Empowerment of Women in Rural Nepal
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Abstract

This study seeks to examine the status and empowerment of women in the rural Nepalese village Bhimpokhara. Research suggests that women in Nepal are oppressed by a patriarchal system and have to face discrimination, violence, and dependency upon males on a daily basis. This may have an influence on their attitudes about gender equality and their attitudes, in turn, may influence the possibility of taking action to become more empowered. In 25 semi-structured interviews, women from diverse backgrounds answered questions about their actual status and about their attitudes. The answers were analysed in detail and compared with each other. While most women had much power within their family and social environment, this was especially dependent upon their education and caste membership. The economic power was very low for all the women. Their attitudes about gender equality were very progressive and contradictory to the reality they find themselves in. This study shows that for a sustainable development, NGO’s and social organizations must take efforts to increase women’s independency, self-confidence, and awareness. Some recommendations are given which include the further support of women’s groups, the creation of tailored awareness programs, and the distribution of microcredits for most vulnerable women like Dalits and widows.
1 Introduction

Women in Nepal are living in a traditionally male-dominated society and are suffering from social, cultural and political discrimination which spreads across all aspects of their everyday life. Women find themselves in a vicious circle of a lack of education creating lack of opportunities, which in turn leads to enhanced dependency upon males and a lacking self-esteem. Therefore, they are not only restricted by traditions, laws, economic restrictions, and educational barriers, but also often unable to change their low status and to reach more empowerment. Existing attitudes and belief systems about their inferiority uphold and further strengthen this discrimination.

Some scholars who have already done research in the context of the status of women in Nepal are Battharai (2014) with a detailed master’s thesis about disempowerment of women from vulnerable communities and Acharya (2017) on the discriminatory practice of chaupadi and efforts to eliminate it. Furthermore Puri & Tamang (2010 & 2011) about the prevalence of sexual violence, Mahat (2003) about women empowerment in Nepal being a myth and having to start at the grassroot level, and the Asian Development Bank (2010) and World Bank (2006) with studies on, respectively, gender equity and discrimination based on caste, gender, and ethnicity. We want to investigate if the concerning picture most of the above-mentioned literature gives us about the pressing problem of discrimination is indeed true, or still as bad as in those studies.

The study is conducted in Bhimpokhara, which is a small community in the Baglung District of Nepal near the foot of the Dhaulagiri mountain range. The majority of people in this hilly area depend on traditional agriculture (terrace-fields of rice and wheat, depending on the season), which is difficult because of the inaccessibility of the land and the monsoon rains. The agriculture yield is hardly enough to provide for the communities’ basic needs and furthermore it is the only source of their livelihood. Subsequently, as they have no any alternate source of income, the economic condition of the whole community is very weak. During harvesting season, people fully depend on their muscles and their animals to secure their livelihood. For the most part they do not own any modern machinery or technology. Due to this weak economic condition the people cannot contribute financially to community development or school environment. Another problem is that this community is very cut-off: The next town is Baglung, where there is a hospital and provisions can be bought. It is a two-hour jeep drive or four-hour walk away. During monsoon season the road is sometimes inaccessible or very dangerous. A lack of awareness among the people about the environment and sanitation, pollution and deforestation is also increasing.

In Bhimpokhara, 97% of households use firewood for cooking inside the home. The exposure to the smoke often leads to health problems like respiratory disease, especially among women. 2% of households have an internet connection and 24% own a television. The average households size is 4.2 and there are slightly more females than males. The traditional caste system, though banned by the Nepalese government in the sixties, is still active in this area and there are seven major castes: Brahman, Chetree, Thakuri, Magar, Kami, and Sarki Dama/Dholi.

Figure 1: The caste system in Bhimpokhara
The order is from highest to lowest status, whereby the last three castes are considered “untouchables”, also called Dalits, who still suffer from discrimination. The literacy rate among males is 77.6% and among females 63.4%. Not more than 32.5% have a higher education than lower secondary school (8th grade) (CBS, 2011). There are hundreds of NGO’s in Nepal that take efforts on behalf of improving the status of women. This help is very important to ensure that the society can develop in a sustainable way, where suffering is decreased, and its members have equal chances of leading a flourishing life. These chances should not be determined by the sex one belongs to. By raising the public awareness to the needs of the poor, they get the attention of individuals such as volunteers or donators for support. Also the government has realized the need for action and has made commitments to reach gender equality goals which are internationally agreed upon.

One aim of this research is to investigate in how far these efforts have been successful. But the main motivation is to examine in more detail the barriers that keep women in rural areas from reaching more empowerment and if their status coincides with their attitudes about gender equality in general. There is an emphasis on the relevance of the fifth sustainable development goal set by the UN (“To reach gender equality and empower all women and girls”). We want to create more awareness about their status and what their actual problems are. It will also be useful to see what they perceive as unjust and what they would like to change about their situation in the future, so that solutions can be found in a culturally fitting way and change can occur from below. This can potentially help developmental organizations, NGOs, and other parties who want to create a better future for women in Nepal because it might draw a more recent picture of the status of women and identify what they need most. This leads us to the following research question and subquestions:

In how far are women in the rural village Bhimpokhara empowered?

What are their attitudes about gender equality?

Which variables influence their empowerment and their attitudes?

How can they be more empowered?

This research was undertaken in cooperation with PSD-Nepal (Partnership for sustainable development). We and our translator met with 25 women from the rural community Bhimpokhara (Baglung District). A semi-structured questionnaire was created to have an in-depth conversation with the women about their status and attitudes. To make their answers more valid, attitude questions were taken from already existing questionnaires. After being collected anonymously, their answers were deeply analysed and compared with each other, with special emphasis on variables that were beforehand predicted to influence empowerment (like education, caste, and income). Furthermore, an attitude score was given. High scores represented a progressive attitude about gender equality and low scores a traditional attitude. Finally, we want to give some practical advice for bettering the women’s opportunities to reach more empowerment.
2 Literature Review

The disempowerment culture and attitudes towards women in Nepal

It is unclear why, in most societies all around the globe and across history women have been discriminated against (Harari, 2014). The fifth of the sustainable development goals, which were set by the United Nations in 2016, is to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2017). It can be seen as an especially important goal because it also includes that gender indicators are integrated across all the other sixteen goals. Countries like Nepal, which can be labelled a patriarchal society and which face many problems with gender-based discrimination, will not be able to reach nine of the seventeen SDGs unless there will be a profound change in the view of the status of women in society (Harrington & Chickera, 2017). Nepal is traditionally male-dominated. This culture has developed over centuries and its development has been supported by Hinduist culture and the caste system. The deeply embedded caste culture is a major cause for injustice and discrimination against women in society. Their denied equality begins in the family, where boys are preferred to get a good education and are raised to be the decision makers. Girls are taught to become a good wife and implement the decisions of their future husband. Traditionally, the adult man lives with his family to support them and the future wife has to live with her parents in law to serve them. The wife’s family has to give a dowry to the husband’s family, which is oriented at the spouse level of education. That is another reason why boys get a higher education. There is a boys preference with the first child, otherwise the women has to continue giving birth until she gets a boy. This also sometimes leads to abortion of girls. The legal system tries to protect even the minimum womens property which is called “pewa” (Paudel, 2011), but in fact this control is limited due to social customs. Women do not have control over their pewa or even their dowry. They have to ask their husband or father if they want to sell it. The traditional social customs
hinder the development to more equality for women. According to Adler (1997) culture, values, attitudes and behaviour are influencing each other within a society. Values are the factors that influence our decision and can be conscious or unconscious. Values are desired and are based in the culture, such as the caste system in the Nepalese culture. Attitudes are the expression of values and influence how people act in a particular situation. The actual behaviour in turn has a large effect on the culture, because it is the behaviour of people and groups within a society. The culture in a society is formed by the behaviour of people. Due to the deeply rooted values coming from the Hindu culture, the patriarchal attitude and behaviour maintains. This can be found in the legal system and the society of Nepal. It has control over the body, labour, income, mobility, sexuality, ideology and identity of women. Women have less opportunities in education and successively also in employment and leadership. Their low status hinders their admission to education and their low education, in turn, hinders their status within society (Paudel, 2011).

The disempowerment of women begins in childhood. Estimated 75% of the women were married between the ages of 10 and 19 (Nepal CBS, 2011). Consequently only 40% are educated beyond primary school which in turn leads to the problem that women are underrepresented in a lot of areas in society (Nepal where we work, n.d.). While the literacy rate of men in 2003 lied at 66%, only 30% of the women could read (Mahat, 2003). Land also is traditionally inherited from father to son. This creates economic insecurity for women because the primary source of income for most Nepalis is still agriculture and the women are always dependent upon their male counterparts. Nepal has already made a substantial improvement in the last decades when it comes to education. For example, the primary school enrolment increased by 19% between 2004 and 2009. But still 8% of children remain out of school and dropout rates are still a major concern, especially for girls (Asian Development Bank, 2010).

The legal status of women

Women are also not given equal citizenship rights. The new constitution which was brought on the way in 2015 and widely celebrated as progressive, fails to give women the right to pass on nationality to their children by birth right. Men, on the other hand, do have this privilege. This leads to the fact that, already now, 4.8 million people in Nepal are stateless and are denied many basic rights (Desouza, 2015). They are unable to get accepted in society, find employment, and secure their children’s future which certainly is a major cause of suffering (Harrington & Chickera, 2017).

Trafficking and violence are also major problems: Studies estimate that between 5,000 and 7,000 Nepalese women and girls are trafficked to India each year to work mostly in the sex industry or in factories (Asian World Bank, 2010). The problem of trafficking is getting worsened by discrimination of women who return from Indian brothels: They are discriminated against, labelled as untouchable and dirty because many of them have contracted HIV (Graaf, 2015). Other studies have shown that about half of the Nepalese women have experienced some form of sexual violence (Lamichhane, Puri, Tamang, Dulal, 2011) or that about half of the young women (15-24 years old) have experienced sexual violence within marriage (Puri&Taimang, 2010).

In the last two decades, there has been a progress to change this inequity. There has been a significant success in poverty reduction and human development in general (National Planning Comission, 2017) and the Nepalese government has shown initiative in pushing gender equality by signing several international conventions. For example, the 2007 amendment to the Civil service act reserves 33% of vacant posts (in all sectors) to women. They have also signed the UN convention on the elimination of discrimination in public life and the the 2000 Millennium Development Goals which sets out targets for poverty reduction, universal primary education, gender equality, women’s empowerment, and maternal health (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Until 2030, Nepal aims to fully
eliminate wage discrimination, sexual violence, and harmful practices such as forced marriage (National Planning Comission, 2017).

But progress in law does not necessarily mean progress in reality. Reality shows that The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare and their local “Women development offices” do not have enough resources and a weak capacity (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Most administrative offices and police offices, who are responsible for implementing the changes, are dominated by conservative males. Local community officers are often not willing to support women against violence and discrimination by their husbands. Cases of domestic violence are rarely perpetrated (Paudel, 2011). The socio-economic status and decision-making powers of women have not improved much (Mahat, 2003).

It is obvious that this problem is double-edged: It lies not only in the enforcement of certain rules and laws, but also in deep-rooted beliefs and attitudes that might be even harder to change. These attitudes have to be tackled to reach a more profound and sustainable change: Women are also key stakeholders of a sustainable development so it is important to end their discrimination as soon as possible. It is questionable in how far the constitutional rights are getting accepted in the population. For example, while it is a right to freely choose one’s partner in Nepal, women, in many cases, are deprived of it: They often have to accept the choice of their family (B. Sharma, personal communication, 19.11.2017).

Another recent study shows how the government has been unsuccessful to fight the harming traditional practice Chhaupadi in Nepal. It concerns the forcing of menstruating women or girls to be banned from the household and live in sheds under bad hygienic conditions. The identified reasons for the practice still being done despite a prohibition are lack of programs against root causes, insufficient budgets, lack of participation of community members, difficulty of monitoring in remote areas, and lack of punishment (Acharya, 2017). This is a good example of good will on one side but lack of effective implementation on the other.

**NGO’s efforts**

NGOs are working hard to change this depressing picture. They are starting empowerment, education and social mobilization programs, for example through the Woman’s Pressure group, a coalition of 84 NGOs. The programs include residential care, emergency support and preventive programs for girls at the risk of violence. The Nepalese Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare has supported such programs carried out by the NGOs. But the support and mobilization of women in rural areas is very hard because most NGOs are based in urban areas (Mahat, 2003). In the upcoming year, Nepal will also be working on a new citizenship law and on a national action plan to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. This provides an opportunity to set an example in fighting inequality and injustice and in ending the exclusion of women (Battharai, 2014).

Women are also starting their own initiatives at getting more independent, for example in women groups, where they can meet and discuss ideas. This leads to more awareness about their own situation and often to the setting up of initiatives to change it. At Nari Chetna Kendra in Kathmandu, for example, women regularly meet to engage in community development and child support programs, to participate in trainings on economics, self-sustainability, agriculture, and advocacy (Women Awareness Centre Nepal, 2012). Another organization is the Women’s Foundation Nepal (WFN), a women’s rights organization that aims to reduce the inequality between men and women in Nepal. Through a variety of training programmes, they want to make Nepali women more strong and independent. Their goal is to ensure that women become an integral part of the Nepalese society and work hand in hand with men to shape the future of the country. Practical issues of the organization are
psychological counselling of women and children that were victims of physical and psychological abuse, and also provide educational programs for children and women. Women that followed programmes at the organization go back to their communities, where they act as positive role models to inspire other women to follow educational possibilities (Women’s Foundation Nepal, n.d.).

To summarize, it is useful to identify several barriers that keep women in Nepal from reaching more empowerment. These can be divided into traditions, laws, economic restrictions, and educational barriers. Concerning traditions, Nepal has a modern day patriarchal society. That is why it appears to be very difficult for women and men to accept more progressive values and break through traditional ones. Furthermore, there is also more work which can be done to implement the existing equality laws and to change those that contribute to persisting inequality. This is the job of administrative and political actors. The economic situation of Nepal makes it one of the poorest countries in the world (Reed &McConnachie, 2002). This also restricts the inequality problem from being solved, because budgets for intervention programs are not there. For implementing equal opportunities successfully, the abundance of money would be a first step, though of course not a sufficient solution. The fourth influential barrier is formed by an imbalance and shortcomings in the educational sector. The lack of education narrowed the women’s autonomy and their occupational outlook. All in all, Nepalese women are trapped in a vicious circle consisting of an interaction from existing cultural beliefs, legislations (or their lack of enforcement) upholding these beliefs, economic restrictions and limited educational opportunities.

2.1 Theoretical framework

It is important to closely examine the variable “empowerment”. It can be divided into social, political and psychological power. Social power means that a person has access to different resources like information, knowledge, and skills. Political power means that the person is able to participate in decisions that influence his or her own future. Psychological power means that an individual has a sense of self-efficacy or self-esteem. This can in turn positively influence his or her access to political and social power (Friedmann, 1992). Empowerment as a whole is “the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to function, and to engage influence and hold accountable the institutions that affect them” (DFID/World Bank, 2006, p.9). It happens at the individual level (from below). How can empowerment be achieved? By providing the to be empowered people with the resources, opportunities, vocabulary, knowledge and skills needed to increase their capacity. This in turn gives them the possibility of reaching more economic, social and psychological power in their own particular situation (Tesoriero, 2010).

The GSEA (Nepal Gender and Social Exclusion Assessment) suggests that there are several critical sites where disempowerment can happen: At the individual site (this includes sense of self-worth and self-efficacy and socialised concepts of behavioural norms) at the family site, up to the community, state, and global site (DFID/World Bank, p. 13). The family is seen as the most problematic site for women. If we look at the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), if a person conducts a certain behaviour is influenced by the interplay of her attitudes, self-efficacy and behavioural norms. So, if a woman will do something to increase her own empowerment and become more independent, for example try to educate herself or join a social initiative, depends on what she thinks about this behaviour (is it right to do that?), if she thinks she is able to do it, and what she thinks that other people think about this behaviour. Self-efficacy thus is the same as psychological power. If there is an inconsistency between her attitudes or behavioural norms and her actual behaviour, she can be considered to have a low psychological power.
The arrows connect the theories as prerequisites for behaviour that increases an individual’s empowerment. Equipped with this framework, we want to look at all variables that might play a role in preventing or encouraging such behaviour.

3Methodology

3.1Research Design

A qualitative approach was chosen to best match the research question *In how far are women in the rural village Bhimpokhara empowered?* and the subquestions, because gender attitudes, gender norms and women empowerment are complex matters that appear in different facets. Because this research aims to understand behaviours, feelings, and beliefs in a meaningful way, a qualitative approach in the form of interviews is most appropriate.

A semi-structured interview was created in cooperation with staff of PSD, who have experience with akin cultural research, to collect demographic information about the women as well as their actual situation and attitudes about gender equality in terms of economic, familiar and societal status. The attitude questions were taken from two already existing questionnaires and slightly changed to better fit the cultural conditions: First, the “Attitudes Towards Women Scale–Short Version” (Spence, Helmrich & Stapp, 1978) measures attitudes toward the roles of women in society by different statements. It has been shown to have an excellent internal reliability with cronbachs alpha > .86 (Daugherty & Dambrot, 1986). Second, the “Gender Norm Attitudes Scale” (Nanda, 2011), focuses on son preference over daughter, roles of women in society, and daughter empowerment. A
study with women in Egypt showed that it has a good internal reliability with an alpha of > .67 (Nanda, 2011). These instruments cover a variety of different factors, according to gender research. Nevertheless, the items had to be adjusted to the Nepalese culture, because the questionnaires are designed for or by Western cultures.

Most questions were designed in a way that they should first be agreed or disagreed with and then explained why the woman has this opinion. This made it possible to analyse the results in a quantitative way first and then get in-depth information about her opinions and beliefs. The interviewers tried to create a meaningful interaction and were flexible when it comes to asking questions: If necessary some questions would be added in the moment to get additional information. The women were asked for their last name only because it shows which caste they belong to. After categorizing the caste, the last name was deleted and replaced with a number to ensure anonymity. Next to their economic, family, and societal status and attitudes about all three there was also a happiness index included at the end of the interview. Here, the women were asked to indicate how happy they are with their actual situation, on a scale from 1 to 10. We are aware that this is not reliably correlated with their status and they could be happy or unhappy due to external factors. But it is still a useful tool to get a broad impression about how happy the women in this community are. The last question entailed if the women would want to change anything about the status of women in their community if they could. This checks for their awareness about possible inequalities and if they have any desire for more empowerment.

The interviews were carried out with the help of a Nepali interpreter from Bhimpokhara who grew up there and knows the community and its people well. He studied English literature and is an English teacher at a local school. The final draft of the interview schema was devised with him to check for possible mistakes, miscommunication or taboo topics. He also arranged the meetings with all 25 women.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The participants are 25 women who live in Bhimpokhara and are older than 18 years. They were sampled randomly: The translator contacted key-persons from each community via phone (Bhimpokhara consists of 8 smaller communities and each has a key-person who knows the community and its people well). This person was then asked to pick three or four women from his community and ask them if they would be willing to participate. He or she was also asked to ensure diversity in terms of age, economic status, educational background and caste/ethnicity.

3.3 Procedure

Interviews were held with one woman at a time. The location was chosen on the preferences of the woman, so that she felt comfortable during the session. One researcher was asking the questions and they, as well as the answers, were directly translated by the interpreter. This is a female researcher because it was assumed that the women are feeling more secure and trustful with talking to another woman. The other researcher was documenting the answers and recording the conversation. An informed consent was read and signed by the women before the interview to ensure their privacy and possibility of stopping the interview at any time (or leaving out questions) if they do not feel comfortable.

As soon as a desirable number of interviews had been finished the results were compared and analysed. First, significant differences were searched in the overall status and attitudes (independent variables) and the demographics (dependent variables). For the attitudes, a positive score concerning the status of women was valued with “1”, a negative score with “0”. A high score on all items added represents a more progressive view about women empowerment, a low score a more conservative
view. Then all answers and explanations were brought into a context and deeply analysed in cooperation with the interpreter and staff of PSD who know the cultural background and can find additional explanations that are not accessible to the researchers from a Western background. To increase the validity and get a broader picture of the topic we combined the conclusion with our experiences and encounters of the life in the village (field notes). While the research was carried out, we were living among the people of the community. Wewere volunteering in the local school, learning their language, and actively participating in their daily life, including habits and traditions. Thereby the primary data we collected during our observations comes from a personal context.

3.4 Modification of the interview

After finishing 9 interviews and a first evaluation together with the chairman of the local municipality it was decided to add a few questions to the interview. First, it was suggested by him that it is useful to consider the problem of unequal pay because it is a common practice in the area that women get less money for the same work. It was also decided to ask their opinion about this because during the first interviews some women hinted that from their point of view it is justified because men are able to do harder physical labour. Furthermore, the question “What is your opinion about inter-caste marriage?” was added because it is useful to see whether separation on the basis of the caste system is still active in the women’s attitudes like it is suggested by the literature. During the first interviews it was namely observed that women from Dalit communities have the worst living conditions, are the poorest, and are the most discriminated against. If they ever experienced domestic violence, the question “Did it occur in combination with alcohol use?” was added because the women who had experienced it reported that their husband or other family members had been drunk during that time. Also, the question “What do you think about men drinking and playing?” was added because it was observed out of first hand and also reported by several people that heavy drinking and playing is a habit of several men in the community. And lastly, after hearing that every woman in the community is restricted during her period (for example not being allowed to enter the house and having to sleep on the veranda) and one told that this is also the case after giving birth we wanted to know more about this discrimination and added the question “If yes, was this also the case directly after your child was born?”

4 Results

4.1 Demographics

Twenty-five women in total completed the interview. The mean age was 40.44. The youngest was 23 and the oldest was 74 years old. The participants belonged to different castes including Brahmin (9), Chhetri (5), Magar (3), and Dalit (Kami 3, Sarki 5).

All women from the age of 40 had no education or informal education. In total, 14 had no or informal education, two finished primary school as their highest degree, five lower secondary, one higher secondary (SLC), three intermediate (all of which were Brahmins). Eighteen were literate, seven were illiterate.

All were married, 19 marriages were arranged. Four were widows and eight had husbands who work in a foreign country. No woman married older than 21 years old and 12 women married under the age of 18. All had kids and the average number of kids was 2.72.

4.2 The actual status of women
4.2.1 Economic status

The average annual family income was 183,750 Rupees (1530€). The women’s average contribution to the family income was 13.18%, five of them contributed more than 30%, four of which were Brahmins. All except one of them worked outside of their home, on average 6.85 hours a day (not including housework, which all the women saw themselves responsible for). All worked in self-sustaining agriculture, except for two: One health insurance cooperative chairperson and one teacher. This work includes harvesting and crops cultivation, rearing of cattle, cutting grass and searching for firewood, and sometimes breaking stones for building material (see images 2 and 3). Twelve of the women had property under their name.

Twenty-three of the women do decide for what their family spends their budget, mostly in cooperation with their husbands. All women stated to be in a situation of unequal pay: It is common that they get half of the pay for a day’s work compared to their male co-workers. This is the case for unskilled field labour (see images 2 and 3). In the Dalit community, some also get less than half (While a man can earn 700 Rupees per day, a woman earns 300). Out of 15 women, 12 thought that this is not right and an unfair practice. The ones that give a reason for this answer mostly said that women are as capable as men or that they put as much energy into their work as men do. Three said that it is fair because men can do harder physical labour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>165.000</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magar</td>
<td>143.000</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chhetri</td>
<td>228.000</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalit</td>
<td>165.000</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Status within family

In total, 16 women were solely responsible for work inside of the house. Out of these, 12 had a husband who was absent or dead. Nine women stated that there was an equal work division. 19 women stated that they have greater authority in bringing up their children while six stated that the authority was equally divided between father and mother. One woman who gave a typical answer stated that mothers are closer to their children:

“The father cannot understand the feelings of the children. Then he cannot love them more than the mother. In her heart the mother can feel her children because they are basically a part of her body.”[18]

All school-age children visited school and there seemed to be no son preference when it comes to education. Son and daughters mostly visited the same schools or if they visited different ones it was a matter of their own interest. When it comes to mobility, 10 women have not been further away than Baglung on their own. They stated to be not able to or not interested to go further. The others have been as far as Kathmandu or Pokhara, two of them have been as far as India to visit their husbands. Most are independent when it comes to going to the nearest town, the hospital, or the market.

Six Women claim to have had experienced domestic violence and four of these stated that it had to do with alcohol.

All women were restricted during their period, except one who is a Christian. All others are Hindus. The restriction was similar for all of them: They must wear different clothes, are not allowed inside the kitchen and not allowed to touch food, male members of the family, and belongings of others, and sleep on their own in a separate room in the house. Only seven women, however, knew the
term chaupaddi. In their opinion, it is an “evil tradition that is still practiced in the far-western regions of Nepal” [11]. Out of 15 women, 12 state that they were also restricted after the birth of their child. The duration here was different, between nine days and one month. 18 women state that in their opinion this practice is wrong.

“She does not like this and does not agree with this tradition. Why are women restricted? It is a regular process and it is good for their health but the people do not understand this. She really disagrees with this ritual.”[7]

“It is not good, but we are following it because it is a tradition. Can we change it? No, not in our home. Basically, it comes from fear of the anger of the gods. They know it’s an evil practice but are afraid to change it (even secretly, when no one is watching) for this reason.” [14]

“It all comes from tradition. Her daughter and daughter in law are not restricted because she thinks it should be changed. She is teaching her children differently: It is all about the body process and it is natural”[16]

4.2.3 Status within society

Eighteen women were part of a social organization, 10 were part of a women’s group. The other organizations were a school committee, several fundraising cooperatives for people in need, and a committee for responsible use of the forest.

Five women were actively involved in politics (members of a party), all except one were voters. Out of 15 women, all stated that the situation of women in their community is improving:

“Yes, very much! The situation in the community is too much improving because in her time they had such a hard time. There was nothing, also on the prerequisites of development: no electricity, no motor road, the women were so uneducated they could not understand even a single sentence and were dependent upon their husband in each and every way. They were confined within the narrow boundary of their household, they could not come out of the houses also at that time. Because those women who got out of the house, they could not stay outside in the nights. So nowadays it is very much improving because of globalization, because they can learn many things from television, she got the chance to study for one year in the women’s class [...] She wants to read more but her eyes cannot see.”[18]

“Yes, it is improving more than in her time. Because people are treating their daughter in law like their own daughter nowadays. Back in her time this was very different. To treat her this way is a great improvement of the society and they also have more opportunities now [...]”[15]

“Yes, it is improving a lot! Before, they were so restricted. Cannot go out of the house, not get money, were confined within very narrow boundaries, were restricted in many ways, did not have rights, when there was informal education classes they were not allowed to go there. After her husband went to a foreign country she went there to study. They were mostly restricted by their husbands.”[1]

1 Citations are in third person perspective, because they resemble the explanations of the translator.
4.3 Attitude questions

Most women had progressive views about gender equality. Nineteen of them thought that women should also be concerned with improving their professional careers. Even though they often said that for themselves it is not possible, because they have no good education, children to care for or a husband that works outside of the home, they state that women nowadays should compete on the job-market and work in skillful jobs if they get the opportunity:

*Though they are back-warded, and they could not get opportunities in their time, women of the actual time have to study more, improve their careers and capacities and get skilful jobs to earn money. It is not necessary to be confined within the household only.* [18]

“*They cannot be happy if they are only confined within the household. They should improve their quality as much as they can. Nobody should tell them that their duty is inside of the kitchen.*” [16]

“*Women should not forget their responsibility, but they have to think very carefully about careers, improve their education, get a job, go out in the world, so they can improve the situation and be not a victim of discrimination anymore*” [10]
Eighteen women disagreed with the statement “Women should be concerned less about their rights but become good wives and mothers”. Like the previous one, this question posed a dilemma for most of them. Caring for the children was clearly seen as their own responsibility so they viewed pursuing their rights or their professionalism as either equally important or less important:

“Good wives and good mothers is a woman’s duty, but rights are also their duty. It is two parts of the same coin, so they need to be concerned about both in the same way.” [8]

“They have to be concerned about their rights as well because today they are also starting to develop personalities and careers. So nowadays it is not only about being wives and mothers anymore but about independency” [20]

“If the mother does fine in the home, everyone else of the family will do well.”[13]

Twenty-two women thought that they should not be regarded less capable of contributing to economic production. Here also, most claimed that they do not get the opportunity to prove it, but that women are as capable of working in a skilful job as men. Almost all of them understood that they are compelled to believe they are physically inferior and therefore not able to work as well as men. This is also the reason that the three of them who agree with this statement gave.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Do you think that women should be concerned with their duties of childbearing and house tending rather than improving their professional business careers?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Do you think that women should be regarded as less capable of contributing to economic production compared to men?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 When somebody applies for a job, do you think that his or her gender should influence the chances of getting it?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Do you think that women should be free to choose their spouse and propose marriage to men?</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.1 Do you think that the father of the family should have greater authority than the mother… when it comes to the bringing up of children?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>12.2 …when it comes to the spending of family budgets?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 What do you think of the following statement: “A good woman should never question her husband’s opinions, even if she disagrees with them.”?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 Do you think that women should have a greater responsibility for solving intellectual and social problems of the society?</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 What do you think about the following statement: “Women should be concerned less about their rights but try to become good wives and mothers.”?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Do you think that a woman should have the same freedom as a man?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 Do you think that more women should be in positions of political leadership?</td>
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All women thought that gender should have no influence on the chances of getting a job. All except one thought that they should be free to choose their spouse and propose marriage to men, even though this had not been the case for most of them:

“In that time, she didn’t even know her husband. She got married on the family’s negotiation. So, she could not really understand her husband or the other people from his family. Marriage should not be a compulsion. It should be free. If they want, they can do it, if not then not. It should be according to the wish and everyone should choose their husband by themselves.” [18]

“Life is theirs, so they should also choose by themselves. She thinks about nowadays and says that previously there was not such a system of treating the individual this way.” [6]

“Yes, they should, but only after they are matured, after 20 years.” [10, married at age 15]

Twenty-three women thought that the father should not have greater authority in the bringing up of children and 24 women thought that the authority of spending budgets should be equal. All of them stated that a woman should have the same freedom as a man and that more women should be in positions of political leadership.

Eight women agreed with the term that “A good woman should never question her husband’s opinions, even if she disagrees with them.” and 17 women did not. If they agreed, their reason was a need for harmony or good reputation:

“She does not want to reason because if there is trouble inside the family, many people in the village know and this leads to a bad reputation.” [1]

“There should not be any disagreement or conflict between husband and wife. Never.” [10]

“If she questions then quarrel arises and if there is quarrel, other people from the community think that there is negativity inside of the family and that is very bad.” [24]

“If the husband gives a good opinion the woman should support it and if not, she should of course question it for the betterment of the whole family” [16]

Out of 15 women, six were in favour of inter-caste marriage. One did not give her opinion about it; the others did not like it:

“She does not like it. By knowing that he or she is from another caste she would not get her son or daughter to marry them. No matter if lower or higher.” [15]

“Not good, she does not like it, because it is better that some castes are untouchable so that they cannot enter the kitchen also. If Brahmans marry Dalits, the girls cannot enter the kitchen. It is traditional and it is followed from the time of her ancestors, they strongly believe in religion, they have fear in their minds, if they do not follow the tradition and the customs something bad will happen in the future.” [17]

“It is very good if they marry in the same caste because of culture and tradition. Inter caste marriage is okay if it makes them happy because what can we do?” [10]

The average attitude score was 8.64 out of 10 (10 represents a very progressive and pro-feminine attitude and 0 represents a very conservative, traditional attitude). No significant relationship was found between independent variables caste, education, member of a social organisation, and the attitude scores.
There was a high variation in the women’s happiness scores, ranging from 1 to 10. The average happiness score was 6.84. When asked what they would like to improve about the situation of women in their community, 14 out of 25 women gave a detailed answer. The others said that they do not know or cannot imagine what they would like to change. Many women at the end of the interview asked us if their answers were good. During the interviews, some women acted insecure and shy, especially in the Sarki community. They often looked around the area and clearly seemed to feel uncomfortable speaking to us. Some women had trouble understanding the attitude questions and our translator had to explain the meaning to them several times. Those were illiterate women with no education. A small amount also acted very self-confident, for example two local political representatives who were empowered across all aspects of their lives. They also had detailed knowledge about problems in their community and things that they would like to change.

When asked what they would change about the status of women in their community, the women gave several ideas:

“If she could change the position of women, then she would request to women to understand their problem more, like that violence against them is unjust. She would give the women more knowledge and education about their own status and equal opportunity to girls in sports.”[1]

“She wants to take women out of their kitchen boundary and want to divide the housework more, they have to go outside more”[2]

“She would fight for the equal rights of women in society, she wants to take the women out the kitchen and get them into more positions of social power, helping the society”[3]

“Women have the fear that they cannot do anything. She wants them to develop more self-confidence so that they don’t fear anymore about doing anything about bettering their status.”[4]

“She wants to make them equal: Equality to male in terms of opportunities, of getting jobs, of getting education.”[10]
“She would like to change the restriction in the time of period and childbearing if she gets the chance.” [11]

“Equal opportunities should be provided to son and daughter. We can give the opportunity to the daughter to have a job. That means that she has to get better education, so she can stand on her own feet. The household work of cooking and cleaning should be divided between husband and wife.”[14]

“She does not believe that she can do anything. She does not think that anyone is giving any authority to the women.”[19, Sarki]

“Alcohol is the major problem of her society, after they drink they start to make noise, they disturb and beat their wives, so if she can she would like to change this” [22, Sarki]

“She wants to work in field of sanitation and drinking water because the village is very dirty.” [23, Sarki]
This research sought to examine the current status of women in the rural area of Bhimpokhara. Our aim was to obtain more insight in the empowerment of the women and the variables which influence this. The alarming picture about the status of Nepalese women that emerged from the literature review was not proven by this study. Unlike our expectations, the women had a progressive opinion about gender equality. Although they are still discriminated in some areas of their life, most of them described the situation of women in their community as strongly improving.

Although the overall status of women was good, it was different for Dalits, single women or widows, who had a poor status. The study was divided into three different life areas: Economic status,
status within family, and status within society. It seems that women have the most power within their family, but poor empowerment when it comes to economic status. Most women were also actively participating in their community and sharing in decision making about their future.

5.1 The current situation of the women

5.1.1 Economic status

We found out that within the economic area, the inequality between women and men is high. Women in the village of Bhimpokhara are very dependent on their husbands’ income. Women seemed to be tied to the house due to housework and their children and could not follow a business career. Women get half of the payment compared to their male co-workers. Most of them described that as unfair, because they are also hard working. Therefore women need the income of their husbands for living, what makes them dependent. Also, it makes living for a single mother even more difficult. Inequality in payment strengthens the maintenance of the strong gender roles. Men earn money and are the owner of the family budget. This can be called strategic financial planning, because men are earning double the amount than their women counterpart would earn in the same job. That even more pushes women in their role as a housewife, who cares for the children and harvests their own fields for self-sustainment. Moreover, as described before, the contribution of women to the family budget is low, what gives them a low economic status. The inequality in payment can be considered as a reason for that small contribution as well. Women are working the whole day but get no money for housework, child caring or harvesting on the own fields. Some women were understanding about the inequality in payment. They described that there is a difference in physical ability, so men can achieve more in fieldwork. They do not see themselves in skilled jobs, where physical strength would not play a role. Those skilled jobs require a good education. The poor education of women we interviewed could be a reason for the fact that they cannot imagine themselves in such jobs. Overall the women are not satisfied with this situation and they think that women could do as good as men, if they would get the opportunity.

5.1.2 Status within the family

It seemed that women have a high status within their family. Women have the same decision-making power as their husband when it comes to spending of the family budget and this also with larger investments. This gives the women equal power and was not expected before, because of their small contribution to that budget. Moreover, women have equal or even more power than men, when it comes to bringing up of their children. This is wished by the mothers and many said that they consider men as not capable of the task to bring up the children. This image was similar in all age groups and was given from generation to generation. Indeed their commitment to take the whole responsibility by themselves limits their freedom. Women spend much time to support their children until they leave the house, and this can take several decades when they get 2 or 3 children. Especially when the children are infants, they spend most of their day with them. Many women become mothers at young age and therefore cannot finish their education or follow a higher education. The time invested in childbearing and a poor education are causes for no academic development or business careers. The women from our research did not see a problem in this, because all of them consider childbearing as mothers’ task and part of their fulfilment. This was confirmed by their confusion about the question “Do you think that women should be concerned with their duties of childbearing and house tending rather than improving their professional business careers?”. It was a dilemma for them, because they wanted to agree on the statement, but did not want the family life suffering under the business career. As described before, childbearing seems compulsory for women and if these traditional gender roles are
part of their mindset, they will be dependent on their husbands, who make the living. But then, many women can imagine themselves outside the kitchen and some are sharing the house-tending activities with their husbands. With the last question, being asked what they would like to change about the situation about women in their community, a few women answered that they want to take the women out of the kitchen. So women in Bhimpokhara stick to the traditional gender roles when it comes to child caring, but they would like to change their tasks within the house.

5.1.3 Status within society

The overall contribution of women in society seemed to be high. There are women groups established in every village and most of the women we interviewed stated that they are member of one of these groups. They are discussing critical topics from their community and collecting money. From these funds they support local organizations like the school and provide incomes for poor and vulnerable people.

The decision making power of women regarding marriages can be considered as low. Although many said that a woman should be free to choose their husband and propose marriage to men, most of them said that they did not get such an opportunity. Marriages arranged by the husband or parents are most common, especially with older women. One women said that she did not even know her husband before the marriage. Furthermore, women without a husband have a very low status. One example from the interviews was a woman who got married when she was 18 years old. Soon after that, her husband left to India because he had a job in the Indian army. He died in a truck accident and she never saw him again. The woman, now being a widow, was not accepted by her community and had to live at her parent’s home for the next 25 years, until she finally found a new husband. This is one example of beliefs that make it very hard for single women to live an independent live. They are vulnerable and instead of getting support from their community they often get marginalized and are not able to provide for their children on their own. The huge pay gap for physical work increases their difficulties. Widows and single mothers therefore need special attention and support by actors like social organizations and women’s groups. The findings from this study support the picture that marriage is seen as compulsory in Nepal and necessary for an acceptable social status. Every participant was married. Almost half of them were married under the age of 18. According to the UN, this is considered child marriage (Unicef, 1989). It is a challenging issue because their development is disturbed when they have to marry at such an early age and start to live an independent life. It mostly affects girls in Nepal because boys are generally older when they marry (personal conversation). Nevertheless it was interesting that most women who married at such a young age stated that it was a “love marriage” (and not one that was arranged by their parents). This is also often called “elop marriage” by them. Elop marriage means a marriage that is done out of love but frowned upon by the parents.

Considering the women’s high participation in social activites, the work of NGO’s in the area can be regarded to have been successful. At least one of the local women’s groups (Amrait women’s group) has been established by the local NGO BYC Baglung. Regarding funds and other resources the women’s groups are still in need of support

5.2 Empowerment

With regard to the question “In how far are the women empowered?” we have to look closer when women can be considered as empowered. This was divided into social power, political power, psychological power and power within the family.
The variable social power can be found in the social status, as described before. It was seen that most of the women are part of a social organisation, like a women’s group or the school committee. With these groups, they contribute to the well-being of their community by fundraising or discussions about problematic topics.

With regard to the political power, our findings showed, that all women are voting, except one, who had no Nepalese citizenship. That quote is high and shows political engagement. In addition, the five women who are member of a party have a high political power. These women were dominant during the interview and had a strong opinion.

In our interviews the variable psychological power can be found in the last question, where women had to imagine they could change something about the situation of women in their society and what that would be. A gap was found between women with and without education. While women with a higher education could give concrete answers about what they want to change, uneducated women could not imagine themselves to change something or name an improvement. All Sarki women apart from one could not answer the question at all. The one Sarki woman, who gave a concrete answer differs from the others, because she was politically active. In addition, psychological power can be seen in the self-confidence of the women. Some women, especially the ones without education or which were illiterate could not give answers to the why questions. They agreed or disagreed on a statement, but when we followed up on this and asked them why they think that, they could not express themselves at all. The ability to give an own opinion can be considered as self-confidence. Without education, women had no self-confidence because they felt unskilled. From observation during the interview it was noticeable that especially women from the Sarki community felt uncomfortable with the interview situation. It was noticeable that women, who are politically active and empowered in many ways act very self-confident. A positive relationship was found between the variable political power and psychological power.

Power within the family can be described as the highest within all different castes. This was also not influenced by factors such as age or education. It stands loss from the before described components of power. It does, however, influence the academic and professional development.

All in all, women who are not educated or illiterate have the lowest power in terms of psychological, political or social. The variable power within family seems to be lost from these influencing factors. Women with no education mostly acted insecure and were more dependent on others. For example they did not like to travel on their own. Some women described that they would not travel to Kathmandu, because they do not know anything about the city and are afraid to feel lost, because they can not read. Furthermore a positive correlation seems to exists between psychological power, political power and social power.

It seems that there is a trend to more empowerment for the following generations. The younger generations also clearly get a better education. All the women describe the situation as strongly improving. Older women are reporting that they did not have the opportunities that girls have today. They got an arranged marriage at young age, no education and were dominated by men.

5.3 Factors that influence the empowerment status

The caste seems to be a factor that influences the economic status. Dalit women had by far the poorest contribution to the family income. Also they do not earn enough money by themselves to make a living, so they are completely dependent on their husbands. What makes them even more dependent is that they do not own fields for self-sustaining farming and instead they have to work on other’s fields. One thing that is very important to understand is that the income of families in the Dalit community is average, because most of their husbands worked in Qatar or Saudi Arabia. But the
women only get a small share of the income to provide for their and their children’s most basic needs (around 20,000 Rupees per year). Their husbands keep the rest. After all their living conditions are worse and they are very poor compared to communities of other castes. Another variable that is influenced by the caste is education. It was remarkable that only Brahmin women had an intermediate education. This related to the concept of intersectionality: A group of women is not only different to men, it is also very different within. Caste, class, religion, ethnicity and gender are all variables which interconnect and cannot be addressed separately when looking at power and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Especially in Nepal, where there is still today an active caste system with large differences (when it comes to economic status, belief systems, cultural traditions and rights) between the castes. So, women from Dalit communities are by far the most vulnerable while women from higher castes have more empowerment and opportunities (DFID/World Bank, 2006). Even though the caste system was banned by law in 1963, it is still very active in Bhimpokhara. Dalits live in their own community which is worse than the others in terms of poverty, health, education and awareness.

A larger share of the women was not in favour of inter-caste marriage, so these inequalities are unlikely to be changed in the near future. The caste system is embedded in the culture and has been there for so long that many consider the other castes as too different from their own. Also the inter-caste marriage is a traditional practice and deeply rooted in the belief system. Women who were against inter-caste marriage explained that it would lead to conflicts within the family, because the parents would not accept someone from a lower caste. The person from the lower caste would be discriminated within the family and could not enter the house of the husband, in the worst case. Therefore, not even women from the Dalit caste were in favour of inter-caste marriage, because they were scared of the discrimination and conflicts, although it would improve their status. In fact, the strong boundaries between the different castes lead to discrimination and injustice. Therefore, the rich stay rich and the poor stay poor. From observations it became clear that there is an emerging trend in favour of love marriages. While arranged marriages are not possible between castes, it is an option for love marriages. If that trend develops further in the future, boundaries will blur and injustice will become less.

In the introduction it was said, that school enrolment is poor. That cannot be supported by this study, because all participants said that their school age children visit or visited school. Also, there was no tendency found to privilege boys by sending them to private school, while the girls go to governmental school. Children from one family mostly visited the same school and the gender of the child did not influence the school selection. However, girls did not continue to visit school, after they got married. Mostly because they had to move to a different place and had to live with the husband’s family from the moment of marriage. This tradition together with the compulsion of giving a dowry to the husband’s family leads to difficulties in families who only have daughters and even in some cases to abortions of girls. According to that tradition the girl has to work in the house of the husband’s family, including cooking and cleaning. Therefore, early marriage is a factor that influences education and thereby the status of women.

5.4 Attitudes

Their attitudes about the status of women within family, economy, and society can be regarded as very progressive. Without exceptions, they think that women should have more social and political power. It can be said that their attitudes do not lag behind their actual behaviour, like it was found by previous research about disempowered Nepalese women (Battharai, 2014), but in their case their attitudes lead ahead of their actual behaviour. This dissonance was seen in attitude statements such as “A good woman should never question her husband’s opinions, even if she disagrees with them.” Many women who disagreed on that statement said that they would nevertheless not question their husband, because they do not want any conflict. So it seems that unfortunately their attitudes do not
represent the reality they live in. They had progressive attitudes about the economic status of women in general, even though their economic status within their community is low. That was seen in the analysis of the status, but also when they followed up on questions such as “when somebody applies for a job, do you think that his or her gender should influence the chances of getting it?” the women explained that it should not influence the chances, but according to their experience it does. They think that women should improve their professional career, although they cannot imagine themselves to do it, or they had not the possibility to do so. This shows a dissonance between what they think about how the situation should be and what they are actually doing. For some, their low self-confidence (or psychological power) in their abilities is a large obstacle to reaching more economic power. Others are of the opinion that they can do as good as men and could contribute as good to the economic production if they would get the chance to prove that. They strongly believe in their capability, but the society hinders them to implement their progressive views into behaviour. That difference between attitude and actual behaviour can also be seen in the analysis of the current status of the women in the different areas.

6 Recommendations

The ideal situation would be a community with women having the self-confidence and resources to improve their actual empowerment status by themselves. Empowerment starts at the grassroots level (Mahat, 2003), meaning that it does not start from above, by new laws and regulations, but from below, by individuals in small communities getting active and gaining more power.

In accordance with the ‘change from below’ theory, people of communities have to determine their own needs and how they are met at the local level. This increases self-reliance and creates meaningful and sustainable change. Change from below is an important principle in social interventions and it also connects to gender equality: If more than 50% of the community people are women, of course they also must have a voice in decision-making and creating a better future (Tesorio, 2010). They have their own needs and their own particular set of skills and interests. To develop a community in a sustainable way, it is also important that many different actors and techniques come together in an interdisciplinary approach (Wall, 2010). When asked what they would change about the status of women in their community, the women had concrete ideas. Therefore NGO’s and other organisations have to cooperate with the women while formulating ideas for new projects.

7.1 Women groups

To reach more empowerment and self-confidence in their progressive behaviour, the women need to develop their own initiatives in place of getting supervision third parties. Women groups are an existing concept in every community with good potential for further development. In these social groups, they can talk about the status of women and problems of empowerment. Also they engage in community development and child support, by small fund raising. Therefore, the cooperation with women groups should be improved. With the support of funds from the local government or NGO’s, they could extend the impact on their communities. They sometimes just lack self-confidence or support to change something, so this should be improved. In the social groups they can exchange their view and educate each other by their own knowledge.
It is expected that a meeting point like a community house would encourage regular meetings of the women groups. Also these houses would make meetings of groups from other communities possible, to get different ideas or support each other. This does not have to be a new construction, but can be an existing building like the municipality or the school, where women could get a free room for some hours a week. With coming projects it could be part of the volunteer program, to visit one or two regular meetings of the group to bring in new ideas from different backgrounds and identify the needs of women for future projects. Thus, the support and further development of existing women groups is recommended and expected to have a positive influence on the education and thereby overall self-confidence of women.

7.2 Education

The different results shown by women with and without education identify a need for improvement in that factor. Women who have a higher education are generally more empowered and have the self-confidence to improve the actual situation. Improvement about the general knowledge about their status and equality is therefore recommended. To realize that, NGO’s active in the area can focus on workshops that have the potential to reduce discriminating beliefs and increase compassion and common humanity. This would in the long term not only decrease the suffering of women, but also of other marginalized groups like Dalits and handicapped people. For flourishing communities, ignorance and misunderstandings have to be eradicated that arise out of these beliefs. A sustainable development can only be achieved if thinking and behaviour patterns that increase inequality are eradicated.

How can this be done in reality? The crucial variable here is education. We should focus on the younger generations first, because they will be shaping the future. The schools are the perfect medium to reach all children of younger generations. The government schools themselves increase we-consciousness and perception of equality already, because children of the most different socio-economical backgrounds visit them. Optional training sessions for teachers and courses for the students could be very effective if done in the right way. Discussions should include the students and give the courses a personal approach, fitting to their own context. An example would be discussions about the caste system and inter-caste marriage: Where does it come from? Can the cultural differences that arose between the castes in centuries only lead to exclusion and separation, or can it also be seen as a source of diversity, cultural richness and exchange? Awareness programs should be created by experienced staff of NGO’s and implemented by them at first with the intention to be continued by teachers.

7.3 Microcredits

Another important aspect is to create more economic independence and better opportunities in the job-market for women. A promising idea is the use of microfinance: Increasing the access of women to microfinance by 15% could reduce gender equality (as measured by the GDI) in the average developing country by half (Zhang & Posso, 2017). Some NGO’s in the area have already started to do that, but there is a promising potential for further extension. Women are in general not able to get credits from other sources because they do not own property as a security bond. Small loans should be given to the poorest and most dependent women (As measured by their family income and their own contribution to it) with a special focus on single mothers who have the most difficulties providing for themselves and their families. This, in combination with a training for minor income generation and economics, can enable them to live a more self-sustaining life. The financial service and training should be tailored to their own needs.

7.4 Daycare for children
Another idea that could counteract disempowerment would be the establishment of a daycare for young children who do not yet enter school so that the mothers have more time to follow their activities. The easiest way to do that would be to set aside a community building and let mothers take turns in supervising their children. The women would then gain precious time where they could get active in selling their own vegetables, animal products or starting other small businesses like sewing, handicraft, or the opening of a shop. By starting with a little loan at first, they might be successful in generating income, paying back the loan, and eventually getting even bigger loans to extend their businesses. This is a good first step for securing women’s independency. But laws and regulations also have to be better implemented in the future, so that inequities like the pay gap or the preference of men in skilled jobs can eventually vanish and women can also reach positions of high social and political power, in private and public sector, so that they are able to participate in decision-making that ensures them a better future.

7.5 Sarki community

A woman from the Sarki community described her village as very dirty and would like to improve the sanitation and drinking water. We also observed the poor hygienic conditions when we visited that community for our interviews. It was seen that women here are the most discriminated. They are discriminated not only by the male members of their community, but also by higher castes. The Dalit women are suffering the most and describe themselves as very unhappy with their lives. Most of the Dalit women indicate during the interview that they don’t feel able to change their situation, they feel powerless. Also, they do not have concrete ideas about what to change. Communities in Bhimpokhara who are doing well are these with good connections to the local municipality or to the government. Local representatives with a higher status often have long-lasting working relationships with NGO’s and social organisations. They are able to bring social projects and volunteers to their village, to improve their community. The Dalit community lacks these kinds of contacts and they are not able and also not empowered enough to formulate a project proposal. Therefore this community is identified to have the most need for improvement and support from externals. It is recommended to focus on the Dalit community for future projects, to enhance their status and quality of life. This also contributes to the development of the Bhimpokara village as a whole. Therefore representatives from other villages, who have a connection to NGO’s and social organisations should consult with the people from the Sarki and Damai communities about what they need the most and plan future projects together with them.

7.6 Implementation plan

Finally, we would like to present an example of an implementation plan for a project where these ideas can be implemented. This is only a rough idea and not fixed but can be used as a first template for social organizations in the area and adapted according to their own needs. The majority of women suffer from inequality and discrimination by men and within different groups. Therefore, like already discussed, we recommend to keep focussing on supporting marginalized groups like the Sarki and Damai women, but also to create more awareness about the prohibition of the caste system to create more unity and exchange between the women. The goal of this project is to decrease discrimination and improve the status of empowerment and make the women more independent. The following project components are identified:

**Awareness program:** Content of the workshop is discrimination and inequality. By educating the young generation in school about discrimination and inequality, the injustice should decrease for the next generations.

**Women groups:** By visiting the women groups, their needs can be examined and support for their development can be arranged. Also a common room is provided for their weekly meetings.
**Microcredit:** Selected women get a microcredit, to be more independent. In addition 3 days of financial training are provided, including a personalised financial plan, to raise the women’s awareness about conducting a business and strategically economic planning. Also included is a planning about efficient time management and the possibility of a childcare to support that. Preferably volunteers with a business educational background.

**Sustainability:** Teachers from the school are getting trained by the awareness program and are responsible to further implement these workshops for future students. In addition the community forms a management committee to look after the maintenance of the project, after the NGO’s and volunteers work is finished.

**Inputs required:**

- Volunteer contribution
- Material for the awareness program
- Funds raised by volunteers and NGO in advance
- Community participation
- Nepalese counterparts (optional, makes the cooperation between volunteers and community people much easier)

For the implementation a good time period would be 8 weeks. Thereby the volunteers have time to adapt to the new culture and situation and also implement the activities.

*Table 4: Example of an implementation plan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Who?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Welcoming of the volunteers, formulating of goals, first contacts</td>
<td>Representatives and responsible person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Preparation of the Awareness program (discrimination and inequality)</td>
<td>Volunteers together with the teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Implementation of awareness program in school</td>
<td>Volunteers together with the teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Implementation of awareness program in school (Discussion)</td>
<td>Volunteers together with the teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Visiting the women group and examine their needs. Writing a project proposal</td>
<td>Volunteers and Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Visiting the women with a microcredit and give them financial training</td>
<td>Volunteers together with a finance expert (or business study volunteers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Visiting the women with a microcredit and give them financial training</td>
<td>Volunteers together with a finance expert (or business study volunteers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Visiting the women with a microcredit and give them financial training</td>
<td>Volunteers together with a finance expert (or business study volunteers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7 Limitations and future research

Some confusion arose because in Nepal people who can write their name are officially considered literate. After getting to know this we only considered women who can fluently read and write in their everyday life as literate. But in the first few interviews the variable was flawed because now we don’t know if they are really literate or can only write their name.

Furthermore it must be taken into account that the attitude scale used may not have been sufficient to measure the participant’s attitude about the status of women in detail. It was seen that all women have a positive attitude. With the majority of attitude questions, most women gave identical answers. Due to no differences in the answers, no information can be drawn about demographic data that influence the attitude. Therefore, no statement can be made about the sub question “which variables influence their attitudes”. However, in previous studies, this material was used in combination with a five-point likert scale, which ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In preparation to our research and in cooperation with our Nepalese supervisor, it was decided to just give two answer possibilities (agree and disagree). Nepalese people are more familiar with that method, so it fits to the culture. This was also seen in our last question about how happy they are with their life. That was the only question where we made use of a 10 point-likert scale and all women had difficulties to understand that method. But just to distinguish between agree and disagree might not be a suitable measurement for attitude, what is regarded as a complex variable. Because no difference is made between women who strongly agree with a statement and women who just agree or even have a neutral position. It is possible that there was a moderate ceiling effect, which could also have played a role in the research outcomes with regard to potential differences between categories, such as caste, education or age.

In addition to the limitations already mentioned, our study lacks information about psychological power. The statement questions were addressing the status of women in general and what the participants think women in general are capable of. This does not measure their psychological empowerment, since there might be a difference in what the participants think women should do and what they themselves are actually doing. A good example for this gap is a woman who disagreed on the statement “A good woman should never question her husband’s opinions, even if she disagrees with them”. But in addition, she said that she would never do that, because she does not want any conflict or trouble with her husband. That limitation influences the research outcomes about psychological power that belongs to the sub question “In how far are the women empowered?”. As an improvement we could have asked if the women feel capable of doing it themselves as additional questions to the statements. We could also have asked more direct questions about psychological power, like “Do you see yourself capable of changing your situation?” or “Do you see yourself capable of getting better education and employment?”.

Last, the village of Bhimpokhara was not representative for whole Nepal or all rural villages. It is located close to Baglung, which is a larger developed city. We presume that women in poorer and less developed areas of Nepal have less independency and a worse social status. The Western part of Nepal is the most undeveloped and the outcomes of our research would probably be different in the far West. There also was a lot of development in Bhimpokhara in the last years. They are strongly supported by social projects from non-governmental organisations, such as BYC Baglung and PSD-Nepal. They also benefit politically and financially from the direct road connection to Baglung. In the past there have been many volunteers in Bhimpokhara, who supported the development of the community.

This research showed that women in Bhimpokhara are empowered in most areas of their life. The fact that the status and empowerment is strongly influenced by caste and education shows that
there is space for improvement in this field. Together with the community people their needs have to be examined. The question that still needs answering is to what extent the Damai community needs support. Damais are considered to have an even lower status than Sarkis. Within the range of our research, this one village of Bhimpokhara was not studied. Our findings underline the importance and usefulness of supporting the most vulnerable groups. The Damai people belong to the last caste of the system and therefore can be considered as vulnerable group, because they have by far the lowest social status and are denied opportunities for improving their status. Hopefully future research about the needs of this kind of community can shed more light on this question. Important and promising areas to research in more detail concerns more questions about psychological power, which is expected to have a strong influence on progressive behaviour. Combining these topics in research might lead to a more detailed insight into the needs and underlying concepts involved. This in turn would greatly inform NGO’s and other helping organisations how to perform supporting practices and programs for these women.
References


Kathmandu: DFID/World Bank


Appendix A: Interviewschema (first version)

INFORMED CONSENT

Thank you for taking part in our research. In the following, you are going to hear a few questions. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree and explain your view. Please try to answer all the question as honest as possible. There are no right or wrong answers. Your last name will only be seen by us and our translator. All your answers will be kept anonymously and only used for the research we do at our university. You can stop the questionnaire at any time. If you don’t want to answer any specific question, you can just say “next question”.

I have understood these conditions and agree with them.

(signature)

Questionnaire

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Last Name:
Age:

Education: Literate / Illiterate
   None / primary school / lower secondary / secondary / S.L.C./ Intermediate / Graduate (bachelor) / Post-Graduate (master)

Are you married? Yes / No
   If yes: Is your marriage arranged?

How many people live in your house (pariwaar)?
   How many children do you have (How many girls/boys)?

Are you suffering from any health problems?
   If yes, what?

ECONOMIC STATUS

1. Do you work outside of your home? Yes / No
   If yes: What do you do?
   On average, how many hours per day?

2. What is the average annual income of your family:
   How is it generated? Agriculture (how many animals, square meters etc.), employment…
   How much do you contribute to it?

3. Do you have property under your name? Yes / No
   If yes, what?
4. Do you think that women should be concerned with their duties of childbearing and house tending rather than improving their professional business careers? Agree / Disagree
   Why?

5. Do you think that women should be regarded as less capable of contributing to economic production compared to men? Agree / Disagree
   Why?

6. When somebody applies for a job, do you think that his or her gender should influence the chances of getting it? Agree / Disagree
   Why?

STATUS WITHIN THE FAMILY

7. How is the work division inside of your family (who does what)?
   7.1 Does your husband help you with house-tending activities like cooking or cleaning?
      If no: Do you think this is fair/right?

8. Do you decide for what your family spends their budget? Yes / No
   Also with larger investments?

9. Who has greater authority in bringing up your children? (If children exist)
   Ba / Aama
   Why?

10. Do all your (schoolage) children visit school?
    8.1 Which schools do they visit?
    8.2 If they visit different schools or none: Why?

11. Do you think that women should be free to choose their spouse and propose marriage to men?
    Agree / Disagree
    Why?

12. Do you think that the father of the family should have greater authority…
    12.1… When it comes to the bringing up of children? Agree / Disagree
    Why?
    12.2… When it comes to the spending of family budgets? Agree / Disagree
    Why?
13. What do you think of the following statement: “A good woman should never question her husband’s opinions, even if she disagrees with them.”? Agree / Disagree

14. How far away from your home have you been on your own? Why? (interested/allowed)?
   14.1 If you need something that is far away (for example, market or hospital), do you usually go there alone?
   If no, with whom?

15. Have you ever experienced domestic violence? Yes / No

16. What is your opinion about chaupauddi?
   16.2 Are you restricted in any way during your period?

STATUS WITHIN SOCIETY

17. Are you part of a social organisation? (Like a club or regular gathering) Yes / No
   If yes, what kind and what is your role?

18. Are you actively involved in politics? Yes / No
   If yes, what position?

19. Do you think that women should have a greater responsibility for solving intellectual and social problems of the society? Agree / Disagree

20. What do you think about the following statement: “Women should be concerned less about their rights but try to become good wives and mothers.”? Agree / Disagree

21. Do you think that a woman should have the same freedom as a man? Yes / No

22. Do you think that more women should be in positions of political leadership? Agree / Disagree

23. On a scale from one to ten, how happy are you with your life? If one means extremely unhappy and ten means extremely happy.
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

24. If you could change something about the situation of the women in your community, what would that be?
Appendix B (final version)

INFORMED CONSENT

Thank you for taking part in our research. In the following, you are going to hear a few questions. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree and explain your view. Please try to answer all the question as honest as possible. There are no right or wrong answers. Your last name will only be seen by us and our translator. All your answers will be kept anonymously and only used for the research we do at our university. You can stop the questionnaire at any time. If you don’t want to answer any specific question, you can just say “next question”.

I have understood these conditions and agree with them.

(signature)

Questionnaire

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Last Name:

Age:

Education: Literate / Illiterate

None / primary school / lower secondary / secondary / S.L.C./ Intermediate / Graduate (bachelor) / Post-Graduate (master)

Are you married? Yes / No

If yes: Is your marriage arranged?

At what age?

How many people live in your house (pariwaar)?

How many children do you have (How many girls/boys)?

Are you suffering from any health problems?

If yes, what?

ECONOMIC STATUS

1. Do you work outside of your home? Yes / No

If yes: What do you do?

On average, how many hours per day?

1.5 In your community, do women get the same pay compared to their male co-workers?

Do you think it should be that way?
2. What is the average annual income of your family:
   How is it generated? Agriculture (how many animals, square meters etc.), employment…
   How much do you contribute to it?

3. Do you have property under your name? Yes / No
   If yes, what?

4. Do you think that women should be concerned with their duties of childbearing and house
   tending rather than improving their professional business careers? Agree / Disagree
   Why?

5. Do you think that women should be regarded as less capable of contributing to economic
   production compared to men? Agree / Disagree
   Why?

6. When somebody applies for a job, do you think that his or her gender should influence the
   chances of getting it? Agree / Disagree
   Why?

7. How is the work division inside of your family (who does what)?
   7.1 Does your husband help you with house-tending activities like cooking or cleaning?
   If no: Do you think this is fair/right?

8. Do you decide for what your family spends their budget? Yes / No
   Also with larger investments?

9. Who has greater authority in bringing up your children? (If children exist)
   Ba / Aama
   Why?

10. Do all your (schoolage) children visit school?
   8.1 Which schools do they visit?
   8.2 If they visit different schools or none: Why?

11. Do you think that women should be free to choose their spouse and propose marriage to
    men? Agree / Disagree
    Why?
    11.1 What is your opinion about inter-caste marriage?
12. Do you think that the father of the family should have greater authority than the mother... 

12.1... When it comes to the bringing up of children? Agree / Disagree

12.2... When it comes to the spending of family budgets? Agree / Disagree

13. What do you think of the following statement: “A good woman should never question her husband’s opinions, even if she disagrees with them.”? Agree / Disagree

14. How far away from your home have you been on your own?

14.1 If you need something that is far away (for example, market or hospital), do you usually go there alone?

If no, with whom?

15. Have you ever experienced domestic violence? Yes / No

15.1 What is your opinion about men in your community who drink and play?

16. What is your opinion about chaupauddi?

16.2 Are you restricted in any way during your period?

If yes, was this also the case after your child was born (if child exists)?

17. Are you part of a social organisation? (Like a club or regular gathering) Yes / No

If yes, what kind and what is your role?

18. Are you actively involved in politics? Yes / No

If yes, what position?

19. Do you think that women should have a greater responsibility for solving intellectual and social problems of the society? Agree / Disagree

20. What do you think about the following statement: “Women should be concerned less about their rights but try to become good wives and mothers.”? Agree / Disagree

21. Do you think that a woman should have the same freedom as a man? Yes / No
22. Do you think that more women should be in positions of political leadership?  
Agree / Disagree

23. On a scale from one to ten, how happy are you with your life? If one means extremely unhappy and ten means extremely happy.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

23.1 Do you think that the situation of women in your community is improving?

24. If you could change something about the situation of the women in your community, what would that be?

Appendix C: Women poetry

To get a better picture about the situation of women, we visited an event against women violence which was organized by the local NGO BYC Baglung. Some women of the community performed self-made folksongs about their situation. The texts showed that they are aware about inequality and are eager to change their situation. Here are some translated excerpts:

“Our song spreads over the whole country
Let’s rise up, discriminated women!
Why is there injustice and suffering
Born as women, to live is our right
[...]

Women should be in a higher position
By eradicating women discrimination
We should not be indifferent to the injustice
Fight against it, being in unity”

“We are back warded so we want to change the world
If there is a daughter, they abort
If they know there is a son, they give a party
We are back warded so we want to change the world

Many women died because of rape and dowry
We are back warded so we want to change the world
Untouchables, poor, and other ethnic groups
We have to grab our happiness (they will not give it to us easily)
We are back warded so we want to change the world

Hey men, listen to us carefully
We are going to make a law which gives us equality
We are back warded so we want to change the world

Rape, murder, and violence
are going to end without effort
We are back warded so we want to change the world”