacy rate has increased from 33.96 percent in 1981 to 54.10 percent in 1991. Similarly, the proportion of literate females has continuously moved up from 12.05 percent to 24.73 percent (Table 2.4). The disparity between male and female educational attainments has not declined from 1981 to 1991.

Table 2.4: Statistical profile by gender

Activity	Unit	Male		Female	
		1981	1991	1981	1991
Literacy	Percent	33.96	54.10	12.05	24.73
Working hours	Hrs/week	56[a]	51[b]	73[a]	62[b]
Employment	Percent	65.4	59.6	34.6	40.4
Daily wage rate in agri.	Rs/day	29.9	40.0	19.9	31.0

Source: Acharya Meena, 1994.

[a] data of year 1985 for rural area

[b] data of year 1985 for urban area

However, the female literacy rate of Nepal is still low among South Asian countries. The average number of working hours of women in both rural and urban areas has been greater than that of men over

the past ten years. Employment rate of males, meanwhile, has been greater than that of females. One notable aspect from a gender perspective, however, is that while male employment percent has declined significantly, female employment percent remains almost constant. This could be due to a more accurate recording of economic activity. It is quite possible that in earlier census, all males were recorded as economically active, irrespective of length of work. Average daily wages for women in agriculture is lower than that for men.

Due to the patriarchal structure of Nepalese society, women are discriminated against in several aspects within the households. This structure of the society has relegated women to subordinate social and economic positions. These customs, however, vary with respect to economic status, class, community and ethnicity. For instance, females from ethnic minorities such as *Magar*, *Gurung* and *Tamang* have equal say in decision-making. Similarly, the average number of daily working hours of women also differs among ethnic groups and agro-ecological zones (Shresttha et al., 1992). Incidence of poverty also varies among various caste and ethnic groups. It is highest among *Limbus*, followed by the socially downgraded and formerly untouchable castes (*Kami, Damai* and *Sarki*). *Chhetri, Magar, Tharu, Tamang* and *Rai* are similarly over-represented among the poor. Incidence of poverty is lowest among *Newars* followed by *Brahmans* (NHDR, 1998).

Women are reported to be consistently less involved in making decisions on several aspects of household activities (Table 2.5). For example, the proportion of women with a say on household decisions is reportedly only 19 percent with regard to disposal of household products and a little over one-fifth with regard to the education of children. The comparative figures for males are 75.5 percent and greater than 60 percent, respectively.

Table 2.5: Decision-making roles by gender, 1996 (%)

Decision Category	Male	Female	Both	Tradition
Farm management	54.8	32.3	0.4	12.5
Domestic expenditure	59.0	31.6	7.8	1.6
Disposal of household Products	75.5	19.0	4.1	1.4
Sending sons to school	68.5	20.9	8.4	2.0
Sending daughter to school	64.6	23.4	10.6	2.0

Source: Shtri Shakti, 1996

Poverty in Nepal is widespread, significant and increasing over the years. The number of people below the poverty line is estimated to have increased from about 36 percent in 1977 to 45 percent in 1997. It has also been more rampant in rural areas compared with urban areas (NHDR, 1998). In terms of ecological area, poverty is most pronounced in the mountains, where it is estimated at 63 percent (Table 2.6). Poverty level in the hills is estimated at 50 percent and about 37 percent in the *Terai*. With respect to development region, welfare levels are lowest in the central development region (34 percent) followed by the eastern (43 percent), western (45 percent), mid-western (59 percent) and far western (65 percent) development regions.

Table 2.6: Poverty among development regions and ecological belts (%)

Development region	Ecological belts			All
	Mount.	Hill	*Terai*	Nepal
Eastern	57	68	27	43
Central	48	31	34	34
Western	52	46	44	45
Mid-western	72	66	47	59
Far-western	80	73	49	65
Total	**63**	**50**	**37**	**45**

Source: NHDR, 1998.

About 7 percent of rural households are headed by females, with poverty incidence found to be highest in the hill areas. Poverty is most prevalent among female-headed households in the mountains compared with those in the hills and the *Terai*. Poverty, however, seems to be more concentrated among male-headed households than female-headed households. About 47.2 percent of female-headed households and 50.7 percent of male-headed households lie below the poverty line in Nepal (Table 2.7).

Table 2.7: Poverty incidence of female-headed households

Ecological belts	Sample households (no.)	Female-headed households (%)	Poverty Incidence	
			Male- headed household s(%)	Female -headed households (%)
Mountain	995	5.83	63.07	56.62
Hills	3 525	8.40	62.65	52.36
Terai	2 816	5.04	32.01	31.69
All	7 336	6.76	50.73	47.18

Source: MIMAP, 1996

This contradicts general expectations since reality is that factors affecting poverty often go against females and female-headed households rather than males and male-headed households. Examined closely, this result possibly traces to the fact that women receive remittances from husbands who are migrant workers and thus decisions on overall expenditure and household chores are made by women. The other major reason might be of household size. Table 2.2 indicates that female-headed households are typically smaller compared with male-headed households. Also, because female-headed households are smaller in size, the dependency ratio of family members is low, which helps females to attain a surplus in remittances. This is perhaps why poverty incidence is higher among male-headed households. Female-headed households thus have smaller family sizes and better nutrition.

There is a strong positive association between household size and the number of children per household, on one hand, and poverty incidence on the other. As the size of the household or number of children increases, the incidence of the poverty goes up, which severely affects the nutritional status of the household.

2.2 Policies and Programme Implementation Status

2.2.1 Policies and programmes

The women of Nepal have not been able to fully take part in development activities because of their limited education, ignorance and poverty. Besides, women's work is often undervalued and underestimated. Women remain invisible as farmers despite their contribution to farming. While providing a basis for the formulation of policies and evaluation of development measures, statistics also help to demolish stereotypes of the roles of women and men in society. Without a statistical representation of women's contribution to society, development programmes will not purposely focus on women.

The Human Development Report (1998) has drawn attention to the fact that much of women's work remains unrecognized, and unvalued. If these unpaid contributions by women were recognized, there would be far-reaching consequences in terms of social and economic policy and social norms and institutions.

The superstition and negative thinking prevalent in the society have been major obstacles to mobilizing women. National policy on the participation of women has been adopted since the Sixth Plan. This encourages women's participation by eliminating barriers to overall development of Nepalese society including the female community. Implementation of the Sixth Development Plan began in the fiscal year 1980/81 and ended by the close of 1984/85. It endorsed the following objectives.

- Provision of proper opportunities for the development of women in the country by making them efficient participants in each field of development;
- Upgrading of the social and economic standards of women for their overall development; and
- Making women self-reliant and productive by utilizing their skills and ingenuity.

The objectives set in the Sixth Plan were long-term ones. Hence, they are valid today as they were then. To involve women in national development and ensure their effective participation in every sector of development, various women development policies were adopted in the Eighth Plan (1992/93 to 1996/97). These policies emphasize overall development of women in order to enhance their capacity by imparting appropriate knowledge and employable skills and creating appropriate environments and infrastructure to create greater opportunities for decision-making at the local and national levels. The aim has been to improve the socio-economic, educational, political and legal status of females.

Specifically, the Eighth Plan has adopted the following policies and objectives:

- To enhance women's participation in the various economic and social sectors (e.g. agriculture, forestry, industry, health and education);
- To raise employment opportunities for women in these areas by extending market services, credit facilities, technical know-how and entrepreneurship training;

- To appoint women in the government, semi-government and non-government sectors and provide them with opportunities for career development; and
- To reform laws that hinder the development of women and form a suitable organizational structure for coordination and monitoring activities relating to women.

Accordingly, several programmes such as the Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW), Small Farmer Development Programme (SFDP) and the Micro Credit Project for Women (MCPW) have implemented.

The Ninth Plan, covering the period (1997 to 2002), has adopted gender mainstreaming as the main approach to diminish gender disparities, empower women and reduce marginalization of women in national economy. The plan has endorsed the following programmes and policies to increase the status of women in the community and hence reduce the poverty:

- Reservation of 25 percent of employment-oriented training opportunities for women;
- Reservation of 20 percent of new job opportunities for women when appropriate candidates are available;
- Expansion of credit programmes for women;
- Requiring gender-sensitivity in all agricultural programmes;
- Promotion of entrepreneurship among women through training support and credit access; and
- Gender-differentiated monitoring.

The plan has emphasized inclusion of women in all development programmes. It also acknowledges women's unpaid contribution to the economy through labour in the home and agriculture sector. The plan recommends affirmative actions to ensure women participation. It has also indicated that there shall be special legal provisions made to ensure women's full participation in the development and political process.

Hence, there has been continuation of national programmes and policies in empowering women in all development activities since the initiation of the Sixth Five-Year Plan of Nepal. In fact, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MCWSW) has been established precisely for the institutional development of the women’s development sector.

2.2.2 Implementation status of programmes

The emphasis of gender equity policy in the Ninth Plan has resulted in the design and implementation of two broad groups of programmes.

The first consists of programmes designed within sectoral programmes to empower women through special training. Due to lack of gender-disaggregated data, it was not possible to pinpoint the exact implementation status of the programmes covering all sectors. However, available data indicate the progress made has to far been modest.

For example, as indicated in Table 2.8, women constituted about 25 percent of total trainees in the agriculture subsector and 19 percent in the livestock subsector in the first three years of plan implementation. Although these figures fall short of the targets (i.e. one-third), implementation status can be considered modest. Likewise, representation of women in politics and civil service has been improving. The proportion of women in the House of Representatives has increased from 3.4 percent in 1995 to 5.8 percent in 1999. In similar manner, female representation in the National Assembly increased from 8.3 percent in 1995 to 15 percent in 1999. In the civil service sector, the percentage of women increased from 7.7 percent in 1999 to 7.8 percent in 2000. An overview of women's programmes within sectoral programmes is provided in Appendix Table 2.

Table 2.8: Women trained in agriculture

Subsector in agriculture	Numbers trained			Female (%)
	Male	Female	Total	
Agriculture	7 743	2 447	9 880	24.8
Livestock	2 444	573	3 017	19.0

Source: MOAC, 2000.

The second group of programmes has been targeted towards women. Government has initiated several poverty alleviation programmes aimed at reducing women's economic dependence and improving their status in society though social mobilization. Government and non-government programmes have also been implemented to alleviate poverty and enhance the status of women in areas such as financial services, employment creation and income generating programmes. In addition, different programmes in health and education and skills development training have also been implemented.

Microfinance programmes promoted as key strategies for addressing poverty alleviation and women's empowerment simultaneously. These include the following:

Productive Credit for Rural Women (PCRW)

The PCRW was initiated in 1982 as the first credit programme to target poor women. Credit is provided on group collateral under this programme and complemented with various training including skills and community mobilization. It is the entry point for initiation of activities and projects such as literacy classes, health education, drinking water facilities and child care centres. The Women Development Division (WDD) of the Ministry of Local Development (MOLD) was the implementer of this programme. Impact evaluation studies have reported it to be a great success. However, the coverage of the programme is very limited in view of the massive need of such services.

Small Farmer Development Programme (SFDP)

This programme was initiated in 1975. Although it was not exclusively focused on women, it nonetheless provided credit to poor farm women. It aimed to improve the overall quality of lives of small farmers living below the poverty line thereby benefiting children and women in all the 75 districts of the country. Similarly to the PCRW, the SFDP is also the entry point for local mobilization of community development activities and projects in education, health education, nutrition, sanitation and drinking water provision.

Micro Credit Project For Women (MCPW)

The MCPW is funded by Asian Development Bank (ADB) and is aimed at developing mechanisms where NGOs are utilized as credit agents to connect the clients (poor women) to commercial banks. This programme was initiated in 1994 as an extension of PCRW. It is administered by the WDD and implemented by the Canadian Center for International Studies (CECI), an international NGO.

Rural Self Help Fund (RSHF)

This fund was established in 1990 by the Nepal Rastra Bank to assist NGOs and saving and credit cooperatives (SCCs) in microfinance activities. Under this fund, NGOs and SCCs play the role of financial intermediaries. The objective of the fund is to provide financial assistance to deprived people including women to enable them to carry out income generating activities. The RSHF operates in 57 VDCs and 28 districts with 3 194 clients (1997). Though these programmes are for poor women, it is not known what proportion of poor women has actually benefited from the programme. Available evidence suggests that these programmes (governmental) have gained limited success in transferring skills to a large number of poor women partly because of unrealistic education requirements that prevent the poor women from entering the programme.

Employment creation projects

Special public works projects sponsored by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) are at times implemented during the dry season when employment opportunities are scarce. The programme is directed towards the poor and food in kind is paid as wage for development works. In these projects, labourers are attracted from marginal and landless households and primarily comprise women (at least 60 percent). But again, outreach is limited.

Income-generating projects

There is a large number of small income-generating projects created for women and run by NGOs. These involve moneymaking activities such as tailoring, beekeeping, livestock raising and handicraft making. However, the aggregate number reached by these projects is small and there are no quantitative evaluations of these programmes to be found.

Skills and vocation training for self-employment

Labour training centres run by the labour department of HMG/N and the Training for Rural Gainful Employment Activities (TRUGA) have programmes targeted particularly to poor women. The Department of Cottage Industry (DCI) and other government organizations, meanwhile, provide training for self-employment. There are also groups that teach marketable skills to female bonded labourers and deprived women from scheduled castes. This scheme offers training on health as well as literacy classes.

Female farmers' groups

The Women Farmer Development Division (WFDD) has been established in the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC) to look into issues related to the participation of female farmers in agricultural development programmes. Farmers' groups are formed under the WFDD and given training on different agricultural activities. Though this programme is not exclusively targeted to poor women, it can be expected that the poor women also benefit.

A large number of NGOs and INGOs also (indirectly) provide skills training. These usually form part of a more general community development effort. The Social Welfare Council (SWC), the organization through which funds and approval for NGOs are channeled, has also been mobilizing grassroots level NGOs on a massive scale to imparting skills training to deprived women. It is not known whether these programmes are well targeted or not. Most evaluation reports of government-sponsored skills training indicate limited success because of lack of employment opportunities available even for those trained.

Vegetable seed production

With proven income earning potentials in the hills and *Terai*, winter vegetable seeds are now produced in the hilly and mountainous districts and summer vegetable seeds in the *Terai* districts. District Agriculture Development Offices (DADOs) are involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of supporting programmes. To help ensure sustainability in seed supply, seed buffer stocks are being maintained at the central level with active participation of the private sector. Similarly, a special vegetable production programme has been implemented in several districts. The kitchen gardening programme, which encourages vegetable production, continues to improve the nutritional status of rural people, especially women and children in the remote areas where there are no other programmes and marketing facilities.

Other programmes

Other programmes targeting poor women include the Chelibeti programme for girls unable to attend formal schools and those involving food distribution to pregnant and lactating mothers as well as provision of scholarships to poor female students. Many NGOs and INGOs have exerted efforts to develop female education and improve women’s access to health services. In addition, legal provisions are being made to nominate at least one female member in each user group (local or district level) that is organized to implement government developmental programmes. The programme that distributes food to pregnant and lactating women began in December 2000 and was concluded in December 2001. It is scheduled to reopen in Doti and Dadeldhura in 2002.

Impact of programmes

The major impact of the PCRW, SFDP, RSHP and MCPW has been to provide poor women in rural areas greater access to institutional credit. Participation of women in income-generating activities combined with self-development activities such as adult literacy and community development has helped build women's confidence in their abilities. These programmes have led to an increase in the income of participating women as well, raising the household's overall economic status. These women have been able to take care of their children in a healthier environment and a greater number now send their children, both males and females, to school.

Many evaluation reports indicate that rural women have had greater access to institutional credit because of the various microfinance programmes. Socio-economic status of the PCRW clients, in particular, have improved significantly. The latest impact evaluation study made by the Centre for Women and Development reveals that PCRW borrowers enjoyed an increase in annual income of $45 on average. The programme has been successful in raising the confidence of poor women residing within the PCRW areas. Similarly, the SFDP has created a positive impact on rural women. Female beneficiaries were mainly engaged in weaving, knitting, poultry farming, shop keeping and trading. The annual income of female members from such activities averaged at $37. Income generated this way was largely used for meeting family needs. However, some women were able to save and accumulate tangible assets.

The above analysis indicates a commitment to alleviate poverty and enhance the status of women at the government and non-government level. But majority of the programmes have limited outreach and suffer from problems related to sustainability and targeting.

Nepalese women are still found to be exploited, neglected and suppressed from their full development potential. They are forced to live insecure lives because of illiteracy, ill health, poverty, tradition and a discriminatory legal system. Since the Sixth Plan was implemented as a national policy and with the creation of several sectoral women development programmes, society has begun to accept the role of women in development. However, the progress in gender equality is not to the mark. There also appears to be a lack of effective mechanisms with respect to programmes that entail training and transfer of technology to women. Despite consistent declarations to the contrary, the achievements thus far have not been significant. A major reason for this is the inadequate sensitivity to gender issues at all levels of the bureaucracy and within political structures. This presents a critical challenge in the promotion of equitable development in Nepal.

Official focus on the gender issue has been increasing over the last two decades in Nepal. Past efforts in women development have resulted in institution building and an extension of sectoral programmes. Due to the lack of a good monitoring and evaluation system, accurate estimates of the women beneficiaries in the country is not possible.

Taken as a whole, the socio-economic status of Nepalese women still lags behind. Due to low educational levels and social reasons, women are still denied access to political and administrative decision-making. Because of economic and social inequality between men and women, female participation in development activities has not been encouraging. Policies and plans are hence hinged on the creation of a

developed society on the basis of gender equality and women's empowerment by mainstreaming women's participation in each and every aspect of national development.

2.3 Women and Education

The history of public education in Nepal has been relatively short. It is a fairly recent phenomenon, which occurred after the overthrow of the Rana regime in 1950. At the time, the national literacy rate in 1950 was less than two percent and only a handful of schools existed in the country, which mainly served the children of aristocratic families. The female literacy rate was then virtually zero. Nepal has witnessed a spectacular expansion of education system in the last 50 years. Presently, there are more then 23 000 schools with about 4.6 million students and 129 000 teachers. However, the expansion of education has not been adequate to cater the educational needs of the majority of the population. A vast majority of women (70 percent) still remain illiterate (MOE, 1998).

The literacy rate of the *Dalit* community is 16 percent, but for *Dalit* women, it is only 7 percent. Among the 2 million Dalit women, only 10 to 15 are either graduates or postgraduates. Ignorance, absolute poverty, caste and gender discrimination can partly explain these statistics.

Despite efforts launched by the government and non-government sectors, the main factors behind lower participation of women in education have not changed much. Girls, especially those in rural areas, are still burdened with heavy household chores, which deprives them of educational opportunities. This serves as a major barrier to female education. Whenever parents in poor households have to pay money to send their children to school, they choose to pay for the education of their sons and opt that their daughters stay at home. Social norms have not changed much, which explains the low participation of girls and women in education even today.

2.3.1 Literacy and educational status

Literacy rates and the enrolment ratio of women serve as important indicators of the gender divide in terms of education. Despite the substantial progress Nepal has achieved in education in the past three decades, the gender differential in literacy is still high. Education is crucial as it enhances the access of women to productive employment opportunities and increases the well-being of the entire family.

The overall literacy rate increased to 23.3 percent in 1981 and further to 39.3 percent in 1991, as against 13.9 percent in 1971 (Table 2.9). The male literacy rate similarly increased from 23.6 percent in 1971 to 34 percent in 1981 and 54 percent in 1991. The proportion of literate females has been continuously rising from 3.9 percent in 1971 to 12.1 percent in 1981 and 24.7 percent in 1991.

Table 2.9: Literacy rates by gender (%)

Census	Male	Female	Both	Difference
1971	23.59	3.91	13.89	19.68
1981	33.96	12.05	23.26	21.91
1991	54.10	24.73	39.34	29.37

Source: Population Census, 1971, 181 and 1991, CBS.

However, the sex difference in literacy rate is still high. The 1991 literacy rate of females is close to the rate of male literacy 20 years ago. The difference between male and female literacy rates has increased to about 29 percentage points in 1991 compared to about 20 percentage points in 1971 and about 22 percentage points in 1981. For every one hundred boys, only 53 girls receive primary school education. Hence, even though Nepal has made substantial progress in education, the country's literacy rate is still very low even among South Asian countries.

While the developing country average for female literacy rates has increased from 32 to 63 percent in the period 1970 to 1997, the South Asian average has increased only from 17 to 37 percent (UNDP 1999). Of the total illiterate population in South Asia, 63 percent are women. Meanwhile, of the total number of children not attending primary school, 71 percent are females (HDR 2000).

Table 2.10 shows the educational deprivation of women and girls in South Asia. Nepal and Pakistan have the worst female literacy rates at 21 and 25 percent, respectively. Efforts to address gender disparities in education have in general focused on improving enrolment at the primary and secondary levels. Yet the minimum target of universal primary education has been met only in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has the best record in education among the South Asian countries (Table 2.10). The rest of the region has yet to achieve universal primary education even for boys. However, South Asian countries have been progressing in terms of female literacy rate over past years.

Table 2.10: Educational profile of South Asian countries

	Nepal	**India**	**Bangladesh**	**Pakistan**	**Sri Lanka**
Female literacy rate (%)					
-1970	3	19	9	5	68
-1997	21	39	27	25	88
Male literacy rate (%)					
- 1970					
- 1997	22	47	47	40	86
	56	67	50	55	94
Primary enrolment ratio					
(net) 1997	63	71	70	62	100
Girls	93	83	80	71	100
Boys	78	77	75	67	100
Total					
Secondary enrolment ratio		48	16	17	79
(net) 1997	40	71	27	33	73
Girls	68	60	22	25	76
Boys	55				
Total					
Completion of primary cycle					
(%) 1994	52	59	67	44	99
Girls	52	65	69	54	98
Boys					

Source: HDR, 2000.

Table 2.11 indicates the inequality in enrolment of school age children by gender. In 1995, of the 928 000 children not enrolled in schools, approximately two-thirds were girls. Of the total number of children enrolled at the primary level, 60 percent were boys and 40 percent were girls. For 1995, the primary school gross enrolment rate was 114.1 percent, implying that a large number of underage and/or overage students were enrolled in primary schools.

Table 2.11: Primary school-age children and enrolment rates, 1995

	Total number of children in age group (6- 10) (a)	**Number enrolled (b)**	**Number not in school (c)**	**Gross enrolment rate (b/a[8] 100)**	**Net enrolment rate (a-c/a[*] 100)**
Boys	1 477 687	1 961 410	314 268	132.7 (100)	78.7 (67)
Girls	1 381 269	1 301 640	613 756	94.2 (72)	55.6 (46)
Total	**2 858 956**	**3 263 050**	**928 024**	**114.1 (86)**	**67.5 (57)**

Source: MOE 1997c.
Figures in parentheses are 1996 NERs and GERs from CBS 1997c.

Moreover, despite the increasing rate of primary school enrolment, the rate of repetition as well as dropouts[2] from the primary grades is very high. This can be attributed to a number of causes. For instance, girls are basically involved in household chores in family farms and involvement in work is intense during the peak agricultural seasons. Not only does this increase absenteeism in schools, but also implies that many children cannot keep up with the required study schedules at home. As a result, they do not feel academically comfortable in school (NPC/UNICEF, 1996b).

Income, poverty, caste and ethnic discrimination are the other causes of the high dropout rate. Although primary schooling is free, households still incur direct financial costs in sending their children to schools. Extremely poor households find it impossible to finance these costs. Most communities, schools and teachers express attitudes and practices that are discriminatory to various degrees against particular caste and ethnic groups. Such attitudes and practices also contribute to a high dropout rate. Demanding work required of young females definitely detracts them from building their capabilities. This in turn affects every aspect of their life.

Female literacy rates vary significantly between poor and non-poor households and also across ecological belts. It is also strongly influenced by the caste and ethnic background of households (Table 2.12). Female literacy among poor household was about 17 percent in 1995 compared to about 30 percent among non-poor households. Of the three ecological belts, female literacy was highest in the hills (22.1 percent) and lowest in the mountains (9.9 percent). The female literacy gap between poor and non-poor households was highest in the Hills (17.6 percentage points) and lowest in the mountains.

Despite the gains, however, national literacy rate is still very low. Two-thirds of the total population thus remain deprived of their basic right to literacy. Again, gender differences are revealed

[2] Defined as failing to attend schools continuously through the primary level.

even in access to literacy. While more than one-half of boys and men are literate, only one-fourth of four girls and women are literate. Access to opportunities to gain an education is highly unequal between urban and rural areas and among the various ecosystems and development regions of the country. Literacy rate is typically lower in the mountains and the *Terai* compared with the hills.

Table 2.12: Female literacy by poverty level and ecological belt

Ecological belt	Female literacy (%)		Literacy gap
	Poor	Non-poor	
Mountain	9.97	18.80	8.83
Hill	22.13	39.77	17.64
Terai	12.28	24.20	11.92
Nepal	16.95	30. and a 14	13.19

Source: NLSS, 1995/1996

Household income, workload and the concern with the purity of the female body leading to early marriages are crucial variables in female education. As long as there is no resource crunch in the family, primary school age girls have a chance to go to school. But as soon as the resource constraint arises, the first casualty is typically the female child's education. Table 2.13 clearly shows that girls in lower income groups have less opportunity to go to school. Hence, we can draw a conclusion that, household poverty has a direct impact on female literacy rates.

Table 2.13: Primary school enrolment levels by income group (%)

	Poor		Not poor	
Rural	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Hills	71.5	32.6	78.5	54.1
Terai	45.0	13.9	67.1	39.2
Urban				
Hills	74.6	50.0	83.3	75.2
Terai	48.6	26.4	72.0	50.9

Source: MPHBS special tabulations in Acharya, 1990.

With regard to the linkages between the mother's education and child nutrition, the study in NMIS indicates the significance of the literacy of mothers for child care. Table 2.14 shows that a child of an illiterate mother has an increased risk of both stunting and wasting. The mother is mainly responsible for the overall care and feeding of children. Hence, her situation might be expected to have an impact on a child's nutritional status and overall household food security. A significant reason for the higher level of malnutrition in South Asia is found to be the poorer status of women (NMIS, 1997).

Table 2.14: Literacy of mothers and malnutrition among children 6-36 months old

Nutritional status	Literacy of mother	
	Illiterate	Literate
Stunted (%)	2 594 (56)	416 (36)
Not stunted (%)	2 003 (44)	741 (64)
Odds ratio = 2.33 (95% of CI 2.00-2.63)		
Wasted (%)	816 (18)	128 (11)
Not wasted (%)	37 781 (82)	1 029 (89)
Odds ratio = 1.72 (95 % CI 1.41 –2.13)		

Source: NMIS, 1997.

Table 2.15 shows that fertility behavior of urban and rural women differ significantly. Urban women give birth to less children (5.3 on average) during their lifetime than rural women (6.2). The total marital fertility rate also varies perceptibly by education level. Illiterate women have as much as 1.4 children more than those with some primary education. A higher level of education makes a substantial difference.

Table 2.15: Indicators by socio-economic group

	Residence			Education		
	Nepal	Rural	Urban	None	Primary	Secondary
Median age of marriage*	16.4	16.3	17.3	16.1	17.0	19.1
Knowledge of contraception	92.6	72.9	90.1	91.7	97.8	99.7
Total marital fertility rate	6.1	6.2	5.3	6.2	4.8	4.0
Birth intervals (months)	33.7	33.8	32.7	34.2	31.2	27.8

* Refers to 20-49 age group.
Sources: NFHS, 1996, various tables.

Educational attainment serves as a valuable safety valve to neutralize the burden of poverty. Thus, illiterate members of society are much more prone to be poor. Incidence of poverty is higher among households whose heads have completed primary levels of education than among those whose heads are simply literate and who had not attended school (NHDR, 1998).

2.3.2 Government plans and policies

The Ninth Plan has outlined a long list of policies and implementation strategies for attaining objectives for education. These include developing education as an effective means of human resource development and a vehicle of national development by preparing citizens to become productive and disciplined and to develop a sense of social responsibility. These policies have been outlined in the main plan report in Chapter 3.

No separate policy pronouncements have been made in the plan for the education of women. However, educational policies emphasize equal opportunities for women and men in all aspects of the education sector. This is evident from policy statements that stress literacy for all citizens and basic primary education to all areas and groups including women and disadvantaged, disabled and oppressed

groups, which have been neglected in the past. Similarly, under the plan's development programme for women, emphasis is placed on increasing women's access to both formal and non-formal education and on improving educational standards through several programmes targeted to women.

2.3.3 Educational programmes for women

With a view to enhancing women's education, the government has initiated several programmes. Table 2.16 below summarizes the initiatives taken to increase women's access to development opportunities through education.

Table 2.16: Major women-focused educational programmes under implementation

Programmes	Duration	Coverage	Focus on
Basic primary education project	93-98	All districts	• Education of out-of-school children, literacy programmes • Recruitment of women teachers in primary schools to encourage participation of women
Scholarship programmes	90-98	All districts	• Targeted to girls from socially and economically disadvantaged households
Nutrition programmes	91-98	Implemented in eight far- and mid-western food deficit districts	• Midday meal programmes for boys and girls
Community - based child development centres	89-98	Number of districts	• Encouraging participation of girls from early childhood • Freeing older girl siblings of their child care responsibilities to enable them to attend school
Women empowerment programmes	97-00	21 districts of Nepal	• Improvement of women's capacity as full partners in economic and social development
Vocational training	90-98		• Women Development Division of the Ministry of Women and Children

Source: The Ninth Plan, 1998.

2.4 Women and Nutrition

The nutritional status of women, particularly as it is affected by childbearing, is partly a function of experiences in childhood and adolescence. Women's activities in the food chain influence their resource situation in two ways. Food and cash are generated through these activities in return for labour and time spent in the process. These, in turn, influence the nutrition of women and the quality of their lives. Greater participation of women in food production may increase total household food availability as well as enhance their control over food supplies and cash, improve their status and strengthen their decision-making powers in their homes.

Women's participation in productive activities tends to increase their economic value and helps bolster their rights over household resources, including food and cash. There is also evidence that the

income that women generate is more likely to remain within their own control. In addition, studies have shown that women place higher priority on their families' basic needs than men do. Therefore, it can be assumed that the greater the control women have over household food and cash, the greater the potential for satisfying not only the nutritional needs of their children but also their own needs.

One decisive factor, not only for family nutrition but also for creating opportunities for women to satisfy their own basic needs, is the status society bestows on females and the part they are expected to play. The successful fulfillment of their roles as main providers of nutrition of the family is particularly important to women in traditional societies as it is closely linked to their identity as women. In other words, their food-related household work is also a moral obligation tied to general conceptions of what is "male" and what is "female." The priorities that women set concerning the allocation of their own labour, their cash expenditures and the distribution of food among family members may then be dependent not only on their access to and control of resources but also on the existing sociocultural norms concerning a woman's role in society.

Several authors have discussed women's "sacrificing role" in intrahousehold food distribution. Some studies describe how girls in Bangladesh learn from puberty onwards to become the least demanding in the family and to give priority to the needs of male household members when food is scarce. The same phenomenon has been observed in Sri Lanka. In this part of the world, poor women take pride in being able to provide their husbands and children with satisfying and adequate meals daily even if they have to work extra hours or reduce their own food intake. Women in Southern India feed their husbands first, then their children (boys before the girls) and only then do they think of themselves. The best and most nourishing portions of the meal are served to males. Nepal is not exceptional in this case. Microlevel findings of four different villages of Nepal indicate that women suffer the most within the household in periods of food scarcity.

About half of all young Nepalese children are smaller than expected. A survey conducted in 1998 shows that 50.4 percent of children below three years are stunted while 48.5 percent were underweight. An earlier survey conducted in 1996 came up with similar figures (i.e. 54 percent underweight, 55 percent stunted) with the lowest levels of malnutrition observed in the eastern region and the highest levels in the mid and far western regions.

It is clear form these surveys, though, that in spite of efforts to deal with the problem over the last 20 years, malnutrition remains as high today as it was in 1975 when the National Nutrition Survey revealed 65 percent of the children to be stunted. This suggests either that efforts to tackle malnutrition have been inadequate, or that their approaches have been inappropriate. In Nepal’s case, it seems both factors are equally to blame. While the average household’s access to food is essential for good nutrition, it is not sufficient. The manner in which children are fed and their exposure to diseases like diarrhea also have a significant impact on their nutritional status (CCA, 1999).

2.4.1 Nutrition status and problems

A high population growth rate, steep poverty levels and deficiencies in income-generating employment, nutritious food, heath and basic facilities, caring capacity, education and public awareness have redounded to various types of malnutrition among different sections of the country's population (NPC, 1998).

The major forms of malnutrition as revealed by the National Nutritional Health Survey include protein energy malnutrition, iron deficiency anaemia, vitamin A deficiency and iodine deficiency. Malnutrition among children is around 53 percent. In addition, 75 percent of pregnant women and 50 percent of women aged 15 to 59 years are anemic.

Most of the nutritional problems arise from lack of adequate and balanced food. Therefore, adequacy of food consumption in households is one of the important parameters for determining nutritional status in Nepal. Table 2.17 shows that food consumption was less than the adequate for almost 51 percent of households, just adequate for 47 percent and more than adequate for less than 2 percent. With respect to development region, the proportion of households with inadequate food consumption was highest (56 percent) in the Far Western Development Region (FWDR) and lowest (47 percent) in the Midwestern Development Region (MWDR), with other regions lying in between. Meanwhile, the problem was most severe in the mountains (63 percent) and lowest in the *Terai* (45 percent). As discussed elsewhere in the report, women are the ones to suffer most in the households when food shortages occur. Apart from the chronic malnutrition, a lack of nutritious food has led to frequent illnesses among children as well as forced labour and diminished access to educational opportunities.

Table 2.17: Adequacy of Food Consumption, 1995/96 (% of households)

Development / Ecological region	Less than adequate	Just adequate	More than adequate
Eastern	49.1	49.7	1.2
Central	49.8	47.4	2.8
Western	54.8	44.3	.9
Midwestern	46.9	51.3	2.2
Far western	55.8	42.0	3.3
Nepal	50.9	47.3	1.8
Mountain	63.2	33.6	3.3
Hill	54.7	43.1	2.2
Terai	44.9	54	1.2

Source: CES, CBS, 1998.

Dietary energy availability in Nepal is presented in Table 2.18. Information presented in the table indicate that in terms of availability of dietary energy at the macro level, Nepal experienced a deficit only during the period from 1986 to 1988 and had surpluses in other years analysed. However, the composition of the available dietary energy is far from what is ideal from a nutritional perspective. In 1995, almost 94 percent of dietary energy available came from vegetable sources or 14 percent higher than the normal requirement. Even within vegetable sources, majority of energy available came from cereals and root crops compared with the normally required contribution of 45 percent for a nutritionally balanced diet. Imbalances in the availability of dietary energy is reflected by the poor indicators of nutritional status of people in general and of women and children in particular.

Table 2.18: Nutritional dimension of food security

Particulars	Availability	Requirement	Surplus/ Deficit
Total dietary energy (Kcal/day)			
1986-88	2 083	2 250	-167
1989-91	2 285		35
1994-96	2 267		17
1997	2 366		16
Composition in % - 1995			
Animal origin	6	20	-14
Vegetable origin	94	80	+14
Cereal and root crops	79	45	+34
Other	15	35	-20

Source: SIFAD, FAO Regional Office 1999.

Citing old data, a UNICEF report maintains that the nutritional status of most rural women of Nepal is extremely low, particularly in terms of a severe lack of proteins, vitamin A, iron and iodine in their diets (UNICEF, 1996). Maternal mortality has been estimated at 540 per 100 000 live births in Nepal, one of the highest in the world. This is mostly contributed by nutritional anaemia, which is suspected to be very high among mothers of children aged 6 to 36 months, at about 71 percent in Sindhupalchowk District in the hills and 95 percent in Nawalparasi District in the *Terai*.

Table 2.19 indicates that maternal nutritional status of women with heights below 145 centimeters is highest among Nepalese women living in the central region and the hills. Illiterate women living in the *Terai* and the eastern and central regions are more likely to fall below the 18.5 Body Mass Index (BMI) measure than other women. For the BMI[3], an indicator recommended by the WHO in judging maternal nutritional status, a cutoff of 18.5 has been recommended to define chronic energy deficiency among non-pregnant women. Based on this index, about 24.7 percent of women in Nepal (36.9 percent in the *Terai*, 13.6 percent in the hills and 14 percent in the mountains) suffer from undernutrition. One of four women in Nepal falls below the cutoff, indicating that the level of chronic energy deficiency in Nepal is relatively high (NFHS, 1996).

[3] The body mass index or BMI is defined as the ratio of body weight divided by the square of the height in meters.

Available information suggests that children under five years of age suffer from various degrees of protein energy malnutrition. In 1996, about 55 percent of children suffered from chronic malnutrition (stunting) and 13 percent from acute malnutrition (wasting). Among the different ecological belts, chronic malnutrition was highest in the mountains at 63 percent, but acute malnutrition was highest among children in the *Terai* region at 24 percent (UNICEF, 1998).

Table 2.19: Maternal nutritional status by characteristics

	Height		BMI			
Background characteristics	**Mean**	**<145 (%)**	**No. of women**	**Mean**	**< 18.5 (Kg/m^2)**	**No. of women**
Ecological region						
Mountain	150.2	14.7	287	20.4	13.6	241
Hill	150.4	15.0	1 609	20.5	16.5	1 377
Terai	150.5	14.6	1 851	19.1	40.7	1 599
Development region						
Eastern	150.4	12.9	780	20.4	19.7	689
Central	150.1	16.7	1 255	20.5	19.6	1 072
Western	150.1	16.3	748	19.1	20.2	638
Literate	151.4	9.7	783	20.3	24.9	686
Illiterate	150.2	16.1	2 963	19.7	29.3	2 531

Source: NFHS, 1996.

2.4.2 Government plan and policies

Food and nutrition policies and programmes were conceptualized and formulated for the first time in Nepal during the Eighth Plan (1992 to 1997). Despite such initiatives, achievements in all the four areas of emphasis laid down in Nation Plan of Action on Nutrition (i.e. household food security, food safety and quality control, infection., malnutrition, micronutrition deficiencies and nutrition evaluation) have been far from satisfactory. This could be due to inadequate allocation of national budget for the specific gender-focused nutritional programmes, the absence of specific targets or timetables or the lack of an appropriate monitoring body to assess progress. Other constraints may be the dearth of clear policies and institutional mechanisms that facilitate NGO or private sector participation in the nutritional programme and the tendency of NGOs to concentrate only on the more accessible areas. Hence, ensuring food safety and household food security remains a major challenge.

The Ninth Plan provides continuity in nutrition policies and strategies adopted in the Eighth plan with a goal to improve the level of nutrition among the people and contribute to poverty alleviation by developing healthy human resources in the country. The policy emphasis of the plan centres on increasing production of nutritious food, continuing micronutrient distribution programmes in highly problematic areas, incorporating nutrition education in primary level and mobilizing the private sector and NGOs in the implementation of nutrition programmes.

2.4.3 Nutrition programme and implementation status

The Eighth Plan considered challenges confronting the nutrition subsector not in isolation. Instead, it was considered as an integral component of the overall problem of food insecurity. The plan initiated several programmes on nutrition together with other income-generating activities in various sectors such as agriculture, health and local development. Major nutrition-specific programmes implemented from 1990 onwards include the following:

- Applied nutrition programmes in Sindhupalanchowk supported by Freedom from Hunger Foundation California (FFH 1998);
- Joint Nutrition Support Programme (JNSP) initiated through the joint venture of HMG/WHO/UNICEF and supported by the Italian government through the UNICEF/WHO; and
- Nutritious Food Programme supported by the United Nations World Food Programme.

Although the objectives and goals of these programmes had been set following multisectoral, intersectoral and intrasectoral approaches, implementation was done in isolation; the nutrition programme has been conducted individually rather than through institutions (Gautam, 1996). In line with the policy, the Ninth Plan has formulated and implemented various nutrition programmes. Except for targeting women in the distribution of vegetable seeds, no specific programmes to enhance nutrition at the household level specifically targeted women have been conceptualized and implemented.

2.5 Women and Health

Gender inequality and discrimination harm female health directly and indirectly throughout the life cycle. Unequal power relations between men and women often limit the latter's control over sexual activity and their ability to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

The maternal mortality rate in Nepal, estimated at 875 per 100 000 for women aged 15 to 49 years, is one of the highest in the world. This is one of the key indicators of the status of reproductive health care and service delivery as well as of women's overall status in society. This rate is based on the age of surviving sisters, the age at death of sisters who died and the number of years since the death of sisters (MOH, 1966a). This estimate suggests that 27 percent of all deaths of women aged 15 to 49 years is attributable to childbirth complications.

Similarly, infant mortality rate is also very high in Nepal. Nearly one child in every ten dies before reaching the age of one (Table 2.20). Contrary to expectations, however, male infant mortality rate is slightly higher than the female infant mortality rate. The NPC-UNICEF (1996) in a study reports that

Table 2.20: Infant mortality rate by sex, 1978 to 1994

IMR/1 000	**1971**	**1973-74**	**1976**	**1978**	**1981**	**1986**	**1987**	**1989**	**1994**
Male	176	175	156	148	120	110	108	104	100
Female	168	167	148	---	114	104	102	100	96
Both	**172**	**171**	**152**	**144**	**117**	**107**	**105**	**102**	**98**

Source: CBS 1987b, 1995b; CEDA 1996; MOH 1992, 1997c.

gender differences do not exist among children 6 to 36 months of age in relation to nutrition, a result that lends credence to the infant mortality figures. Infant mortality, however, varies substantially by region. Infants in the rural areas are exposed 1.6 times more to death risks compared with infants in the urban areas (NHDR, 1998).

Providing quality reproductive health services enables women to balance safe childbearing with other aspects of their lives. It also protects them from health risks, facilitates their social participation, including employment, and allows girls to continue and complete their schooling (UNFPA, 2000).

Compared to the so-called "upper caste people," the condition of the *Dalit*s is very miserable. For example, a very backward *Dalit* caste – the *Mushar* of *Terai* – has a life span of only 42 years compared with the national average of 55 years. Moreover, gynecological diseases such as a prolapsed uterus are common among *Dalit* women. The children of *Dalits* are most often compelled to drink polluted water and thus suffer from various diseases. Both mortality and fertility rates are high.

2.5.1 Health situation

The health status of the Nepalese women does not present a healthy picture. Discriminatory social and cultural practices, limited and ineffective delivery systems and poverty are the major reasons for the low health status of Nepalese women. The male-female mortality differential presents evidence that women enjoy lower levels of welfare and have weaker access to health care and nutrition than men (Table 2.21). In the natural process, more boys than girls are born and it has been biologically proven that male children are weaker in infancy and early childhood. If female children were treated equally, then their ratio should have equalized in about five years. However, larger numbers of female children die during infancy and childhood. Thus, it may be probably be due to the neglect of female children in health care and feeding.

Table 2.21: Health and survival indicators

Indicators	**Male**	**Female**
Child mortality rate	45.5	56.5
Crude death rates	12.9	13.6
Maternal death rates	-	8.33
Life expectancy at birth	55.0	53.4

Note: CMR: per 1 000 live birth, CDR: per 100 births, MDR : per 100 000 live births.
Source: DOH/New ERA and DHS, 1996, Family Health Survey, 1996.

The rate and rank of infant mortality in South Asian countries from 1960 to 1999 are presented in Table 2.22. Data shows that the infant mortality rate of Nepal has been improving since 1960, but Nepal still has highest infant mortality rate among South Asian countries.

Table 2.22: Infant mortality, rate of progress

Under-5 mortality rank	Under-5 mortality rate			
		1960	1990	1999
Nepal	47	315	145	104
Bangladesh	53	248	144	89
Sri Lanka	135	133	23	19
India	49	242	123	98
Pakistan	39	227	128	112

Source: UNICEF Report, 2000.

Table 2.23 presents the gender differentials with regard to health status, where female children are found to be disadvantaged in terms of nutritional status. Young girls are more likely to be stunted (50 percent) or severally stunted (22 percent) than their male counterparts (47 percent and 19 percent, respectively). The NMIS study conducted by NPC/UNICEF in 1995 also arrives at similar findings The 1996 Family Health Survey (FHS) similarly finds that male children are more likely to be vaccinated than female children (47 percent versus 40 percent).

Table 2.23: Nutritional status of children by sex

Particulars	Male	Female
Stunted	47	50
Severely stunted	19	22

Source: Family Health Survey, 1996.

Table 2.24 shows that higher morbidity can be found among the females (i.e. in terms of both chronic illness and other diseases). Despite higher morbidity and malnutrition, women receive less health care than males. Several microlevel studies support this (e.g. 1996 FHS and 1996 NLSS). The Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS) covering 3 388 households reveals that a higher proportion of females fell ill. Moreover, a greater percentage of ailing women did not receive treatment at all and those who were treated received mostly home remedies or traditional medical care. Early marriages and frequent and prolonged child bearing are associated with the high rate of undernourishment, high morbidity and ultimately high mortality of both mothers and infants (FHS, 1996).

Nutritional anaemia was found to be common among pregnant women in Nepal according to the 1986 Joint Nutritional Programme Survey. The proportion afflicted among mothers of children aged 6 to 36 months ranged from 71 percent in the mountain districts to 95 percent in the *Terai*. Another study conducted in 1987 revealed that 68 percent of women residing in the middle hills suffered from iron deficiency anaemia (Melville, NS, 1987). WDR (1993) documents a positive correlation between ill health in households and poverty. From the available evidence, it is unclear whether female survival differs among the poor and non-poor households. Poorer households are more likely to be exposed to

malnutrition because of lack of resources. Chances of survival are smaller with poor households than non-poor households

Among the poor households, *Terai* women were found to be relatively better off than those from the hill and the mountain regions. This pattern was observed even among the non-poor women. No significant variation was observed in gender differences in the utilization of health care services between the poor and non-poor households except in immunization Appendix Table 3 summarizes the proportion of households consulting different medical practitioners.

Table 2.24: Health status and utilization of health care

Immunization of Status Children aged 5 years and under(NLSS, 1996)	**Not immunized**	**Male**	**Female**
	Mountain	43.71	35.77
	Hill	16.63	19.90
	Terai	17.46	23.60
	Partially immunized		
	Mountain	31.44	39.39
	Hill	41.22	42.06
	Terai	46.46	43.55
	Fully immunized		
	Mountain	24.85	24.84
	Hill	42.15	38.04
	Terai	36.04	32.86
Consultation to health practitioner (NLSS, 1996)	Not consulted	33.20	35.55
	Doctor	35.61	33.99
	Para medical	26.72	23.47
	Traditional	4.47	6.98
% Population reporting Chronic Illness 3/	Mountain	7.97	9.25
	Hill	6.98	8.08
	Terai	4.66	5.63
Distribution of type of Illness by Gender	Diarrhea	45.46	42.04
	Fever	45.46	42.04
	Respiratory	4.71	5.61
	Skin	33.28	34.90

1. Children whose height for age is below two standard deviations is regarded as severally stunted.
2. Chronic illnesses refer to illness suffered for long time.
Source: NLSS, 1996.

2.5.1 Government policies and programmes

The Ninth Plan has listed a number of policy initiatives to improve heath services delivery system in Nepal. First, it has emphasized accessibility of basic heath services especially at the local level, which can be achieved by integrating efforts and blending resources of the public, private and NGO sectors. The goal is to deliver integrated health services by strengthening public health service delivery institutions at the district, subdistrict and local levels. Second, decentralization has been emphasized so as to make

planning, management and implementation of health sector programmes more effective. Under this policy, functions and responsibilities are delegated to the appropriate levels except for policy-making functions, which are retained at the centre. Third, the plan stipulates gradual yet integrated delivery of health, nutrition, drinking water and sanitation services. Fourth, the plan encourages private sector involvement in providing specialized health services, supplying basic to high level manpower and investing in high cost heath service infrastructures. This strategy limits the public sector's role to simply monitoring private sector activities and ensuring health care standards. Fifth, the plan aims to make reproductive health services more effective via programmes that seek to reduce maternal and infant mortality, expand coverage of family planning services and promote the concept of small families especially in the rural areas.

2.5.2 Health sector programme and implementation status: Women's perspective

The Ninth Plan policies and programmes are a reflection of the Second Long-Term Health Plan (1997 to 2017). This blueprint for the health sector emphasizes participation of all actors and stakeholders in health and health-related facilities. It recognizes the need for self-reliance, gender sensitivity, decentralization and effective and efficient management in order to provide equitable access to quality health services. Private sector and full community participation are considered as essential characteristics of an effective, efficient and sustainable health system.

The Second Long-Term Health Plan considers women's health as a social as well as health concern. It puts emphasis on the enhancement of the status of women in the society, makes the provision of safe motherhood programme a priority and adopts gender awareness as a major policy. It has prioritized its basic health care package, which includes public health measures as well as essential clinical services, to address the health needs of the population at the district level and lower in the next 20 years. Policy-makers have already made improvement of women's health a major priority in the design of the package, which will also be broadened to include provision of tertiary and specialized health services.

Government formulated the National Reproductive Health Strategy in 1998. It aims to strengthen existing programmes on safe motherhood, family planning, HIV/AIDs, STD, child survival and nutrition by applying a holistic life cycle approach. This integrated health package is to be provided by hospital, primary health care centres, health posts and subhealth posts as well as through community and family level activities (e.g. primary healthcare centre outreach, traditional birth attendants, women health volunteers, mothers' groups) based on standard clinical protocols and operational guidelines. Reproductive health has also been integrated into some major programmes targeting women.

A project for safe motherhood by strengthening maternity services has been implemented in 25 districts. The programmes include training district staff as well as equipping district hospitals with emergency obstetric care. Fairly recently, parliament also passed the Breastfeeding Act of 1997 and the Iodized Salt Act of 1998, laws that help protect the health of child and mother.

2.6 Women in Agriculture

An overwhelming majority of economically active women in Nepal (93.7 percent) work in agriculture. This is the highest percentage of female involvement in agriculture among South Asian countries. In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, less than 50 percent of females in the labour force work in agriculture, whereas 66.4 percent of Pakistani women in the labour force earn a living in the rural economy (Table 2.25). Women's involvement in agriculture is extensive both in terms of labour input and farm management. Hence, their knowledge of agri-economic systems is important in almost every aspect of agriculture.

Table 2.25: Gender employment in agriculture in South Asia

	Male*	Female
Nepal (1996)	78.9	93.7
India (1994)	58.3	78
Bangladesh (1996)	53.9	41.7
Pakistani (1997)	40.7	66.4
Sri Lanka (1995)	35.4	41.5

Source: HDR, 2000.
* For each country, male figures are percentages of male labour force and female figures are percentages of female labour force.

When considering crop production in the context of agro-ecological zones, women in the *Terai* region are less involved than those in the mountain and hill areas (Upadhyay, 2000). With regard to communities and ethnic group variation, the direct labour contribution of women to crop production and women's participation varies according to community (Table 2.26).

Table 2.26: Ethnic variation of gender involvement in the Central Development Region, 1994

Crop	Ethnic group	Male	Female
Rice	Parbatiya	46	54
	Tamang	42	58
	Darai	57	43
Maize	Parbatiya	6	94
	Tamang	20	80
	Darai	44	56
Wheat	Parbatiya	34	66
	Tamang	35	65
	Darai	---	---

Source: Various tables & Bajarcharya, 1994.

Despite women's overwhelming involvement in agriculture, they remain invisible farmers and much of their work is not recognized. Thus, gender issues emphasized by the Sixth Five-Year Plan are still valid today.

2.6.1 Government policies and programmes

The APP has accorded gender issues a high priority and recognizes it as one of the more important implementation strategies. It has set an objective to bring women into the mainstream of agricultural growth. Not only does it give explicit consideration to gender issues in all aspects, but also specifies how women may be brought into the mainstream and benefit from accelerated growth. Specifically, the APP aims to improve the access of women to production inputs and credit, make them active participants in income-generating and marketing activities and ensure that both women and men have access to the development opportunities being promoted.

Priority strategies envisaged by the APP for incorporating gender issues in priority input and output subsectors are outlined in Appendix Table 1. In addition, the APP has suggested the following measures to increase women's participation in agriculture development:

- Appoint more women to staff positions.
- Change the attitudes and behavior of the existing staff.
- Revise operating procedures and programmes to improve the participation of women in development.
- Encourage formation of women's interest groups.
- Monitor women's access to production inputs including fertilizer, irrigation and credit.
- Provide extension and training programmes for women farmers that match their needs and circumstances.
- Carry out agricultural research towards understanding and addressing women's issues.
- Develop technologies that will reduce the drudgery of women's work in agriculture.

The strategies and policies outlined by the APP have been reflected in the Ninth Plan. These recognise that programmes for women farmers are inadequate and that coordination at the policy, institutional and implementation levels tend to be poor. The lack of female participation in the appraisal of women's development programmes also serve as a major challenge in placing women in the mainstream of agriculture development. Accordingly, leadership development among women emerges as one of the major activities for all subsectors within agriculture.[4] The objective is to increasingly involve women in production programmes.

2.6.2 Implementation status of programmes

Irrigation

Women's participation in irrigation management is disproportionately low because they have very little access to training opportunities. Since their access to land is poor, their access to irrigation development also tends to be weak. In general, they are deprived of technical support and financial assistance through credit and subsidies.

Both the APP and the Ninth plan emphasize participation of women in irrigation development. Increased participation of women has been envisaged via an emphasis on water users groups and training in the management of irrigation and watershed areas. The interim APP, in particular, has recommended that women make up at least one-fourth of the members of user groups.

[4] Appendix 2 presents the Ninth plan program on agriculture focused on women.

Fertilizer

To increase female participation in production, the APP has given due consideration to research specifically focused on the role of women in fertilizer use and distribution. Table 2.27 summarizes the training opportunities received by women in soil fertility and pest management. The table reveals that women have obtained relatively less training opportunities compared to men. Despite emphasis on women's training related to soil fertility and plant protection, no improvements have been observed in the first year of APP implementation in terms of women's share in total persons trained. The number of women receiving training, however, has improved significantly. In the base year of the APP, only 37 women availed of training. This figure increased to 104 women in the first year of implementation.

Table 2.27: Persons trained in soil fertility and pest management

Subjects	1996/97		1997/98	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Soil management and operation of kit box	24	9	17	-
Integrated plant protection and pesticide management	39	28	175	104
Total	**63**	**37**	**192**	**104**

Source: Annual report 1997 and 1998, WFDD.

The APP also emphasizes women's increased access to credit, particularly those involved in farm work. With this goal, the WFDD established the Mobile Credit Fund Programme for women. Initiated in 1995/96, this programme covered three districts, namely, Chitwan, Dhading and Banke. The programme was extended to seven districts in 1997/98 with additional four more districts in the MWDR and FWDR (i.e. Nawalparasi, Baridiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur). An additional $13 333 in credit was provided to women.

Technology Generation and Dissemination

The APP and the Ninth Plan encourage research work to generate technology that can help reduce the workload of women in both the farm and the household. Emphasis is also placed on the need to identify and recommend technologies that are easily accepted by women farmers. Table 2.28 presents women's exposure to improved technology through various training programmes, which has visibly improved after implementation of the APP. The number of women trained in agriculture technology related activities in 1998/99 was 50 percent higher than in 1996/97, the base year of the APP. This was more so in donor-assisted projects and programmes where the number of women trained in 1998/99 was almost double that in1996/97.

Table 2.28: Women's access to training

Training	1996/97 (no)	1998/99 (no)	Percent change
Agriculture related	504	622	23.41
Livestock related	282	362	28.37
Donors programmes	457	881	92.78
Total	**1 243**	**1 865**	**50.04**

Source: Annual Report 1997 and 1998, WFDD.

The interim APP recommends involvement of women in technology development and dissemination particularly through on-farm research and core extension. Table 2.29 compares the participation of women in various agriculture development programmes before and after APP implementation.

Figures in the table show that the government programmes and plans have given the due importance to women's roles in agriculture development and programmes. In the fiscal year 1996/97 prior to APP implementation, 19 percent of agriculture extension programmes and 17 percent of livestock extension activities were focused on women. This proportion increased to 21 and 24 percent respectively in 1997/98, which is the first year of APP implementation. Similarly, opportunities for training increased quite significantly. In the fiscal year 1996/97, 13 percent of trainees in agriculture and 18 percent of trainees in livestock constituted women. These proportions increased to 20 percent and 70 percent, respectively, in 1997/98.

Table 2.29: Women's involvement in agriculture development programmes (%)

Programmes	1996/97	1998/99
Agriculture extension activities	19	21
Livestock extension activities	17	24
Opportunities to agriculture training	13	20
Opportunities to livestock training	18	70

Source: WFDD, Annual Report 1997 and 1998.

Table 2.30 summarizes government expenditure on the MOAC's programme for women farmer development from 1994/95 to 1998/99 is. Outlays have apparently not been significant and have declined through the years except for 1996/97. If emphasis on women farmer is to be judged from the point of view of public expenditure, then this programme has been accorded lesser priority in the post-APP period because government expenditure has been lower in the first two years of APP implementation compared to the base year. In 1996/97, the total amount allocated for women's development was R1.635 million which declined to R1.275 million in 1997/98 and R1.405 million in 1998/99.

Table 2.30: Investment on women development

Fiscal Year	Amount (in Rs 000)	Growth rate (%)
1994/95	1 453	
1995/96	1 295	-10.87
1996/97	1 635	26.25
1997/98	1 275	-22.02
1998/99	1 405	10.20

Source: Annual Report, WFDD, 1999.

Livestock

The involvement of women in livestock production is a longstanding tradition in Nepal. Livestock production patterns may differ widely among various ecological zones and social systems, but women play a major part in caring for animals in all systems ranging from the high hills to the *Terai*. The *pewa*[5] and *daizo*[6] systems in rural Nepali society force female household members to spend more time on

[5] Animals are regarded as the property of women, and selling and buying is hence usually decided women.
[6] Animals given by parents to their daughters as part of their weeding dowry.

livestock care and management. They are key players in household livestock production as they account for more than 73 percent of the total number of labour hours spent on different activities related to livestock raising (Bajracharya, 1993).

Gender involvement in livestock production varies according to the ecosystem. In the *Terai*, women are more involved than men in feeding fodder and concentrates to large animals, feeding concentrates to poultry, cleaning animal sheds and making decisions regarding the marketing and slaughtering of goats and poultry. Men, however, have the dominant role in animal grazing. In the hills, the role of men is larger than that of women in milking large animals, carrying milk for sale to the village or market and making decisions regarding the marketing and slaughtering of goats (Table 2.31).

Table 2.31 Gender involvement in livestock by agro-ecological zones (%)

Activities	Terai		Hill	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Grazing animals	44	24	24	55
Feeding fodder	27	42	24	34
Feeding concentrate	23	54	17	66
Feeding to poultry	15	54	17	66
Cleaning sheds	27	50	10	52
Milking	38	38	45	24
Selling of milk	30	20	45	24

Source: Bajracharya, 1993.

Table 2.32: Gender involvement in livestock by ethnic group

Ethnic group	Time spent/day (hrs)	
	Male	Female
Parbatiya	0.27	1.25
Tamang	---	4.00
Maithali	0.98	0.62

Source: Bajracharya, 1993.

Table 2.32 shows that ethnic differences also exist in this aspect, there being greater involvement of *Tamang* and *Brahmin/Chhetri* women in livestock management than *Maithali* women. Other studies also indicate variation with economic status. Women of middle economic status perform comparatively more work than those of high or low economic status (Bajracharya, 1993).

Considering the involvement of women in livestock production, the Ninth Five-Year Plan has focused on enhancing women's participation in the livestock business by improving their access to training and technology. Specifically, it aims to involve 7 000 households in pig and poultry development to increase the income of women from backward groups by mobilizing local resources. Table 2.33 presents the statistics on women-focused livestock distribution activities in the pre- and post-APP period.

Table 2.33: Women-focused livestock distribution (%)

Programmes	1996/97	1998/99
Big animals	-	15
Small animals	20	29
Chicken	13	-
Fodder mini-kit	22	-
Fodder and grass seeds	26	43

Source: Annual Report 1997 and 1998, WFDD.

Figures in the table reveal that women are given weight in livestock distribution. In 1996/97, distribution of small animals focused on women accounted for 20 percent, which increased to 29 percent

in 1998/99. Similarly, importance given to women in the distribution of fodder and grass seed increased by 17 percent in 1998/99 compared to 1996/97. Although, women were bypassed in the distribution of big animals, chicken and fodder in 1998/99, women's share in total increased slightly in after the implementation of the APP.

High value crops

In the design of development programmes, the APP has emphasized involvement of more women in the production of high value commodities using a group approach. Table 2..34 presents the number and composition of agriculture groups in the country and its growth in the pre- and post-APP periods. Women groups constituted some 14 percent of the total number of farmer groups formed before the APP was implemented. This increased to 18 percent in post-APP period, with the number of women groups formed increasing by about 39 percent. Emphasis on women groups seems to have come at the expense of mixed groups. The number of mixed groups formed decreased from 2 723 in 1996/97 to 2 190 in 1998/99.

Table 2.34: Agriculture groups by region

Group type	1996 / 1997 (no)	Compo-sition (%)	1998 / 1999 (no)	Compo-sition (%)	Change in 1998 over 1997 (%)
Male	3 444	48.11	4 024	53.03	16.84
Female	992	13.86	1 374	18.11	38.51
Mix	2 723	38.04	2 190	28.86	-19.57
Total	**7 159**	**100.00**	**7 588**	**100.00**	**5.99**

Source: Annual report, DOA, 2000.

Forestry

Table 2.35 quantifies the level of women's participation in community forestry. In spite of concrete policy emphasis and implementation guidelines to increase women's participation in community forestry, the result so far has not been encouraging. Of the total number of Forest Users Groups (FUGs) formed, only 4 percent of members are women participating in community forestry development activities either by taking the leadership position or as primary beneficiaries. If we look in terms of women's participation in decision-making, this is even lower since women constitute only 2.39 percent of executive committee members (CPFD, 2000).

Table 2.35: Women in community forestry, 2000

Particulars	Number	Percentage
Women managed FUGs	344	3.80
Men managed FUGs	8 704	96.20
Total FUGs Formed	9 048	100.00

Source: CPFD, 2000.

Table 2.36: Women's participation in leasehold forestry, 1995

Particulars	Total	Female	% of women
In group	1 306	155	11.87
Membership	8 773	2 324	26.49

Source: APP, 1995.

Table 2.36 presents women's participation in leasehold forestry. Compared to community forestry, more women are actively involved in the leasehold forestry programme. Females manage about 12 percent of the total

number of leasehold forest group beneficiaries. In terms of membership, they constitute about 27 percent of all members. This indicates that leasehold forestry is not only directed towards poor farmers but is also more inclusive of women.

Households in the rural areas of Nepal often rely on the surrounding environment and forests for water, wood for fuel and fodder for livestock. Frequently, these and other environmental products are collected from local common forest land, a task that in many areas is predominantly carried out by women. Given the increasing pressure in gender division of labour, there is concern that women in particular will bear the burden of resource scarcity by having to spend more time and effort to collect forest products (IFPRI, FCND DP No. 87).

Based on socio-economic data and information of the Snowy Mountain Engineering Consultants (SMEC) collected by APROSC, average access of a household to wild fruits is 72 kg per annum. This appears to be high compared to similar situations in other parts of Nepal. *Bandobasta*[7] estimates that a typical farmer in the hills can collect up to $7 worth of wild fruits, which, if consumed by the household, will not adequately justify the opportunity cost of labour. Furthermore, this study estimates that, on average, a family can obtain up to $10 worth of calories from the wild fruits per annum, which appears to be quite substantial. Similarly, each household in Seti valley derives an average of 323 kg per annum of vegetables and wild mushrooms. Based on this estimation, each household derives approximately 885 gm of wild vegetables and mushrooms from the forest each day, which adds up to about 494 tons of vegetables annually.

[7] An institution that promote biodiversity conservation by giving economic incentive to local farmers.

3. MICRO LEVEL FINDINGS

3.1 Studied Districts and Villages

The microlevel study was conducted in four villages of four districts (namely, Murma village in Mugu district, Sokat in Achham district, Belaha in Sunsari district and Kharula in Kailali district). Various techniques were used to gather information during the PRA. The main objective was to generate an in-depth understanding of the nutritional and gender aspects of poverty and food security issues. Participatory assessment of the nutritional and gender dimensions of poverty and food security issues at the district, household and intrahousehold level were subsequently reviewed.

Sokat Village in Achham district is located in the FWDR and has a total area of 1 692 sq km. The total population of the district is estimated at 198 188, 53 percent of which consists of females and 47 percent of males. Murma Village of Mugu District is located southeast of Gamgadi and is populated by only 55 households. *Chettri* is the most dominant caste in Murma although it is home to other minority ethnic groups. According to the 1991 census, the district population was about 36 364 with 48 percent of the total comprising females. Similarly, Belaha is located 30 km southwest of Inarwa, the district headquarters of Sansuri, while Kharula can be found 45 km southeast of Dhangadi, district headquarters of Kailalai.

Agriculture dominates the economy in all the study areas; dependence on the sector was high in *Terai*, medium in the hills and low in the mountains. The *Terai* represents agriculture that is transforming in character from subsistence to semi-commercial, with the shifts particularly rapid in Belaha in the eastern *Terai* compared to the western *Terai* region. Agriculture in Murma and Sokat is at a subsistence level and no signs of modern agriculture can be traced in these villages.

The food availability situation is better in *Terai* VDCs but has not been as encouraging as expected in view of the resources, development potentials and level of infrastructure development in the area. Problems regarding food shortages were most severe in Sokat followed by Murma and Belaha. The situation was better in Murma since the village was situated near the district headquarters and the village served as the buffer zone of Rara National Park. Most households in Murma experience food shortages from mid-January to mid-June (5 months). In Sokat, the hard months are mid-November to mid-August (9 months) while in Belaha, this period lasts from mid-June to mid-August (2 months) in Belaha. This problem was particularly acute for the poorer households, which make distress sale of food crops shortly after harvest in order to pay credits and raise cash.

In Murma and Sokat, the local economy is sustained by seasonal migration of male members of the family to India for daily unskilled labour employment. This practice continues even if earnings are oftentimes too meagre for survival. Since there are no jobs in the village or neighbouring areas, they need to migrate to save food for the women, children and the elderly who are unable to go to India. People from Murma usually return at the start of summer to work in their farms, but recent years have witnessed Sokat villagers staying longer in India and traveling more often for employment. This is an indication of increased level of poverty in Sokat. Usually, richer households that have enough to eat do not go to India.

When they do go, it is usually for a very short period and just to buy necessities such as clothes and utensils. Due to scarcity of food and lack of employment opportunities, people from Belaha also travel to the neighbouring states of India in search of seasonal daily labour work. Poverty seemed especially rampant in Murma and Sokat, but it also appeared extensive among indigenous tribes of Kharula and Belaha.

The workload of women is normally high in Murma and Sokat. In general, females spend 7 to 10 hours a day on reproductive work and 5 to 7 hours a day on productive work. This is partly due to the dominance of livestock in farming systems and the strong linkages between farm, livestock and forestry activities . Seasonal outmigration of men in Sokat and Murma has also served to increase the labour burden of women. In general, women have less contact with the outside world compared to men and their mobility is generally confined within the village and district. In the villages under study, women from Murma were found to have the least exposure followed by Sokat and Belaha. Apparently, the more advanced the infrastructure facilities, the higher was the contact of women with the outside world.

Malnutrition is common in both Murma and Sokat villages. Household food security seems to affect all the members of the households equally. Even pregnant and lactating mothers do not get extra food allowances. This holds true for all economic categories of households. People in Murma hardly eat nutritious food such as vegetables. They usually eat bread (wheat, barley or finger millet), bean soup and potatoes. Eating rice is luxury for them and the opportunity to do so depends upon the availability of rice at the sales depot of the Nepal Food Corporation (NFC). People in Sokat have a similar problem, but they are lucky enough to avail of rice, pulses and vegetables.

The food and dietary habits of people in Belaha and Kharula involve eating rice with pulses and vegetables twice a day. Though a wide range of vegetables can be found in both villages, the normal diet of people varies according to socio-economic status. For instance, the rich eat plenty of vegetables while the poor usually do not, except for those vegetables grown in their kitchen garden. Although many children do not attend school because of poverty and the need to work in the household, the incidence of children malnutrition is not as high as in Sokat and Murma.

In all the villages that were studied, providing pregnant and lactating women with nutritious food is not common practice and women do not seem to do it on their own either. Household food scarcity affects all the members of the households, although the effect may differ according to sex, age and economic status.

Although women have become increasingly involved in various saving and credit programmes run by different agencies, it seems unlikely that these will contribute much to generating employment for women and to female economic empowerment. Lack of coordination and poor linkages among those who operate the programmes and their limited coverage are the major problems seen in the study villages. The importance of complementarities has yet to be realized by the people working at different organizations

3.2 Gender issues of Poverty

3.1.1 Work load

The daily workload of men and women in the study villages is summarized in Table 3.1. Three distinct points become evident from the figures. First, irrespective of poverty level and location, women work more than men do. Among the four villages, women work for about 17 hours a day in Murma and Sokat and between 15 and 16 hours in other two *Terai* villages as against about 12 to 14 hours of work for men daily. Second, males are engaged more in productive work and less in reproductive and household work while females are relatively more involved in reproductive and household work. Third, men spend 9 to 11 hours a day in productive work and between 2 to 4 hours per day in reproductive work while women spend between 5 to 9 hours in productive work apart from 8 to 10 hours spent each day on child care and household chores. Men and women work almost equal hours in farming.

Table 3.1: Workload of men and women in study villages

Work Type	Unit	Murma		Sokat		Kharaula		Belha	
		Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Distribution of total time									
Work	Hours	12	17	14	17	NA	16	13	15
	%	50.0	70.8	58.3	70.8	NA	66.7	54.2	62.5
Rest	Hours	12	7	10	7	NA	8	11	9
	%	50.0	29.2	51.7	29.2	NA	33.3	45.8	37.5
Distribution of work time between									
Repro-ductive	Hours	3	10	4	8	NA	9	2	10
	%	25.0	58.8	28.6	47.1	NA	56.3	15.4	66.7
Productive	Hours	9	7	10	9	NA	7	11	5
	%	7.0	41.2	71.4	52.9	NA	43.7	84.6	33.3

Source: Village PRA.

This suggests that unless gender-sensitive methodologies are designed to address women's issues and enhance their access to technology development and dissemination, the goal of improving food security and livelihood conditions is unlikely to be fulfilled. If interventions target only men or if they are more friendly to men in such a way as to further burden women, then new technologies will either be ignored or resisted by the female population. If new advancements reduce the workload pf women, the probability of their accepting these technologies is likely to increase other things remaining constant (e.g. cost, availability, divisibility and adaptability).

Daily working hours generally vary according to household size, socio-economic status and physiographic conditions (Bajracharya, 1993). It has been observed that both women and men in the hills work longer hours in the monsoon season than during winter months. Women spend much more time than men on subsistence activities and domestic work. Rural women can work as many as 16 to 18 hours

per day, doing fieldwork as well as handling domestic responsibilities. This heavy workload can have a negative affect not only on women's own health but also on family nutrition as well (FAO, 1998).

3.1.2 Mobility pattern

As shown in Table 3.2, people in all the villages studied are quite mobile and particularly so for men rather than for women. Apart from travels within the VDC and neighbouring villages, men frequently visit district headquarters on official business, for medical purposes and at times for marketing purposes (limited to Belaha VDC). Women also visit the district headquarters for similar reasons albeit less frequently. Villagers travel outside of the district less often except in Sokat where both men and women travel to Doti[8] to purchase household consumption items. In the rare cases that men and women travel outside the district, it is to purchase clothes, salt and food items or to visit relatives.

Traveling to India is a regular phenomenon for men in the Mugu District and Sokat Village in Achham District and less so for those in Kharaula Village in Kailali District and Belaha Village in Sunsari District. In the first two villages, men of working age invariably go to India to work on a seasonal basis, specifically during the idle months of the agricultural cycle. This can be seen as a livelihood strategy of people in both districts. In the *Terai* villages, where food shortages are less of a problem, very few men go to India to work.

Table 3.2: Mobility pattern of males and females

Movement		Murma		Sokat		Kharaula		Belaha	
	Destination	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
District headquarter	Frequency	2-3 times a month	2-3 times a month	Sometimes	Rarely	Frequently	Less frequent than men	2-3 times a month	Often
	Purpose	Visit to offices, medical, official	Visit to offices medical official	Legal works, meetings	To accompany men	Legal works, Marketing, meeting	To accompany men	Marketing, medical, office visit	Marketing, medical
Outside district	Frequency	As required	Once or twice a year	Frequently*	Frequently*	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Rarely
	Purpose	To bring salt, clothes, and food items	To bring salt, clothes and food items	To bring salt, clothes and food items	To bring salt, clothes and food items	To visit relatives	To visit relatives	To visit relatives	To visit relatives
Outside Country	Frequency	6 months	none	6 months	None	Sometimes	None	Rarely	None
	Purpose	for work	NA	for work	NA	for work	NA	for work	NA

* Doti is close to VDC.
Source: Village PRA

[8] Doti is three hours walk from the village compared to Mangalen, district headquarters of Accham district.

The implication of male migration has both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, migration helps reduce pressure on agricultural land and food supplies, provides opportunities for the rural unemployed and underemployed and is associated with rising living standards and livelihood prospects at the household and community levels in rural areas. On the negative side, new imbalances in both origin and destination areas are created. In most of urban Asia, this is manifested in high unemployment and growing social unrest. In rural areas it translates into declining agricultural output (at least for subsistence crops), growing pauperization (particularly among women) and a disruption of traditional family and social structures.

Migration may be beneficial to the farm household through migrants' remittances, which may be used to acquire more land or purchase inputs or hire labour. However, besides reducing the available labour supply of farms, migration may also have a negative effect on food production and security. The impact of male migration on female roles is evident in the gender division of labour in a farm household. If they habitually travel abroad, men may not be available for ploughing and planting, which are both time and energy intensive chores.

For women, migration of men translates into a marked increase in agricultural work, including a wider range of farm tasks, a heavier workload and less time for domestic tasks and child care. With less males to share farm tasks with, women must either depend on hired labour, which many cannot afford, or resort to limiting agricultural operations. For example, if women have problems hiring and supervising labour, then ploughing may be undertaken less frequently or on smaller piece of land. Thus, labour shortages may lead to a reduction in total agricultural output and underutilized or idle productive land. This may, in turn, result in changes in cropping patterns with direct repercussions on dietary standards, family nutrition and welfare. It may also undermine food security and contribute to the adoption of unsustainable agricultural practices and land degradation. The long-term implications of agricultural labour force shortages are likely to result in a decline in food production and in the health status of rural families, including a rise in mortality.

Remittances can be of great significance to a rural family and comprise a considerable portion of household income. For some families, remittances are a survival strategy that ensures subsistence but does not necessarily lead to significant improvement in living standards. However, for other families, remittances are a means by which to invest in agriculture or in their children's education. In addition, families that are relatively better off use remittances to invest in productive activities by purchasing agricultural land and growing cash crops. Research in Pakistan and India showed that migrant men send remittances to their fathers to pay debts or to buy land rather than to their wives who run the households.

Migration has potentially far-reaching effects on household structure as it increases the incidence of female-headed households. Female-headed households are the most vulnerable to seasonal stress among the rural poor and are dependent on access to common property resources. When temporary migration becomes long-term or permanent, women become farmers in their own right but encounter a variety of production constraints. With or without the assistance of their children, women often find it increasingly difficult to adequately fill the labour supply gap left by the men. This hinders agricultural production and thus affects sustainability, household food security and nutrition.

3.1.3 Decision-making

The whole decision-making process in the household is a complex one. Although men are culturally accepted as the decision-makers in the household, the decisions they make are usually suggested by other members of the household, particularly by wives (Singh, 1983). This observation varies with the society and social class differences. The decision-making role of gender varies with ethnicity, economic status, farm size, education, etc. In the *Magar, Grung, Tamang* and *Tharu* communities, for example, males and females are equally responsible for decision-making (Acharya and Bennett, 1981, Upadhyay, 2000).

Decision-making roles within households in the study villages are presented in Table 3.3. As per the table, about one-fourth to one-third of decisions are made jointly by males and the females. Women appear to a play greater role than men in household decisions in the hills and the mountains, while it is other way round in the *Terai* villages. Analysing by decision area, it is observed that women are more influential with regard to decisions pertaining to food, farming, forest use and family planning, while males dominate on issues relating to land, spending of money and children's education and health. The prevalence of joint decisions varies between villages. Issues that entail joint decision-making include farming and forest use in Murma, family planning in Sokat, farming and family planning in Kharaula and farming in Belaha. The part each gender plays by type of decision area is presented in Appendix Table 4.

Table 3.3: Decision-making roles within households (%)

Decisions Made by	Villages studied			
	Murma	**Sokat**	**Kharaula**	**Belha**
Men	34	33	43	45
Women	42	34	29	30
Both	24	33	28	25

Source: Village PRA.

3.2 Nutritional Dimensions of Food Security

3.2.1 Perception on food shortage

Food is scarce in majority of households in the villages studied (Table 3.4). The proportion of households experiencing food deficits varies from a low of 45 percent in Belha Village in Sunsari District to a high of 77 percent in Sokat Village in Achham District. Three meals a day is the norm and food scarcity, particularly in the poor households, is reflected by a cutback in the number of meals per day, a reduction in food items eaten and even a decline in the daily quantity of food intake.

Table 3.4: Frequency of meals and food types consumed

Particulars	HH Category	Villages			
		Murma	Sokat	Kharaula	Belha
Food deficit households (%)		65.45	76.68	69.60	45.46
Meals per day	Rich	3	3	3	3
	Poor	2-3	2-3	2-3	2-3
Type of food	Rich	bread bean potato	rice pulse bread veg.	rice pulse bread veg.	rice pulse bread veg.
	Poor	bread bean potato*	rice* pulse* bread veg.*	rice* pulse* bread veg.*	rice* pulse* bread veg.*
Who eat last in the household		Women	Women	Women	Women
Child malnutrition prevalence	Rich	None	None	None	None
	Poor	significant	significant	None	None
Separate food to pregnant women	Rich	No	No	No	No
	Poor	No	No	No	No

* These are luxury food items for poor households.

Source : Village PRA

About 80 percent of households suffer from food shortages for more than six months in a year, which occurs during the winter months in the mountain and hill regions. This is the period when most males leave the household to search for work in India. Seasonal migration helps save food for those who stay behind. The food situation in Murma VDC is generally poor for about seven months. From mid-June to mid-November, only about 5 percent of households have enough food to eat while some 80 percent depend upon other sources of income.

The major challenge facing Sokat VDC is the production of adequate food supply for villagers. Majority of the people are poor and feeding their family adequately has been their prime objective. Food is often scarce from mid-March to mid-December in this village, with August being the most critical month. Similarly, food shortages are particularly severe from mid-August to mid-October in Kharula Village, where the period of scarcity often lasts for seven months. In Belaha Village, the food situation is poor from mid-March to May. However, food availability ceases to be a problem in the remaining months.

The type of food consumed is determined largely by what is produced. In poor households, pulses and potatoes are considered luxurious items while these are normal items consumer almost daily in non-poor households. In all the villages studied, the intrahousehold food distribution pattern shows a female bias in food consumption. Consequently, the women who eat last are the ones to suffer most when cooked food falls short of the requirement. This is particularly the case for poor households during food shortage months.

Malnutrition of children has been observed among poor households in Murma and Sokat villages but not in the *Terai* villages or even in their poor households. Stunted growth and an unhealthy

appearance (e.g. pale pallor and brown and dry hair) are the major indicators of malnutrition among children. Though stunting is very high nationally, it is even higher in the mountains and hills. Five out of six children reportedly suffer from stunting in the region (NHDR, 1998). In the study villages, pregnant and lactating mothers were not given a different, more nutritious diet.

4. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This annex forms a part of the overall report on "Agricultural Policies and Strategies for Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Food Security in Nepal" and deals specifically with gender and nutritional concerns of poverty and food security. It provides an analysis of national policies and programmes – their implementation status, impacts and shortcomings – and makes appropriate recommendations for the incorporation of a gender and nutritional perspective in planning as well as effective implementation of development programmes.

The study has been based mainly on the review of documents published by government, the donor community and research organizations both in the public and private sectors and among NGOs. The findings of the review have been supported by microlevel village studies carried out in four districts – namely, Mugu in the mountains, Achham in the hills and Kailali and Sunsari in the *Terai*.

Gender discrimination is quite high in Nepal. Women are far behind their male counterparts in terms of education. While they work more hours, they are less represented in the formal employment sector. Moreover, they receive lower wages than their male counterparts. Women have limited access to land and other productive resources. Although available data reveal women-headed households to be better off than male-headed households in terms of poverty incidence, nonetheless women are the main victims of poverty within the households given the reality discussed above.

The Ninth Plan duly recognizes the problem of marginalization of women in the national economy. Accordingly, the plan has adopted gender mainstreaming as the main approach to reduce gender disparities, empower women and reduce marginalization of women in national economy. The plan has endorsed several policies and programmes to raise women's status in community and thereby reduce poverty. The plan has focused on attacking poverty among women by incorporating a gender dimension in sectoral programmes and implementing poverty reduction programmes targeted to women.

Implementation status of sectoral programmes for women indicate that they have been increasingly incorporated into the development process. For example, in the first three years of implementation of the Ninth Plan, female participation in agriculture sector training programmes reportedly grew to 25 percent of total trainees in the agriculture subsector and 19 percent in the livestock subsector. Although this can be considered achievement, albeit modest especially compared against a targeted participation rate of 30 percent, it reflects that women are still being discriminated. This starts at the planning stage and further intensifies during implementation. Although women constitute half of the country's population, planned targets involve increasing female participation amount to just about a third.

Therefore, if gender balanced development is the goal, it is essential that additional focus and emphasis be placed on the needs of women rather than of men. This is because providing equal opportunity to men and women will not eliminate gender disparity as women are already far behind men in all aspects of development.

Several programmes targeted to women are under implementation. In general, these programmes have helped raise women's status in the society via their social and economic empowerment. However, because of their limited coverage, the overall impact has not been that significant. Most of the targeted programmes supported by donors and implemented by NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) that adopt the group approach to service delivery appear to have good results. However, enlarging NGO operations to widen the reach of targeted programmes has been constrained by a lack funds. However, targeting women through CBOs will not only cost less but will also be more effective since these organizations work similarly to mothers' groups and women's saving and credit groups, which have proven to be successes.

It is therefore recommended that a greater number of CBOs be formed and mobilized to implement development programmes targeted towards bringing gender equity and poverty alleviation for women.

The educational policy of the Ninth Plan emphasizes increased women's access to both formal and non-formal education and to improve educational standards through several programmes focused on women. Various activities to this end involve literacy programmes for out-of-school children, recruitment of women teacher in the primary schools, special programmes for girls from socially and economically disadvantaged groups, midday meal programmes for boys and girls, encouraging participation of girls in education from early childhood and creating an environment that encourages older girls to attend school or non-formal education. The overall effect of the policies and programmes implemented during the first three years of the plan has resulted in the increase of female literacy by 4 percent (against a 10 percent increase in male literacy) and a 2 to 3 percent increase in school enrolment programme.

As discussed above, the positive effect of educational policies and programmes that promote female literacy again reveal lack of emphasis as the literacy gap between male and female has increased in the first three years of implementation of the plan. Thus, merely providing equal educational opportunities to both sexes will not be sufficient to eliminate the educational gap. What is required is an added thrust on women education. Moreover, targeting both formal and informal schooling for women in order to eliminate the gender disparity requires full understanding of the social and economic factors that force women to lag behind men in education.

Therefore, to reduce the gender disparity in education, it is recommended that efforts be made to fully understand the reasons behind the disparity and to adopt appropriate strategies in targeting education for women. One reality is that the disparity is especially high between women and men from poor and non-poor households, which calls for a focus on poor households.

A rapid population growth rate, a high level of poverty and deficiencies in available income-generating employment, nutritious food, heath and basic facilities, education and public awareness have redounded to various types of malnutrition among different sections of population. Almost 53 percent of children are malnourished, while about 75 percent of pregnant women and 50 percent of women aged 15-59 years are anemic. The dearth of nutritious food is the root cause of most of these problems. Almost 51

percent of households complain of nutritional inadequacy, which is reflected by the predominance of foods of vegetable origin in the daily energy intake.

Food and nutrition policies and programmes of the Ninth Plan emphasize increased production of nutritious food, continuation of micronutrient distribution programmes in highly problematic areas, inclusion of nutrition education in the primary levels and mobilization of the private sector and NGOs in the implementation of nutrition programmes. Given the size and widespread nature of the malnutrition problem in the country, emphasis on increased agricultural production alone will not be sufficient. Also required are increased employment and income opportunities for women and other vulnerable sections of the society. While improving the nutrition of the entire population through employment and income opportunities are admirable short- to mid-term imperatives, adopting measures that bring immediate effects are also necessary.

It is therefore recommended that immediate action be taken to promote kitchen gardening via a large-scale distribution of vegetables seeds to women. This not only precipitates increased household food production in the short to medium term, but also bolsters employment promotion and income generation programmes for the long run.

The health status of the Nepalese population in general and the country's women and children in particular is poor. Discriminatory social and cultural practices, a limited and ineffective health delivery system and poverty are the major reasons for the low health status of Nepalese women. Mortality differentials and nutritional indicators have been generally biased against the female child, which shows that women have lower welfare levels and weaker access to health care and nutrition than men. This is because fewer females are immunized or consult medical personnel while more suffer from various chronic forms of illnesses.

The Ninth Plan's health policy, which emphasizes provision of basic heath services to all and decentralization of healthcare services, has attached special importance to women' s health by prioritizing the safe motherhood programme. The basic health care package has been broadened to include women's health as a priority area. The National Reproductive Health Strategy, which was formulated in 1998, aims to strengthen existing programmes on safe motherhood, family planning, HIV/AIDs, STD, child survival and nutrition by adopting a holistic life cycle approach. This integrated health package is to be provided by hospitals, primary healthcare centres (PHCs), health posts and subhealth posts as well as through PHC outreach, TBA, FCHVs, mothers' groups and other community and family-centred strategies based on standard clinical protocols and operational guidelines.

All of these programmes targeted to women need to be expanded to widen their coverage. At the same time, as a complement to these programmes, it is essential to raise awareness of women of the importance of nutrition and sanitation practices, which are prerequisites of good health, through mass health consciousness campaigns.

The attempt of the government to indirectly attack poverty through rapid and high economic growth in broad-based sectors such as agriculture has resulted in the formulation and implementation of

the APP and the incorporation of APP strategies, policies and programmes in the Ninth Plan. The APP accords gender issues a high priority and aims to bring women into the mainstream of agricultural growth. The plan intends to improve access of women to production inputs and credit and to actively involve women in income generation and marketing activities to ensure that both women and men have access to the development opportunities being promoted. In the first three years of APP implementation, women have been increasingly engaged in agriculture development activities through provision of training opportunities and by involving them in a number of other agricultural programmes. However, the first two years of APP implementation reveal that there has been no significant improvement in terms of programme focus and resources (e.g. meagre outlay for WFDD of MOAC).

It is therefore recommended that WFDD be granted adequate resources, staff and facilities such that the division becomes fully equipped to plan policies and programmes in all subsectors of agriculture and to effectively monitor and evaluate women-focused agricultural development activities.

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