

Gender Equality in Work

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Theme: Women's Empowerment | **Location:** Nepal

BACKGROUND

Heifer International's *Strengthening Smallholder Enterprises of Livestock Value Chain (SLVC)* program in Nepal aims to support women to empower themselves and improve their livelihoods. Started in 2012, the program emphasizes the importance of household dynamics and involves family members, community leaders, and social groups as secondary project participants. These are a set of trainings, discussions, and reflections that create an environment conducive to personal growth and inspire behavioral change in people.

This brief is part of a larger study that analyzes indicators of women's empowerment across demographic variables.

METHODOLOGY

Using a mixed method approach, the study (November 2021 – May 2023) involved 251 respondents, including 176 female participants and 75 male respondents from the same households. The qualitative study involved 10 focus group discussions, as well as key informant interviews with project stakeholders. Secondary data from the nationally representative Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) database of Nepal, Bangladesh, and India were used to corroborate their findings.

This brief focuses on the results of women's agency, family support and care work.



Primary Finding: Women's empowerment models that target women, their environment, and the stakeholders around them improve women's agency and positively influence the attitudes of some of the men closest to them toward the equal distribution of unpaid domestic work.

Key words: Women's Agency, Care Work, Nepal, Women's Empowerment

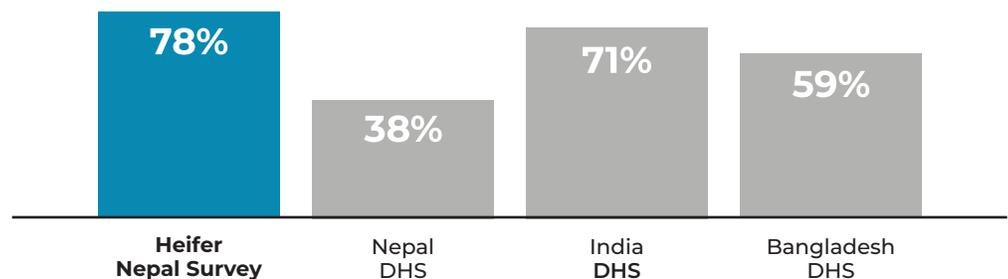
Rationale

When exploring what influences household dynamics, this study reviewed outcomes related to women's autonomy, care work, participation in decision-making, and the degree of support women received from their families to take part in the program. The research findings highlight that including women in household decision-making can have beneficial effects on child education, health and nutrition, especially in societies with patriarchal power structures.

Participation in Decision-Making

In the Heifer study, 78 percent of women say they have decision-making powers on domestic issues. This outcome shows that intervention can have significant positive impacts in terms of enabling women to empower themselves.

Figure 1: Percentage of women who say they usually make decisions on domestic issues



Support from Family

Family support plays a crucial role in initiating — and sustaining — women's empowerment programs. Heifer and its local partners focus on supporting communities to empower themselves with techniques for improving farming and animal production, designed to benefit families over the long term. The study shows that convincing women to join, and continue with, the program became easier when their families saw it helped them improve their economic status.

The qualitative study revealed initial opposition from mothers-in-law toward younger women's participation in the program. As the benefits of the program became clear, many older women changed their minds and supported their daughters-in-law's participation in it. There was also a positive shift in intra-household gender relations, with men increasingly recognizing and appreciating the contributions their wives made to household income.

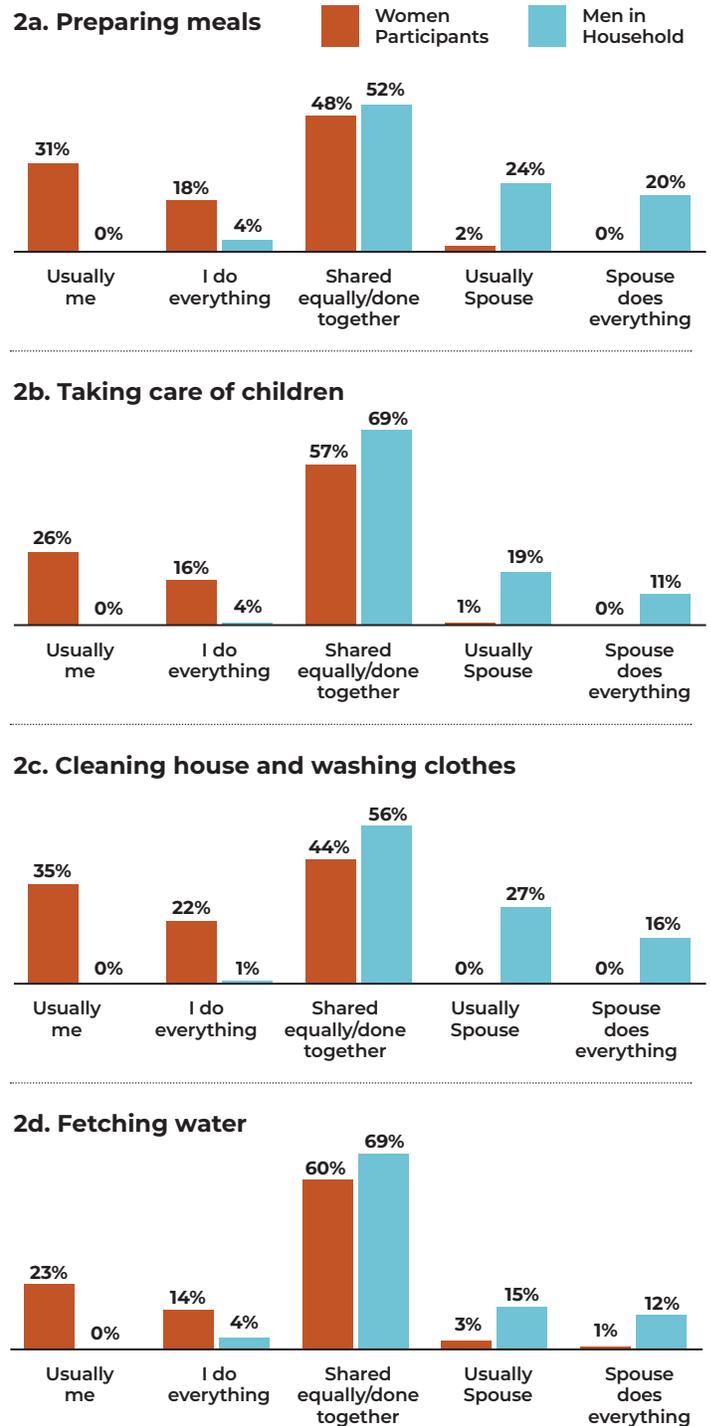
Achieving Gender Equality in Care Work

Initially, unequal gender relations prevailed in the communities where Heifer Nepal's SLVC program operated, particularly regarding responsibilities for care and the division of housework. Many women mentioned time management issues and feeling overwhelmed when they first joined the program. Families were often hesitant about women's participation in the program. Even when their husbands were supportive, women often had to finish household chores before taking part in program activities.

Despite their demanding workload, the women who joined the program remained dedicated to it. Many husbands and wives now say they believe in sharing household duties equally. Encouragingly, some women also say they are teaching their sons to do housework and become more self-reliant at home.

The majority of men in the household agreed that household tasks should be shared equally between men and women (Figure 2). They testify to how women's empowerment programs address the gender disparity in care work.

Figure 2: Who in household is responsible for:



Source: Heifer Nepal Survey

Conclusion

Family support is crucial to women empowering themselves — this is evident where initial opposition from mothers-in-law shifted to support. This study shows that 78 percent of women in Heifer Nepal's SLVC program said they held decision-making powers in domestic issues (Figure 1).

This highlights a significant amount of progress in women's empowerment, particularly since changing social norms on the division of household work is hard to achieve in patriarchal societies.