The role of gender and ethnicity in household decision-making: Evidence from rural Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Gender disparity in household decision-making is a common phenomenon in developing countries. It is influenced by ethnicity, culture and geographical location. Household decision-making processes were examined in rural Nepal with a primary focus on gender roles in the context of three distinct ethnic communities (*Brahmin/Chhetri*, *Gurung* and *Tharu*) in the *Chitwan* district. A combination of participatory rural appraisal (n=6), gender analysis (n=6), key informant interviews (n=14) and a household socio-economic survey (n=123) were used to collect data. At the household level men and women were interviewed separately. The involvement of women in economic activities was quite high but differed substantially between the ethnic groups and by type of household economic activity. Proportionately fewer *Brahmin/Chhetri* women were engaged in livestock husbandry compared to the other two ethnic groups. Men and women jointly decided the allocation of family labour to on-farm and marketing activities, but there was a large variation across the ethnic groups (eg. 43% in *Gurung* vs. 90% in *Tharu* communities). Women were more involved in household management and family well-being related activities than men in all three ethnic groups, with the highest participation rates occurring amongst the *Tharu* women. The study supports the argument that poverty alleviation strategies and projects to improve rural well-being should be sensitive to gender roles and ethnicity.

Keywords*: Household decision-making, gender roles, ethnicity, gender analysis, participatory rural appraisal, Nepal, rural areas.*

INTRODUCTION

Nepal is an ethnically diverse country with many languages and dialects, and cultures (AsDB & ICIMOD, 1992). As in other developing countries, gender discrimination in household decision-making is widespread in Nepal (Acharya, 1993; Bajracharya, 1994; Sattaur, 1996). It varies also by caste systems, class, culture, religion and geographic location, particularly in rural areas (Acharya & Bennett, 1981; Bajracharya, 1994; Murthy, 1996).

The household is a crucial unit for consumption and labour supply decisions in the rural environment (Wheelock & Oughton, 1996). Rural household decisions are made in the light of social and economic changes and are normally guided by the family's well-being and economic status (Acharya, 1993; Tiwari, 1997). Decisions are also dependent on the characteristics of the household, for example, age and gender, health status, farming experience, knowledge and skills, and relationships among members (Reijntjes *et al.*, 1992). Household decisions may alter gender divisions of labour within the household (Wheelock & Oughton, 1996). Decision-making processes involve household members through negotiation, and balancing decisions between work for income and self-consumption (Omari, 1995; Wheelock & Oughton, 1996). Rural household decisions also vary by

ethnicity (Acharya & Bennett, 1981; Acharya, 1993; Bajracharya, 1994; Mencher, 1993; Sattaur, 1996), and are often gender specific (Jelin, 1991; Bagchi, 1993; Ghosh-Ahmed 1993; Bajracharya, 1994; Omari, 1995).

Household decisions are an important factor to consider in local level planning and policy formulation, especially by government and non-governmental organisations (GOs and NGOs) for rural areas. However, household decision-making processes are not well understood in Nepal's rural context, particularly in relation to gender and ethnicity (Acharya & Bennett, 1981; Bajracharya, 1994). In this paper, household decision-making processes are examined with a primary focus on gender roles in the context of three distinct ethnic communities (*Brahmin/Chhetri, Gurung* and *Tharu*) in the *Chitwan* district of central rural Nepal. These three ethnic communities have a similar occupational structure, but differ in terms of their settlement history.

A MODEL OF HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The conceptual model of household decision-making process developed for this research is presented in Figure 1. The household decision-making process was hypothesised to be associated with five broad groups of variables: demographic characteristics; household attributes; resource endowments; off-farm activities; and on-farm activities.

In rural Nepal the multi-generational household system predominates. Parents, children, grand children and some relatives representing different age cohorts and gender live together in the same household. In general, older household members are expected to dominate household decisions as they have traditional respect from the other household members, because of their experience and knowledge. Other adults may have limited roles in decision-making and children often are not involved at all. Not only do men dominate household decision-making; older women (especially mother-in-laws) dominate over the junior female household members. For example, a daughter-in-law in an extended household is likely to have considerably less power and limited autonomy than a wife in a nuclear family.

Household attributes such as family size and dependency ratio also influence household decision-making. In larger households, the head is required to play a greater role in major decisions, and often other members are less involved compared to households with fewer members. Similarly, a household with a high dependency ratio (number of persons under 15 and over 64 divided by the total number of household members) is likely to have a greater involvement of women in activities related to family well-being decisions, but less involvement in production and marketing activities than a household with a lower dependency ratio.

Land, livestock, assets and capital, education and personal capabilities (for example, knowledge and types of skills) comprise the major resource attributes associated with household decision-making processes. 'Resource poor' households often have more children, less cultivable land area per capita, fewer livestock and less formal

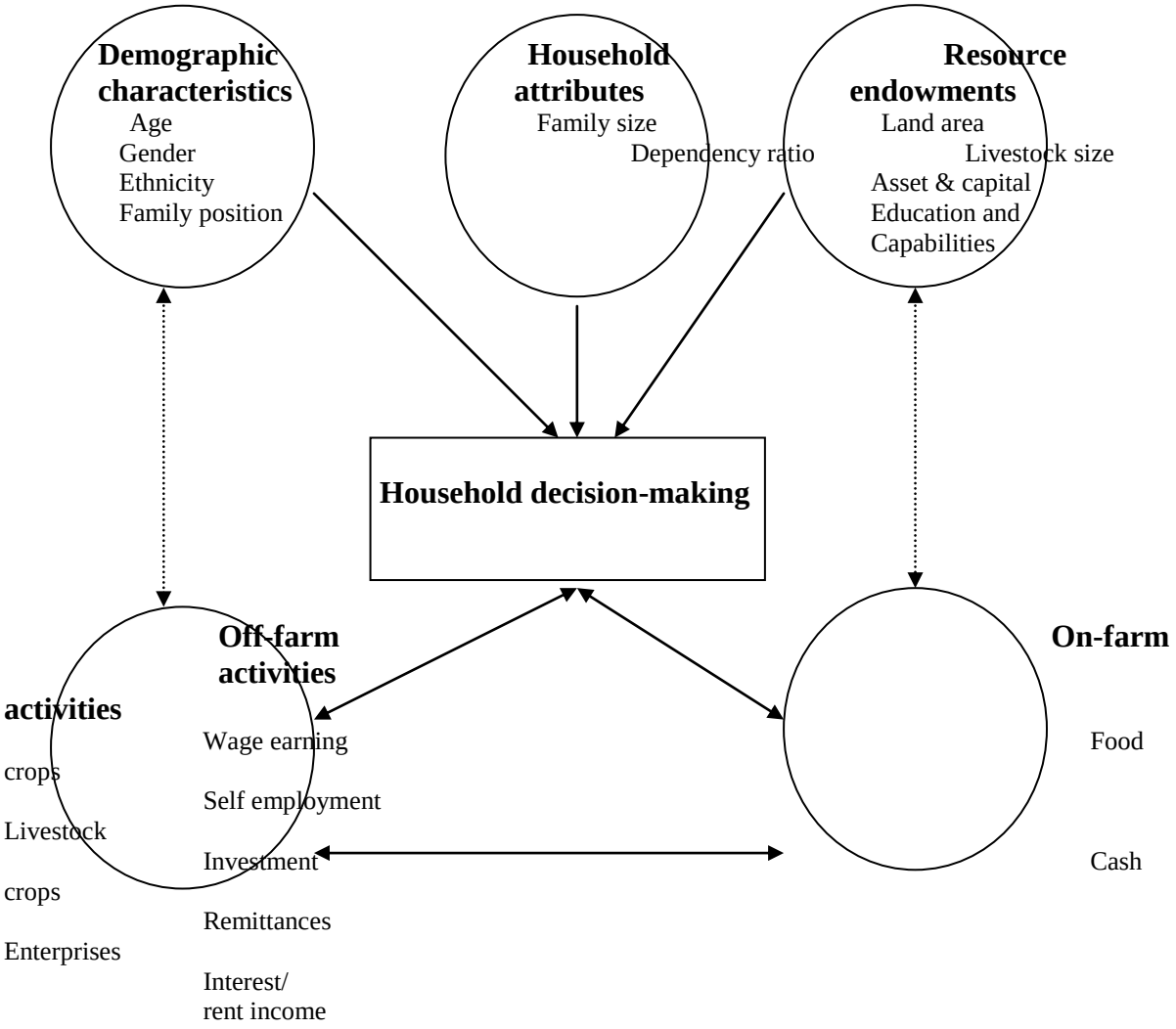

Figure 1. A conceptual framework of factors influencing household decision-making in rural Nepal.

education. In such households, women can be expected to be more involved in tendering livestock and other farm menial work while those from better resourced households may employ extra helping hands.

On-farm activities such as the production of crops, livestock and farm-based enterprises influence the household's resource endowment position and thus are likely to influence household decision-making and constrain women to on-farm production activities. In contrast, men are likely to be involved more with the marketing of cash crops.

Off-farm activities include waged work, self employment and salaried employment in the public and private sectors. Pensions and remittances are other sources of off-farm income that may influence a household's situation. Off-farm activities will also change the flow of information to the household.

METHODS

Operationalisation of the conceptual model

To operationalise the conceptual model, variables representing the characteristics in Figure 1 were identified. The respondent's age was measured in years up to 1998 and gender and ethnicity were recorded based on prior information held by the researcher. The number of household members including children and the elderly were recorded directly through the survey questionnaire and dependency ratios were computed as explained earlier. The land area was recorded in the local unit, *kattha* ($1/30^{th}$ hectare), and later converted to hectares. The head of the household provided livestock classes and numbers. The annual household working capital and an individual's specific capabilities such as membership of organizations or community leadership of the household members were also recorded. Education was recorded as years of schooling. Because of the skewed distribution of educational attainment, it was categorised into five groups: illiterate, literates, up to class five, class 10 and higher education. On- and off-farm activities were recorded as described by the respondent. Gender roles in cultivation practices, livestock production and the marketing of major crops were assessed by asking 'Who does what?' Men and women were interviewed separately. Gender roles were assessed for activities related to family well-being and household labour allocation decisions.

Study area

The *Chitwan* district of Nepal was selected as a study site for the research. It is located in the *Terai* region of Nepal and has a population of 354,488 (CBS, 1997). The district is informally known as the 76^{th} district of Nepal, because although there are only 75 districts in Nepal for administrative purposes, people emigrate to *Chitwan* from all over the country.

Three distinct ethnic groups (*Brahmin/Chhetri, Gurung* and *Tharu*) were examined. These groups were selected on the basis of their common rural occupation, but different settlement history. Three Village Development Committees (VDCs) were purposively selected for the research based on their concentrations of the ethnic populations of interest. The *Bhandara* VDC was selected to represent the *Tharu* ethnic community, while the *Phulbari* and *Shivanagar* VDCs were selected to study the *Gurung* and *Brahmin/Chhetri* ethnic groups, respectively.

Data

Data collection involved three stages. First, a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and gender analysis (GA) was carried out to gain a general understanding of the research area and acquire information on gender and ethnicity roles in household. One PRA exercise was carried out in each ethnic community (n=3) and three sets of social maps and seasonal calendars were prepared. Gender analysis was performed separately for both men and women in each ethnic community to develop six sets of GA frames. In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 key informants who represented the ethnic population and relevant governmental and non-governmental organisations. Information obtained from the key informants provided an understanding of gender and ethnicity roles. In stage three, 123 households were surveyed in order to gain detailed data on household decision-making processes. After pre-testing, the household survey questionnaire was administered by the face-to-face method because most respondents did not have written records, were mainly illiterate and not accustomed to mail surveys.

Stratified random sampling was used to select the 123 households (40 households from the *Tharu* and *Brahmin/Chhetri* and 43 households from the *Gurung* ethnic group). Separate

interviews were conducted with one male and one female member from the same household so as to remove sex bias. In a "woman-headed household", the head woman and the eldest male member were interviewed. The survey data were edited for redundancies and incompleteness and entered into an EXCEL spreadsheet. Statistical analysis of the survey data was carried out with SAS.

RESULTS

Household characteristics by ethnicity and gender

Households in *Tharu* were 42% larger than those in *Gurung* and 19% larger than those in the Brahmin/*Chhetri* ethnic communities (Table 1). The smaller *Gurung* households reflected the long-term absence of household members from the community, as evidenced by the gender imbalance for this group (0.86 males per female compared to 1.08 and 1.04 males per female for the *Brahmin/Chhetri* and *Tharu* households, respectively).

Table 1. Household characteristics of survey respondents by gender and ethnicity in *Chitwan* district, Nepal (1998). Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

Characteristics	Ethnic Group			Overall
	Brahmin/Chhetri	Gurung	Tharu	
Household size				
Male	3.80 (1.43)	2.83 (1.63)	4.42 (2.31)	3.66 (1.93)
Female	3.52 (1.70)	3.27 (2.00)	4.27 (2.82)	3.68 (2.24)
Total	7.32 (2.40)	6.10 (3.05)	8.69 (4.70)	7.34 (3.64)
No. of dependents per household				
Male	1.25 (0.89)	1.20 (1.08)	2.40 (1.46)	1.60 (1.28)
Female	1.35 (1.18)	1.34 (1.28)	1.55 (1.37)	1.41 (1.27)
Age of the respondents				
Male	47 (12)	41 (17)	38 (10)	42 (14)
Female	42 (10)	41 (12)	33 (8)	39 (11)
Dependency ratio[1]				
Male	0.32	0.42	0.54	0.44
Female	0.38	0.41	0.36	0.38
Total	0.35	0.42	0.45	0.41

1 Dependency ratio = No. of dependents per household/ household size.

The *Tharu* households had proportionately more dependent members than the other two ethnic groups and of the dependents proportionately more were males in the *Tharu* and *Gurung* groups than in the *Brahmin/Chhetri* group. The smaller household size and fewer younger children in the *Brahmin/Chhetri* households generated a lower dependency ratio. On average the *Brahmin/Chhetri* respondents were three years older than those in the *Gurung* group and nine years older than the *Tharu* respondents. Female respondents were five years

younger than male respondents in both the *Tharu* and *Brahmin/Chhetri* groups, while both sexes were of the same age in the *Gurung* group.

Education and occupation of respondents

Gender inequality was highly pronounced in the educational attainment of the respondents (Table 2). For example, 51% of females were illiterate compared to 15% of the males (P<0.01). The illiteracy rate was 60-62% for the *Gurung* and *Tharu* female respondents, while twice as many *Tharu* male respondents were illiterate compared to their *Brahmin/Chhetri* and *Gurung* counterparts.

Table 2. Level of education and primary occupation of respondents by gender and ethnicity in *Chitwan* district, Nepal (1998).
(Percent respondents reporting)

Characteristics	Ethnicity						Overall	
	Brahmin/Chhetri		Gurung		Tharu			
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Education level (%)	**n=40**	**n=40**	**n=41**	**n=43**	**n=40**	**n=40**	**n=121**	**n=123**
Illiterate	10	30	12.2	60.5	22.5	62.5	14.9	51.2
Literate	35	45	22	20.9	27.5	35	28.1	33.3
Primary (1-5)	5	15	2.4	9.3	22.5	-	9.9	8.1
Secondary (6-10)	27.5	7.5	48.8	9.3	15	2.5	30.6	6.5
High school and above	22.5	2.5	14.6	-	12.5	-	16.5	0.8
Chi-Square	male respondents 22.39 (8)****					female respondents		
18.16 (8)*								
Primary occupation (%)	**n=40**	**n=40**	**n=41**	**n=43**	**n=40**	**n=40**	**n=121**	**n=123**
	5	2.5	29.3	-	97.5	30	43.8	10.6
Farming	30	5	31.7	-	-	-	20.7	1.6
Paid employment	5	-	-	-	2.5	-	2.5	-
Wage labour	12.5	7.5	2.4	-	-	-	5.0	2.4
Trade	-	-	2.4	-	-	2.5	0.8	0.8
Household work only	45	85	34.1	100	-	67.5	26.4	84.6
Farming and housework	2.5	-	-	-	-	-	0.8	-
Others (*Pandit)*								
Chi-square	male respondents 84.25 (12)****					female respondents		
36.33 (8)****								

Note: * P < 0.05 and ** P < 0.01, and * * * P < 0.001, respectively.

Among the *Brahmin/Chhetri* respondents, 50% of the males had attained a secondary or higher level of education compared to a meager 10% of the females. About 63% of the *Gurung* males also had attained a secondary or higher level of education. In summary, the *Tharu* people were the least educated of the three ethnic groups, while women lagged far behind men in all three ethnic groups.

The primary occupation of respondents varied widely by ethnicity (Table 2). Nearly all *Tharu* male respondents reported farming as their primary occupation while less than 3% were engaged in waged labour (P<0.01). Proportionately more *Gurung* men were involved in paid employment (32%) and one in eight of the *Brahmin/Chhetri* males were engaged in trading. All of the *Gurung*, 85% the *Brahmin/Chhetri* and two-thirds of the *Tharu* women reported farming and households work as their primary occupation. None of the female respondents were engaged as a waged labourer.

Household resource endowment

Table 3 exhibits the major physical resource endowments of the respondent households. Farm size (total land area) was 50% larger for the *Brahmin/Chhetri* than the farms owned by the other ethnic households. The larger land area supported more livestock. The *Gurung* households had substantially more poultry, while *Tharus* had proportionately more small ruminants.

Table 3. Physical resource endowment of respondent households in *Chitwan*, Nepal (1998). Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

Resources	Ethnicity			Overall n=123
	Brahmin/Chhetri n=40	Gurung n=43	Tharu n=40	
Total land area (ha.) (irrigated + unirrigated)	0.98 (0.69)	0.63 (0.67)	0.63 (0.84)	0.74 (0.75)
Large ruminants				
Cow, buffalo and oxen (no.)				
Adult	2.20 (1.50)	1.60 (1.30)	2.00 (1.60)	1.90 (1.40)
Heifer	1.20 (0.90)	0.95 (0.84)	0.42 (0.67)	0.88 (0.87)
Small ruminants				
Goat, sheep (no.)				
Adult	1.20 (1.20)	0.79 (1.05)	2.47 (3.07)	1.49 (2.09)
Kid/lamb	1.02 (1.50)	0.69 (1.05)	1.30 (1.89)	1.00 (1.54)
Small non-ruminants				
Pig (no.)				
Adult	0.07 (0.4)	0.11 (0.54)	0.05 (0.22)	0.08 (0.43)
Piglet	0.05 (0.3)	0.11 (0.39)	0.05 (0.22)	0.07 (0.31)
Poultry and ducks (no.)	30.10 (109.4)	170.20 (638)	17.07 (16.12)	74.86 (386)

The coefficient of variation was very high for poultry and duck ownership in the non-*Tharu* ethnic households (>300%) and for small ruminant ownership in all three ethnic groups. Small non-ruminants were less prevalent than large ruminants among all ethnic groups. Overall, the *Brahmin/Chhetri* households were better resourced than the other two ethnic groups.

Time use profile

One full day's activities of a man and a woman from the same house were monitored in each ethnic group on an hourly basis. The activities were later categorised into four major sets: livestock-related, household work, personal activities and social work. Overall, women and men spent 18 and 16.5 hours a day, respectively, in these activities (Figure 2). The daily activities of *Brahmin/Chhetri* women had started by 4 am and continued up to 10 pm, while men started their day about one hour later and stopped half an hour earlier. In the *Brahmin/Chhetri* community, women spent most time on household chores followed by livestock care and management, while men spent most of their time on personal activities. The *Gurung* women were relatively more involved in social activities than the other ethnic women.

The *Tharu* men spent more than 10 hours a day on farming activities. Women were more involved in livestock-related activities than the allocation of time reflects their relative importance to the two communities. The *Brahmin/Chhetri* and *Gurung* women spent more than nine hours a day on household chores while men spent just about two hours a day on these tasks. Men, on the other hand, allocated more time to personal activities (playing cards, "gossiping" etc).

Gender role in household decision-making

Nine key activities related to household decision-making were identified during the PRA sessions. Responses from the males and females with respect to their roles in decision-making are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Gender roles in decisions related to household activities as reported by male (√) and female (*) respondents (*Chitwan* district 1998).

Activities	Brahmin/Chhetri		Gurung		Tharu	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Determining number of children	√ √ * *		√ *	√ √ * *	√ √ * *	√ √ * *
Use of family planning measures	√√ * *		√ *	√ * *	√√ * *	*
Marketing of cereal crops	√√ * *		√√ * *	√ * *	√√ * *	√ √ *
Marketing of cash crops	√√ * *	*	√√ * *	√√ * *	√√ * *	√ √ * *
Marketing of large animals	√√ * *		√√ * *	√√ * *	√√ * *	*
Marketing of small animals	√√ * *	√ *	√ *	√√ * *	√√ * *	√ *
Working on off-farm activities	√√ * *		√√ * *	√ * *	√√ * *	√ *
Working as on-farm labourers	√√ * *	√√ * *	√√ * *	√√ * *	√√ * *	√ *
Marketing of poultry and ducks	n.a. n.a.	n.a. n.a.	n.a. n.a.	n.a. n.a.	n.a. n.a.	√√ * *

Note: (√√ and * *) denotes strong and (√ and *) weak participation in decisions.
A blank cell indicates no participation in decisions and n.a denotes data not available.

In general, the responses from males and females were consistent. Both agreed that men played a dominating role in all activities. Both male and female respondents also agreed that both of them had an equal role in decisions regarding the marketing of poultry and ducks. The *Gurung* females participated in all activities. The disparity in gender roles was less apparent in the *Gurung* than the other two ethnic groups. The *Tharu* females had "strong/weak" participation in all activities according to female respondents and in seven of

the nine activities according to male respondents. Decisions related to the marketing of poultry/duck were clearly dominated by *Tharu* women.

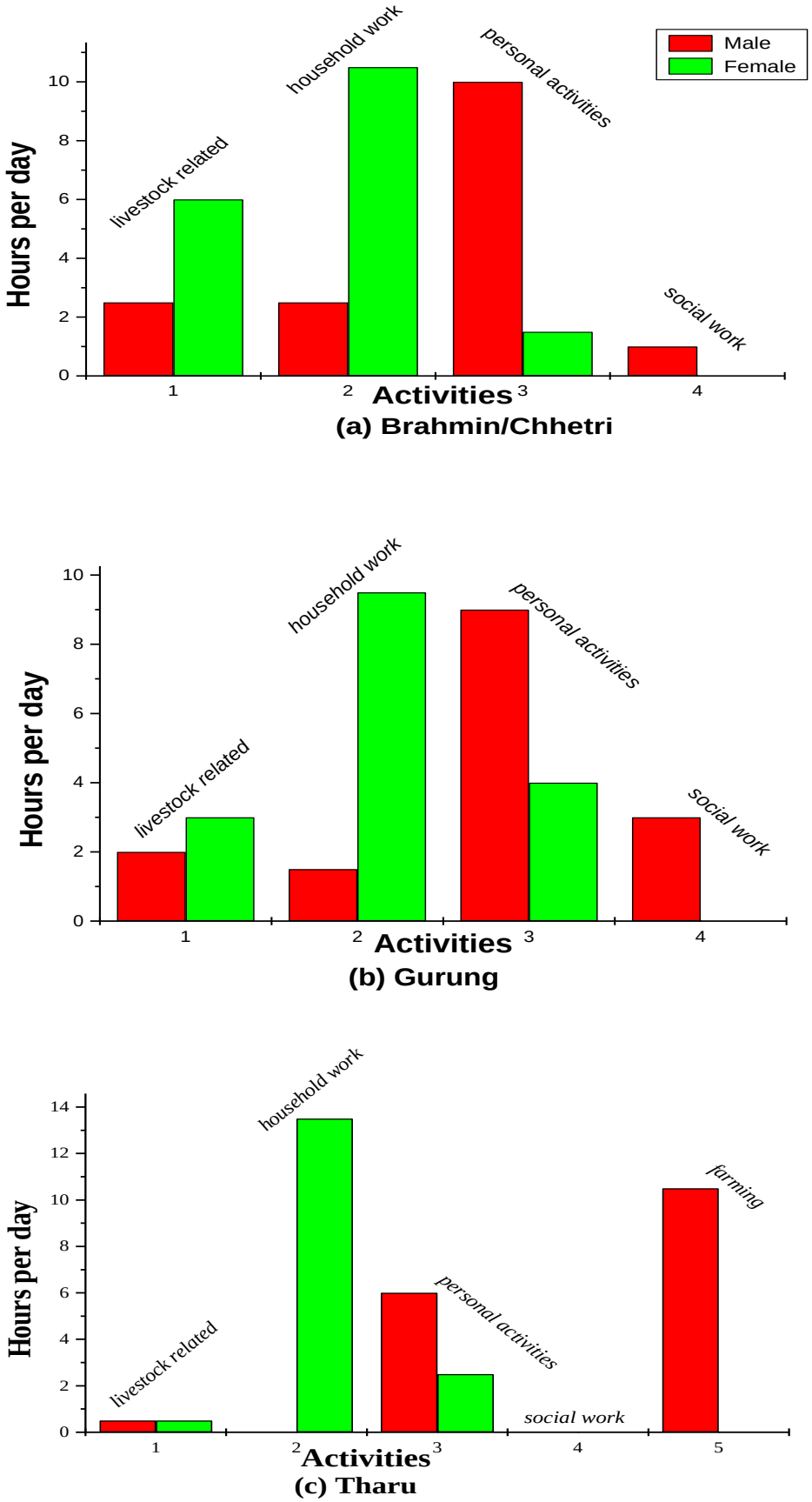

Figure 2. Time use profile by gender in (a) *Brahmin/Chhetri* (June 9) (b) *Gurung* May 28), and (c) *Tharu* (May 20) ethnic groups in the *Chitwan* District of Nepal (1998).

Gender role in labour allocation decisions

Gender role with respect to five decisions concerning the allocation of household labour was recorded separately for male and female respondents during the survey (Table 5). Responses were categorised as males, females or both (males and females).

Table 5. Gender role in labour allocation decisions reported by male and female respondents. (Percent respondents responding)

5a. Male

Decision on:	Ethnicity and gender role									Overall		
	Brahmin/Chhetri			Gurung			Tharu					
	M *n=40*	F *n=40*	B *n=40*	M *n=41*	F *n=41*	B *n=41*	M *n=40*	F *n=40*	B *n=40*	M *n=121*	F *n=121*	B *n=121*
Hiring a farm worker	32	20	48	12	42	46	3	2	95	16	21	63
Family labour for on-farm	30	20	50	12	44	44	-	7	93	14	24	62
Family labour for off-farm	33	10	57	42	29	29	5	-	95	27	13	60
Family labour for social service	38	10	52	59	24	17	13	2	85	37	12	51
Overall labour allocation [a]	26	3	71	46	27	27	5	2	93	26	11	63

[a] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 38), Gurung (n=41), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=119).

5b. Female

Decision on:	Ethnicity and gender role									Overall		
	Brahmin/Chhetri			Gurung			Tharu					
	M *n=40*	F *n=40*	B *n=40*	M *n=43*	F *n=43*	B *n=43*	M *n=40*	F *n=40*	B *n=40*	M *n=123*	F *n=123*	B *n=123*
Hiring a farm worker	30	25	45	9	49	42	-	2	98	13	26	61
Family labour for on-farm	25	27	48	19	42	39	-	7	93	15	26	59
Family labour for off-farm	30	12	58	42	28	30	5	-	95	26	14	60
Family labour for social service	33	12	55	53	28	19	13	2	85	33	15	52
Overall labour allocation[b]	18	8	74	47	30	23	5	2	93	24	14	62

Note: Note: M= Male F= Female B= Both; [b] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 38), Gurung (n=43), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=121).

Overall, responses from the males were consistent with those from the females. Joint decisions were common for all five elements of labour allocation: hiring a farm worker; use of family labour for on-farm activities; participation in off-farm and social services; and overall activities. This pattern was more distinct for *Tharu* households than the *Brahmin/Chhetri* households. Women in the *Gurung* community had a greater role in all labour allocation decisions compared to the females from the other two ethnic groups.

The *Brahmin/Chhetri* males exerted a greater role in labour allocation decisions with respect to hiring a farm worker and family labour for on-farm activities, while *Gurung* males had a greater say in the allocation of family labour to off-farm and social service activities.

Gender role in crop production decisions

Five decisions involving the area to be cultivated, crop varieties to be planted, fertilizer to be used and marketing of crop output were examined to identify gender roles. Similar to labour allocation decisions, the *Brahmin/Chhetri* and *Tharu* respondents identified a joint role in all five areas (Table 6). Very few respondents
agreed that females had distinct decision-making power. The *Gurung* males exerted a larger influence on decision-making compared to those from the other two ethnic groups. Disparity between genders with respect to crop activities was less pronounced among the *Gurungs* than the *Brahmin/Chhetri* and *Tharus*.

Table 6. Gender role in crop production decisions as reported by the male and female respondents. (Percent respondents responding)

6a. Male

Decision on:	Ethnicity and gender role									Overall		
	Brahmin/Chhetri			Gurung			Tharu					
	M n=40	F n=40	B n=40	M n=41	F n=41	B n=41	M n=40	F n=40	B n=40	M n=121	F n=121	B n=121
Area to be cultivated	25	7	68	27	27	46	8	-	92	20	11	69
Crops to be planted	23	7	70	22	34	44	10	-	90	18	14	68
Varieties to be used	22	8	70	27	34	39	15	-	85	22	14	64
Fertiliser to be used[a]	31	5	64	53	32	15	28	-	72	37	13	50
Marketing of crop products[b]	33	5	62	29	34	37	15	-	85	26	12	62

[a] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 39), Gurung (n=40), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=119)
[b] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 39), Gurung (n=35), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=114)

6b. Female

Decision on:	Ethnicity and gender role									Overall		
	Brahmin/Chhetri			Gurung			Tharu					
	M n=40	F n=40	B n=40	M n=43	F n=43	B n=43	M n=40	F n=40	B n=40	M n=123	F n=123	B n=123
Area to be cultivated	25	7	68	28	30	42	8	-	92	20	13	67
Crops to be planted	20	10	70	23	40	37	10	-	90	18	17	65
Varieties to be used	20	10	70	30	37	33	15	-	85	22	16	62
Fertiliser to be used[c]	36	10	54	43	38	19	30	-	70	36	17	47
Marketing of crop products[d]	39	5	56	27	35	38	18	-	82	28	13	59

Note: M= Male F= Female B= Both.
In the case of Tharu respondents, female alone are not responsible for crop production related activities.
[c] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 39), Gurung (n=42), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=121).
[d] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 39), Gurung (n=37), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=116).

Gender role in livestock marketing decisions

The respondents were asked to identify gender roles related to three livestock marketing decisions: selling large ruminants, small ruminants and milk/milk products (Table 7). The responses from the males and females were again consistent.

Table 7. Gender role in livestock marketing decisions as reported by male and female respondents. (Percent respondents responding)

7a. Male

	Ethnicity and gender role									Overall		
	Brahmin/Chhetri			Gurung			Tharu					
Decision on:	**M**	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	**F**	B
Selling large ruminants [a]	54	-	46	37	16	47	42	-	58	45	5	50
Selling small ruminants [b]	47	14	39	14	38	48	25	21	54	30	23	47
Selling milk/milk products[c]	32	34	34	-	96	4	14	43	43	17	60	23

[a] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 39), Gurung (n=32), Tharu (n=24), Overall (n=95); [b] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 28), Gurung (n=21), Tharu (n=28), Overall (n=77); [c] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 35), Gurung (n=28), Tharu (n=7), Overall (n=70).

7b. Female

	Ethnicity and gender role									Overall		
	Brahmin/Chhetri			Gurung			Tharu					
Decision on:	**M**	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	**F**	B
Selling large ruminants [d]	54	5	41	36	18	46	42	-	58	45	8	47
Selling small ruminants [e]	50	14	36	14	41	45	21	18	61	30	23	47
Selling milk/milk products[f]	43	28	29	-	97	3	14	14	72	22	55	23

Note: M= Male F= Female B= Both; [d] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 39), Gurung (n=33), Tharu (n=24), Overall (n=96); [e] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 28), Gurung (n=22), Tharu (n=28), Overall (n=78); [f]Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 35), Gurung (n=29), Tharu (n=7), Overall (n=71).

However, key distinctions were observed. For example, men played a greater role in selling large and small ruminants, but women had more say in selling livestock products, particularly in the *Gurung* community.

Gender role in household management decisions

Both male and female respondents agreed ($P<0.01$) that decisions related to family well-being and overall household management were taken jointly (Table 8). Very few females had a distinct role in the activities investigated in this study. Common decisions related to daily chores were not included in the analysis as they fell within the larger domain of women's role. The *Gurung* residents responded differently with respect to house construction/repair/maintenance and the choice of children's schooling age compared to the other ethnic communities. For example, well over 75 percent of both male and female respondents agreed that the decisions concerning children's schooling age rested with men.

Table 8. Gender role in household management and family well-being decisions reported by the male and female respondents.
(Percent respondents responding)

8a. Male

Decision on:	Ethnicity and gender role									Overall		
	Brahmin/Chhetri			Gurung			Tharu					
	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
New house construction [a]	31	-	69	49	5	46	13	-	87	31	2	67
House repair/ maintenance[b]	32	5	63	51	5	44	-	13	87	28	7	65
Children's schooling age [c]	28	7	65	78	17	5	5	-	95	35	8	57
Children's partner selection [d]	8	5	87	3	10	87	-	-	100	3	5	92
Children's marriage [e]	5	3	92	5	15	80	-	-	100	3	6	91
Having number of children [f]	8	5	87	3	13	84	-	-	100	3	6	91
Use of family planning [g]	8	3	89	3	13	84	-	-	100	4	5	91

[a] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 39), Gurung (n=41), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=120); [b] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 40), Gurung (n=41), Tharu n=40), Overall (n=121); [c] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 40), Gurung (n=36), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=116); [d &e] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 39), Gurung (n=39), Tharu (n=39), Overall (n=117); [f] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 38), Gurung (n=38), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=116)
[g] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 36), Gurung (n=37), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=113).

8b. Female

Decision on:	Ethnicity and gender role									Overall		
	Brahmin/Chhetri			Gurung			Tharu					
	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
New house construction [h]	28	3	69	47	9	44	13	-	87	30	4	66
House repair/ maintenance[i]	30	8	62	49	9	42	-	13	87	27	10	63
Children's schooling age [j]	22	10	68	76	19	5	5	-	95	33	10	57
Children's partner selection[k]	10	5	85	2	15	83	-	-	100	4	7	89
Children's marriage[l]	10	5	85	7	20	73	-	-	100	6	8	86
Having number of children [m]	8	5	87	3	15	82	-	-	100	3	7	90
Use of family planning[n]	8	3	89	3	16	81	-	-	100	4	6	90

Note: M= Male F= Female B= Both; [h] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 39), Gurung (n=43), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=122) ;
[I] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 40), Gurung (n=43), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=123); [j] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 40), Gurung (n=37), Tharu n=40), Overall (n=117); [k & l] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 39), Gurung (n=41), Tharu (n=39), Overall (n=119); [m] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 38), Gurung (n=39), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=117); [n] Brahmin/Chhetri (n= 36), Gurung (n=38), Tharu (n=40), Overall (n=114).

DISCUSSION

The majority of decisions taken by Nepalese rural residents concerning agricultural production and marketing were made jointly by males and females. This is consistent with earlier research in Nepal by Acharya & Bennett (1981), Bajracharya (1994) and Sattaur (1996). The key informant interviews also revealed that joint decisions among household members were common. This finding is perhaps not surprising, as both men and women attach high priority to overall household welfare. However, women needed permission from their male counterparts for a wide range of decisions in the *Brahmin/Chhetri* and *Tharu* ethnic communities.

A key informant from the *Gurung* community also suggested that household decision-making in his community occurs through discussion among family members. Our results indicated a smaller gender disparity in the *Gurung* community than the other ethnic groups investigated. This may be because of affirmative social recognition of *Gurung* women. A *Tharu* key

informant also stressed that family members generally discussed and reached consensus on household-related decisions. He also revealed that during such discussions, mainly with the head of the household, other senior females and males were asked to contribute to household decisions.

Unlike cropping, males in all three ethnic communities mostly made decisions concerning the marketing of large ruminants. This finding corroborates an earlier study by Tulachan & Batsa (1994). A *Brahmin* key informant suggested that men are usually outgoing and have a better knowledge of marketing activities than women. Women in the *Brahmin* community were more confined than men to inside the house and kept busy with regular mundane household chores (Figure 2). Consequently, they lacked direct access to information on markets, although this does not necessarily mean that livestock-related decisions are solely made by males.

This study suggests *Gurung* women (16%) actively participated in the marketing of large ruminants. A *Gurung* key informant claimed that since many male members are mostly absent from the community, women are *de facto* responsible for all sorts of household decisions including the marketing of farm and livestock products. Evidence from Kenya also revealed that where male members are absent, women with the help of their dependent family members are not only involved in all livestock care and management activities, but also take part in livestock marketing and other household-related activities (Roberts, 1996).

Acharya & Bennett (1981) and Pradhan (1985) reported that 50% of males were involved in household labour allocation decisions while 39% were made by women and 11% jointly by both men and women in Nepal. Our results do not support these findings, as joint decisions were more prevalent in the study area. The discrepancy can be partly explained by the substantial progress made by women since 1981, particularly in the *Chitwan* district, which is generally considered to be more aware of current issues than other districts (with the exception of Kathmandu Valley). Cultural barriers could in part also explain a lower participation rate of rural women in labour allocation decisions in Nepal: rural women are mostly confined to domestic activities. Furthermore, women are less educated and have fewer interactions with others than men and thus are reluctant to take decisions such as hiring a farm worker. Access to and control over resources is still a major problem for women and they do not have the flexibility to take unilateral decisions.

Earlier research has indicated household and agricultural-related decisions also vary substantially by ethnicity (Acharya & Bennett, 1981; Bajracharya, 1994; Sattaur, 1996). Our results also show this to be the case: labour allocation decisions were found to be somewhat male dominated in the *Brahmin/Chhetri* ethnic community, but women had a greater voice in the *Gurung* community. However, joint decisions were common in the *Tharu* community. Acharya & Bennett's (1981) findings for central Nepal for men and women from the *Tamang* and *Tharu* ethnic communities for household-related decisions were similar to our findings for the *Gurungs*. Of course, every ethnic community has its own culture, values and norms to be followed in the household. For that reason, those who determine what or how decisions are made in a household is a complex issue to unravel. Nevertheless, education could be one of the strongest determinants of gender participation in decision-making. Subedi (1997) suggested that educated people are, in general, more capable of participating freely in household discussions. Our data indicate that Nepali rural women substantially lag behind men in their education and that this is partly associated with geo-cultural barriers. Despite this, household management decisions tended to be joint

suggesting household welfare is a prime objective of all decision-makers. This reflects a modern view and it is encouraging that a lot of consultation is occurring with respect to the overall well-being of rural household in the *Chitwan* district of rural Nepal.

CONCLUSIONS

Household decision-making is a complex phenomenon that varies according to the nature of household activities and, ethnicity and gender. Our investigation of rural household decision-making in three ethnic communities in rural Nepal revealed that household decisions, including those related to labour allocation, are often made jointly by males and females. However, the level of participation varied substantially across the ethnic communities. For example, in the *Gurung* ethnic group, women were more responsible for household decisions compared to men of *Brahmin/Chhetri* descent, whereas joint decisions were common amongst the *Tharu*. Decision-making also varied by gender and the nature of farming activities. For example, crop-related decisions were largely made jointly whereas males dominated livestock marketing decisions in all ethnic communities.

Rural development strategies tend to ignore the importance of gender and ethnicity in addressing household sustainability issues, even though the effectiveness of intervention measures usually depends on their socio-cultural acceptability. A better understanding of the cultural, social and economic environment in relation to gender roles and ethnic variation can therefore mitigate impediments to rural development project design and implementation. Gender roles vary by ethnicity for some, but not all, activities and this needs to be specifically accounted for in rural policy formulation and planning. Pre-project study of gender and ethnic variation is therefore recommended before implementing any project or developmental work.

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