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The Role of Community Engagement in Poverty Reduction: A Case Study of Khlanga Rural Municipality of Nepal

Karki, Shyam

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The research findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on community engagement and its impact on poverty reduction. Moreover, the research holds significant social implications as it provides valuable insights and recommendations to enhance community development efforts in rural Nepal.

This study explores community engagement and its impact on poverty reduction in rural Nepal. It analyzes the benefits and barriers of community engagement. The findings indicate that education level, household dependency ratio, teamwork willingness, and social participation positively and significantly influence community engagement. Additionally, community engagement, participation in decision-making, and skill training are positively correlated with income. The study identifies a significant income difference of 586 USD between engaged and non-engaged groups, suggesting that community engagement can increase income. Moreover, community engagement improves economic and health conditions among participants. However, challenges such as elite capture, lack of monitoring, and limited expertise hinder the benefits of community engagement in Nepal. To achieve more effective outcomes, concerned organizations should develop inclusive strategies involving households.

Development Economics, Poverty

Community Engagement Community Participation Poverty Self-help Group Barrier

According to the National Planning Commission (NPC, 2021), Nepal's average multidimensional poverty rate is 17.4%. Although the intensity of poverty in Nepal varies across nations, it is higher in rural areas and lower in urban areas. The people in Bagmati province's lowest (7%) and Karnali province's highest (39.5%) are multidimensionally poor (NPC, 2021). However, the national poverty rate is still higher than that of multidimensional poverty in Nepal. The state of poverty in Nepal has been declining from 41.8% in 1995/96, 30.8% in 2003/04, 25.2% in 2009/10, 21.6% in 2018, and 18.6% in 2022 (Ministry of Finance, 2012, 2018, 2022). Raditloaneng (2015) argues that community engagement can promote social justice, transformation, and empowerment of communities, and that community engagement activities may decrease or eradicate poverty.

Community engagement is a widely used approach for solving social and economic problems and improving people's livelihoods. Recently, people have engaged in formal organizations and groups such as civil society organizations (CSO), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and other community-based organizations. By 2018, 46,235 NGOs and 254 INGOs had been registered in Nepal (Karki, 2020). They encourage creating user groups (i.e., forestry, irrigation, drinking water, rural road users' group), self-help groups (i.e., mothers' group, female group, saving group), and community engagement for livelihood improvement. However, the role of community engagement in poverty-reduction strategies has not yet been adequately investigated. Consequently, scholarly attention has been paid to this area.

The purpose of this study was to explore the benefits and challenges of community engagement, as well as its impact on poverty reduction in rural Nepal.

A multi-stage sampling method was adopted in this study. The study area in the Bheri municipality (also known as Kalanga) of the Jajarkot district was selected using a purposive sampling method. A random sampling method was adopted to select the wards of the Bheri municipality, comprising 13 wards. Only 11 wards were included in the random process owing to the lack of ward profile data for wards 9 and 13. The ward is arranged with a random value and selects the first eight wards, wards no, 1,2,4,5,6,7,8, and 12. The reason behind choosing eight wards was to maintain the inclusiveness of the nearest and remote wards from the headquarters of the Bheri municipality.

A systematic random sampling method was adopted in the final stage. Primary data were collected from 448 households using a structured questionnaire and interviews with key informants in the research area. Descriptive and econometric data analysis methods were used to analyze the collected

data. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) model was used to qualitative data analysis. Cross-tabulation for categorical variables and mean comparison t-tests for continuous and binary variables were used for descriptive analysis. However, a logistic regression model was applied to identify the factors influencing community engagement and its role in poverty reduction in rural households.

The key findings of this study are: (1) community engagement and its role in poverty reduction in rural Nepal; and (2) benefit and barriers of community groups. With respect to the first finding, community engagement, earning member ratio, and regular employment as major income sources positively correlate with income poverty. Conversely, family size, lack of investment, loans, agriculture, and casual labor as major income sources were negatively correlated with income poverty, indicating that a higher earning member ratio, regular job, and community engagement increase income and contribute to reducing income poverty among the participants.

According to the qualitative analysis results, community engagement has improved the health and economic conditions of local people in the research area. However, several key challenges were encountered in community engagement programs, including issues of elite capture, lack of monitoring, and a lack of expertise.

Based on qualitative, descriptive, and econometric analyses, the major conclusion of this study is that community engagement contributes to reducing income poverty in rural Nepal. However, a few poor households are not equally benefited from the community engagement due to the elite capture, lack of monitoring, and lack of expertise

In conclusion, it is recommended that community groups, local governments, and national and international organizations collaborate to develop an inclusive strategy that involves households in community groups. This approach will lead to more effective and impactful results in society.

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Shyam Kumar Karki
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Note: One journal article titled "Determinants of community engagement and its role in income poverty reduction: Evidence from Nepal" is currently under review in an international journal. Another journal article titled "Assessing Barriers to the Effectiveness of Community Engagement Programs in Nepal" is being prepared for submission to another journal.

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