

FEED THE FUTURE INNOVATION LAB FOR LIVESTOCK SYSTEMS

UNDERSTANDING EMPOWERMENT IN ORDER TO IMPROVE NUTRITIONAL OUTCOMES: INITIAL FINDINGS FROM NEPAL CASE STUDIES

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Background

Development institutions constantly seek effective ways to work with local communities to build sustainable change. Research has shown that diffusion of information and adoption of new practices becomes sustainable when they are tailored to the local context (Sugden et al., 2014). This requires recognition of and a familiarity with the unique relationships and distribution and availability of resources within a community, as well as a nuanced understanding of how local people perceive and understand critical concepts.

Empowerment is a concept that is heavily studied and targeted by research and development institutions in Nepal. Furthermore, empowerment of vulnerable groups is a priority issue of the Government of Nepal, as illustrated by the integration of Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) within the Constitution of 2015. Under its new constitution, Nepal directly addresses issues of gender- and social-based inequality in their Three-Year Plan, which identifies guidelines for implementing GESI within governmental ministries and across all sectors. At the community level, empowerment is a major focus of GESI in part due to its potential to influence access to, utilization of, and consumption of resources (GESI Working Group, 2017).

Researchers and government and development practitioners in Nepal share a general definition of *empowerment* that is integrated into development programs and serves development strategies. Despite this institutional level agreement about the meaning of *empowerment* as it pertains to governmental initiatives, individual conceptualizations of *empowerment* vary at the personal level. Other differences in the conceptualization of *empowerment* arise at the community level which differ greatly from the institutionalized governmental definition. The implementation of projects may therefore be affected by differences in the interpretation of *empowerment* by communities and institutional partners.

In response to this issue, the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems, in collaboration and with support from the Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agriculture Extension Services

Vulnerable groups and Intersectionality

- **Vulnerable groups** in Nepal include rural and remote populations, the poor, low caste (*Dalit*) and ethnic minorities (*Janajatis*), women, and children.
- The **intersectionality** of vulnerabilities in Nepal requires researchers to address the **social, ecological, economic, political, and gender** differences in vulnerability as a combination of experiences as individuals often experience multiple forms of disempowerment (Nightingale, 2011).
- **Addressing intersectionality** requires researchers to consider individuals based on a combination of their circumstances rather than placing them in a singular category.

(INGENAES) project, sought to identify differences in the conceptualization of empowerment among institutions and rural communities in Nepal and to understand how differing conceptualizations may affect projects seeking to influence access to and utilization of nutritious foods. Of particular interest to the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems is the influence empowerment may have on the consumption of animal-source foods. For this reason, a primary concern of the Livestock Systems Innovation Lab is to identify how different conceptualizations of empowerment may influence nutritional practices at the community level.

Methodology

The initial phase of this study was conducted in July 2017, followed by a second phase of data collection and follow-up in November 2017. In total, researchers conducted 7 focus group discussions using the Community Concept Drawing (CCD) Methodology, developed by Chesney McOmber of the University of Florida. The methodology involves a participatory drawing exercise in which participants are asked to illustrate, on paper, their idea of the most, intermediate, and least empowered man, followed by their idea of the most, intermediate, and least empowered woman (See Figure 1). Following the drawing phase of the exercise, researchers then ask participants to rank, as a group, the most important enabling structures that facilitate empowerment and the most important barriers to empowerment for men and women. Finally, researchers ask participants to describe what is needed (in terms of community structures, policy, resources, trainings, etc.) for the least empowered man or woman to rise to the position of the intermediate empowered person, and what is needed for the intermediate empowered person to move to the position of the most empowered person.

Table 1: Study sites where CCD sessions were conducted:

<i>Participants from rural communities</i>	<i>Participants from development institutions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ratamate^{W, M} ● Bitaripokhari^{W, M} ● Pakheri^W 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pokhara^{Mx} ● Dhulikhel^{Mx}

^W CCD session conducted with women.

^M CCD session conducted with men.

^{Mx} CCD session conducted with a mixed group of men and women.



Figure 1: A participant from the woman's group CCD session in Bitaripokhari contributes illustrations to the CCD drawing. The drawing divides a piece of paper into three sections: most, intermediate, and least empowered (from top to bottom). The participants draw their interpretation of each level of empowerment. Defining levels of empowerment allowed researchers to identify trends in asset ownership, decision-making power, diet, and family dynamics that participants associated with increased or decreased empowerment.

The initial phase of study involved data collection using the CCD among smallholders in rural communities. During the second phase, researchers conducted the CCD with development practitioners. In smallholder rural communities, CCD sessions were conducted with 3 women's groups and 2 men's groups, with 15-30

individuals in each group. Among development practitioners, 2 CCD sessions were conducted in mixed-gender groups that included 5-8 individuals. All CCD sessions conducted with smallholder communities took place in 3 communities located in the Central Development Region. CCD sessions with development practitioners took place in 2 municipalities, with one in the Central Development Region (Project area 1) and one in the Western Development Region (Project area 2). Table 1 illustrates the municipalities associated with each participant group (rural communities and development institutions).

The CCDs conducted with development practitioners included one session with a mixed participant group, including members of different NGOs and INGOs (Pokhara), and one single-organization CCD session (Dhulikhel), with participants from a local NGO, BBP-Pariwar. The smallholder communities that participated in this study were all beneficiaries of BBP-Pariwar. Following the initial CCD sessions with the communities, researchers returned in November of 2017 to conduct a follow-up discussion with one of the participant groups (Ratamate). The follow-up group interview sought to gain feedback from the community with respect to their perceptions about the tool.



Figure 2: *The CCD Methodology utilizes participatory group drawing to map and develop concepts as they relate to the participant group. The leftmost and middle images above depict two sessions conducted in rural Bitaripokhari. The image on the far right depicts the mix-gender session conducted with development practitioners of BBP-Pariwar in Dhulikhel. The participants drew and discussed three levels of empowerment (most, intermediate, and least) of men and women, as perceived in their community experience.*

Project area

Project area 1 includes CCD sessions conducted in the Central Development Region (CDR). Geographically situated in the east-central part of Nepal, the CDR is the most developed region of Nepal. The capital city of Nepal, Kathmandu, falls in this region. Pokhara, the site of the first CCD session with development practitioners, lies in the Western Development Region (WDR) of Project area 2.

Results

This section presents a summary of initial findings from the CCD sessions conducted with smallholder communities. The findings below are organized by theme rather than importance, which will be determined after further analysis. First, researchers discuss the key findings from rural communities and second, from development practitioners.

Key findings from rural communities:

Table 2: Sources of empowerment

Sources of empowerment	Source of women's empowerment according to men	Source of women's empowerment according to women	Source of men's empowerment according to men	Source of men's empowerment according to women
Family support	X	X	X	X
Financial stability	X	X	X	X
Technical skills training	X	X		
Self-confidence		X*		
Community participation		X		
Power to make independent decisions		X		
Asset and land ownership		X	X	X
Children's education		X	X	
Health		X	X	
*Reported by all three communities				

- **Family support** is emphasized as a source of empowerment **for men and women** among both men and women participants. Women participants mentioned lack of family support as a barrier to women's empowerment.

Table 3: Barriers to empowerment

Barriers to empowerment	Barrier to women's empowerment according to men	Barrier to women's empowerment according to women	Barrier to men's empowerment according to men	Barrier to men's empowerment according to women
Lack of family support		X		

- **Financial stability** plays a significant role in empowerment of **men and women** according to both men and women. However, men and women participants reported differences in how decisions around money are made (who decides how much to spend and on what, etc.). The

perceptions of men and women surrounding gender roles in financial decision-making varied between and within communities, with some communities favoring participation of women in financial decision-making and others favoring men as the primary decision-maker regarding financial matters.

- **Technical skills trainings** (livestock rearing, agricultural practice, credit skills, reading/writing) play an important role in improving and enabling environment for **women's empowerment** according to men and women. However, these skill-training opportunities were not reported as important to men's empowerment by men or women participant groups.
- **Women** participants from all three communities mention the importance of **self-confidence**, ability to express one's ideas in public, ability to make independent decisions, and ability to participate in the community. Meanwhile, men emphasized the importance of resource and asset-based sources of empowerment.
- **Men and women participants** from **Ratamate** and women participants from **Pakheri** emphasized the importance of their **children's education** in both men's and women's empowerment. Men emphasized the importance of providing access to quality education to their children while women emphasized the ability to pass their own knowledge on to their children.
- Men's group 1 and women's group 1 and 2 cite **property ownership** in the top 5 enabling factors for empowerment.
- Only women participants reported **health** as the most important factor (ranked 1 out of 5) for enabling women's empowerment. Men from Pokhara also ranked health within the top 5 enabling factors; however, it ranked it 5 out of 5.

Key findings from the follow-up group interview in Ratamate:

- Participants reported that the CCD methodology was useful for **sparking conversations** about empowerment within the community and within the household.
- Participants reported that the CCD methodology allowed them to better identify, refine, and articulate their conceptualization of empowerment.

Key findings from development practitioner sessions:

- The messages conveyed during practitioner settings reinforced the conceptualization of empowerment shared in community CCD sessions; this was particularly true when comparing BBP-Pariwar with their beneficiary communities.
- Development practitioners were in conflict between their personal perceptions of empowerment and their perceptions of empowerment as learned from educational experiences and interaction with Western ideologies of empowerment embedded in development practice. For example, the perception of the Sari (a traditional Nepali women's dress) as a symbol of empowerment for women was debated against the perception of the Sari as a symbol of patriarchy and traditionalism. In another instance, participants would change their answer to favor less traditional views after thinking aloud about what they are taught in development practice.
- The conflict between the participants' identities as "Nepali" and "practitioner" caused intrapersonal and interpersonal debate.

- The participants reported the CCD methodology would be applicable for their work with communities.
- The participants reported that the CCD was helpful in better understanding their personal perceptions of empowerment.

Recommendations

Several interesting findings emerged from the CCD sessions. During the follow-up interview in Ratamate, researchers heard that participants continued to engage in discussions surrounding empowerment for several weeks following the CCD. The participants reported better understanding of their own conceptualizations of empowerment and a greater ability to articulate their perspectives. Researchers believe there is value in exploring the CCD as a development tool for enhancing community voices. More specifically, the CCD may build the capacity of communities to identify their own development priorities, potentially improving their ability to negotiate with local NGOs. Furthermore, the value of the CCD as a tool for empowerment may be useful to civil society organizations and community organizations seeking to refine and prioritize locally directed change. Finally, the CCD need not only focus on empowerment. Other concepts that may aid the investigation of ASF consumption in rural Nepal include *health* or *wellbeing*.

All communities and groups (men and women) associated improved empowerment (of men and women) with increased consumption of ASF. This finding is interesting, as current literature focuses on the impact of *women's* empowerment, specifically, in improving ASF consumption (Bouis, 2000; Bushamuka et al., 2005; Colecraft et al., 2006; Gillespie & van den Bold, 2017; Nielsen, Roos, & Thilsted, 2003; SPRING, 2014; Workicho et al., 2016). These results point towards men's empowerment as important for determining men's consumption of ASF. Also interesting is the inherent link between men's and women's empowerment as described in the CCD, in which the empowerment level of men may predict the empowerment level of their spouse. For example, the most empowered man is often married to a woman with optimum levels of empowerment as conceptualized by the community. In this way, empowerment of one partner attracts or facilitates empowerment of the other partner. This yields the question, what role does men's empowerment have on ASF consumption? To our knowledge, there is no literature investigating this connection.

Based on the initial findings presented above, researchers recommend interventions in empowerment to focus on the following areas identified by the community CCDs: self-confidence, intra-household dynamics, technical skill training in agriculture or livestock rearing, education, and financial skill-building. These recommendations should be considered within the context of the communities that participated in the CCD sessions, as the results of CCD may vary greatly between regions of Nepal. Furthermore, it should be noted that women and men displayed different empowerment priorities. As participants reported discussing the CCD for several weeks following the sessions, they mentioned that after further thought they had changed their opinion on several elements of empowerment. For example, the women participants reported that they would change the ranking of the key factors of empowerment. However, by the time this follow-up interview took place, many of these community insights were forgotten by the participants. In this case, the researchers recommend a follow-up time of 1 week following the CCD session. The quick follow-up will allow time for participants to contemplate their conceptualizations of empowerment and allow them to reevaluate and change their responses to better reflect their reality.

In terms of its utilization with development practitioners, the CCD holds promise as a tool for self-reflection and for identifying synergies and differences between community and development goals. Additionally, the CCD could be utilized to identify the most relevant domains of empowerment, which could support the construction of an adapted, context-specific empowerment index (for example, an

adapted Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) or Women's Empowerment in Livestock Index (WELI), for livestock). In the future, the researchers recommend using this tool in a workshop format for development practitioners in which the participants both learn and participate in the CCD session. In this way, the practitioners are able to learn the methodology for use in the field while reflecting on and becoming familiar with their own conceptualizations of empowerment.

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