



*"Because of Save the Children, I became literate. You may not be able to imagine it, but this is something special for someone of my caste, living in a still largely illiterate society."*

*- Chandra Maya Bishwokarma*



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**AKUKOT - MAJH LAKURIBOT**  
YEAR RETROSPECTIVE LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT  
**SAVE THE CHILDREN / US**

January, 1997

**SAVE THE CHILDREN US  
TAKUKOT-MAJH LAKURIBOT 10 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE LITERACY & EMPOWERMENT**

This report and the project on which it is based reflects the combined efforts of three people without any of whom this work would not be the same. Keith Leslie in his capacity as director of the SC/US Nepal field office provided the leadership and vision that led to the original Takukot/Majh Lakuribot NFE project from 1983 to 1987 as well as the long term commitment to project excellence that inspired and culminated in the five year and ten year retrospective reports. His personal input at every stage of the project is reflected in the quality of the program and the shape of this report. Udaya Manandhar made the program a reality through his concrete work with the staff in the field and with materials and methods at the Kathmandu office. His knowledge and dedication to women's education have pervaded his work as Nepal Field Office Program Director and lie at the very heart of the program's success. Lauren Leve came in as the researcher to document the completed project. As principal investigator, she designed, analyzed and wrote the bulk of this report. We present this paper jointly to acknowledge the critical interdependence of each contribution and contributor. A piece of research like the reality on which it is based emerges from the exchanges between knowledgeable minds and hands.

We would also like to mention Rajeswar Devkota another key player for both the program and the report. A native of Takukot himself, Rajeswar was one of the first facilitators and the first supervisor of the 1983-87 program. He later joined the SC/US staff full time and revisited the women that he helped to educate as the Team Coordinator for this study. In the course of the research, one of the enumerators who had herself begun her education in Rajeswar's class tearfully confessed that she would always remember how he had started her out by guiding her hand as she tried to form the letters. We who have worked with him feel an equal debt.

We were especially fortunate to be able to work with some of the program participants as well. Five of the enumerators began their education in the literacy program discussed herein before continuing in the government school (names indicated below with\*) and all but one were born, raised and living in Takukot or Majh Lakuribot at the time of the study. We believe that the day-to-day presence of these women as commentators and critics, as well as enumerators, enhanced both the questionnaire and the answers we received and working by their sides was enriching and gratifying.

Also the authors would like to offer a deep debt of gratitude to Gita Karki whose constant good humor, graciousness and daily acts of kindness enlivened the spirit of all those involved in this study.

Finally, Save the Children would like to thank their colleagues and friends at USAID in Nepal. Their constant support and encouragement have always been much appreciated. USAID Nepal provided funding to SC/US community development projects in Gorkha district between 1981 and 1992 as described in this report.

This study is dedicated to the people of Gorkha, the women who took the class and the ones who ran it. May the next ten years offer even more than the last.

Research Team	
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Literacy empowers women by setting in motion a series of individual and community changes that work against traditional modes of oppression and for enhanced opportunity and development. Participants agree that "the source of progress is education" (Manu Maya Rana)

- \* Education is an effective remedy for the lack of imagination and loss of individual agency often associated with traditional women's roles. It helps them find a voice and teaches them to speak, increases the sense of possibility for individual women and for women as a whole, and enhances participants' sense of value and self-confidence.
- \* Women who participated in the course are more active in the public sphere. They go to school, lead and participate in women's groups, take part in community meetings and projects, work as community health volunteers, and otherwise seek to serve their communities.
- \* Literacy increases women's information resources and their sense of connection to and involvement in the world. Ten years after completing the literacy course, women who participated in the course are better informed than their neighbors who did not, and they are more able to access information on their own.
- \* Literacy levels attained are not good predictors of individual empowerment. Non-formal education empowers women in a myriad of ways, and reading skill is only one among many factors contributing to women's development as a result of class participation.
- \* Reading, writing, and basic math help participants to read the documents that appear in their lives (letters, Teej songs, product labels, public notices, and school notes and fees, etc.). They write letters, make purchases, run shops, and initiation of income generation projects, and work as women's group leaders, project enumerators, and community health volunteers.
- \* Non-formal education courses also serve women by including a strong functional development component that teaches women specific health, agriculture, and income-generating skills that participants say have made their lives easier on a daily basis since the class by increasing work efficiency, decreasing illness and family size, providing a supplementary source of income, and making a wider range of foods available.
- \* Educated women have greater self-determination in their homes. They are more involved in household decisions, have somewhat more freedom to make small independent purchases, and feel that education gives them greater mobility. Many also feel that their domestic relationships have benefited.
- \* Education transforms tradition.
  - \* 90 percent of participants' children of school-going age attend school.
  - \* 92 percent say that the customary age for girls' marriage has increased over the past ten years.
  - \* 82 percent of the participants sampled recognize that new ways of thinking and acting have become common in the community over the past ten years.
  - \* 74 percent say that they themselves have incorporated "modern" or developed behaviors into their lives.

- \* Participants report that education is the main reason for such changes, and that educated people are willing to critically examine tradition and challenge or change it.
- \* Empowerment is a community phenomenon.
  - \* Many women who did not take the course said that they began to perform certain techniques introduced in the literacy class or implemented development strategies because "everyone had one" or "everyone was doing it," reinforcing the common-sense assumption that as novel ideas and designs become common in a community, they lose their risk value and become incorporated into the prevailing structure.
  - \* Individual changes impact across societies through the agency of the role model. The presence of a local female role model was a strong predictor of enhanced sense of possibility, broad imagination, and aptitude for critical thought at the individual level.
- \* Participants in the NFE course demonstrated varied but consistently higher levels of self-determination, participation in the public sphere, implementation of time- and health-saving technologies, imagination, knowledge, and understanding, sense of possibility, and critical analytical thought than the control group. Though the numerical differences were sometimes small, lending credence to the hypothesis that NFE courses empower whole communities, participants consistently led women who had not taken the course in those categories, and the community leaders were often women who had been educated in public schools or at the Adult Literacy Center.

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## LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT

*In 1983 Save the Children started programs here. Before that time we didn't know about anything. We learned from them that we should study. In the beginning it was difficult to collect participants. We'd study for two hours every evening. At first we didn't recognize printed papers but later on we could at least look at it and assume its importance. After completing six months they awarded us a certificate and an orange seedling. Afterwards that tree gave us a lot of fruit. Now everyone also knows that women have rights. We belong to women's groups and have bank accounts. Uneducated girls are selected less for marriage. In the beginning a girl should know how to stand on her own feet and not to rely on her husband with blind faith. There have been lots of changes after the literacy program. - focus group Lakuribot Village Majh Lakuribot*

The paths to empowerment are multiple and winding. Older, younger, richer, poorer, talented, troubled, with children or without, different women need and are able to actualize different things and forms of empowerment vary accordingly. For Sita Bhatta Adhikari, empowerment is when the other women in the household come to her for advice about work. For Lila Kumari Amgai, it is represented by having a job and being able to contribute money to her desperately poor household herself. Every woman we spoke to had her own special trials and her own special story. But from this broad pool of diverse voices, some common themes arose.

### SIX STEPS TO EMPOWERMENT

These themes have been presented in this report as the six steps to empowerment. In contrast to universalizing theories that seek to define and measure empowerment in terms of a ready-made set of behaviors and beliefs, the six steps identified here emerged directly from the words and

#### Six Steps to Empowerment

- 1 Education Enhances Self-Confidence and Sense of Possibility
- 2 Increased Participation in the Public Sphere
- 3 Life Becomes Easier with New Techniques and Ideas
- 4 Increased Self-Determination
- 5 Education Transforms Tradition
- 6 Women's Rights Become Community Custom

experiences of the NFE participants we met. By discussing empowerment in this way as a cluster of mutually implicated moments, resources and transformations, this paper seeks to emphasize that empowerment is — and can only be — a process that each woman will experience at her own pace, in her own way, according to the unique conditions of her own circumstances. Each step outlined represents a possible shift in a woman or women's perceptive, behavioral or material experience that contributes to her ability to act in and on her world. Not everyone experienced all of these, no one experienced them in the same way, and these six do not begin to encompass the multiplicity of movements across cultures or even necessarily throughout communities. Yet they do reflect main paths of transformation in the process of empowerment as it is and has been shared by women who participated in the SC/US literacy program in Gorkha between 1983 and 1987.

Imagining empowerment in this way takes us away from standardized models based on Western values to a place where thought, negotiation and small-scale acts become valid indicators of empowerment in action, and empowerment is not a product but a continuous, progressive evolution. The six steps to empowerment outlined here are a heuristic description of the micro-processes of empowerment that grew organically out of the experiences of the women involved in this study. They are not offered as a prescriptive definition of empowerment, universally or even

across Nepal, but are concrete moments grounded in a particular place, time and event. The women of Takukot and Majh Lakuribot tell us that empowerment is an individual and individualized process; it is not about achievement but ongoing transformation, and it is never attained but always unfolding. In keeping with this, the six steps are outlined here as moments and resources, both for the women themselves and for planners and thinkers who want to better understand empowerment in order to establish conditions for helping other women in other places with other lives.

#### Step 1 "We Can Do Anything If We Start Once" Education Enhances Self-Confidence and Sense of Possibility

*In the past, both men and women were illiterate. Then slowly men began to be able to read and write, but women were left the same. We were busy in household chores, child rearing, tending the cattle, etc. There was a lot of work. But now [since the literacy course] our daughters and daughters-in-law are also educated. My daughter and I studied together in the ALC, then after six months she joined the fourth grade in school. Now she is studying at the Gorkha campus. -- focus group Kumaltari Village Majh Lakuribot*

The problems confronting the women of Takukot and Majh Lakuribot extend far beyond the simple fact of not being able to read. Hard work and hunger are constant facts of daily life. Alcoholic and/or abusive fathers and husbands may be another. Sickness is pervasive and costly, both in medicines and lost work. The need for a cash income increases by the year, as families are often separated as men leave the villages in search of wage labor. The net result of this pressure to produce, in combination with a cultural tendency to concentrate the hardest work in the hands of the lowest status family members, is that women, especially young wives and mothers, often seem to be working all the time. Without electric lights to extend the length of the productive day, and with the house, the fields and the children to care for, many women's lives become a day-to-day fight where the years unfold one after another, and daughters inherit the mothers' sorrows with their skills. In the face of this poverty, tradition reigns with few thinking of question it, and even fewer in circumstances to try. Before participating in the literacy class, women told us work and tradition — the limits of the known — conditioned their imaginations at their lives.

*Learning that they can learn is the beginning of a process that extends far beyond the letters on the page.*

*We didn't know about education. All we knew was farm work — raising cattle, working in neighbor's fields. That recognition of our labor by others was the only indication we had that we were worth something. There weren't any schools at that time. We didn't know about health posts. - focus group Lakuribot Village Majh Lakuribot*

#### DISCOVERY OF POSSIBILITY

Participation in the NFE course disrupted this tyranny of routine. In the literacy course, women say they first experienced themselves as creative, thinking beings. Together they learned to read and write, and this achievement taught them that they could think beyond tending cattle and cooking food. It can be difficult to imagine how a lifetime of physical work in an environment that offers no intellectual stimulation or scope for curiosity can petrify convention and deaden dreams. But for the first time in the course, participants experienced the capacity to learn and understand as their own, as well as their brothers' and sons'. I found myself amazed that I could read and write letters. Manu Maya Rana told us, "I feel like I opened my eyes a little bit." Nita Maya Gurung confirmed: Meeting, gossiping and studying together, the women of Gorkha discovered

that they could also think and know and grow. As children, when their brothers went to school they had consoled themselves with the belief that women were for housework and learning was not for them. Now they realized that they too could comprehend things beyond their domestic experience and this simple fact was a powerful revelation.

*I joined the adult literacy class at the age of 12. I find myself fortunate that I can read and write which I couldn't do before. It was difficult to understand so many things. Now I know we can do anything if we start once." - Nir Maya Shrestha*

#### CONFIDENCE

The outcome of this discovery was a confidence and curiosity that resonated throughout the community. Five years after completing the literacy course, 41 percent of the participants interviewed said that they felt significantly more confident speaking to people they didn't know well. The source of progress is education. Manu Maya Rana told us, "After studying women won't hesitate to speak in public places. Krishna Kumari, who joined the class as a pre-teenager continued through grade ten in school and is now studying for the school leaving certificate (S.L.C.) that will allow her admission to college, explains how this works:

*Earlier I hesitated to meet and talk with strangers. While studying though I met and mixed up with many people and through working with them I developed confidence. It's a process, a chain, a social thing."*

The non-formal method of teaching adult literacy that has been written into *Naya Goreto*, the national adult literacy textbooks, and which formed the base of the SC/US program, uses a variety of interactive techniques to reach out to participants and help them help one another. Numbers and letters are introduced through fictional scenarios designed to inspire discussion, and learning takes place in small groups where they discuss the stories and then present their thoughts and conclusions to the group and one another.<sup>1</sup> Working in this way, participants form supportive friendships and classmates become accustomed to discussing ideas. The result is the beginning of critical social thought in a woman's community that endures over time. 41 percent of the participants in the literacy class, for instance, say that they think about women's status and talk about it with their friends even now, 15 percent remain concerned with village life and how to change it. Although these numbers may seem low, participants tell us that they do represent a meaningful contrast to the situation before the class when focus groups agreed no one thought critically about such things at all. Even now, ten years after the conclusion of the NFE course, the old idea sharing networks are still alive. 94 percent of the participants interviewed said that they had people with whom to discuss their ideas. In contrast, 17 percent of the women who did not study in the course lamented that though they had ideas, they had no one with whom to talk.

At the start of the course when people gathered at the center, Krishna Kumari recalled, "no one wanted to talk and everyone felt shy in front of the others whom we didn't know. But because everyone must participate as part of the learning process, support mechanisms developed and women slowly learned to trust their ideas. On the first day they were silent -- I could hardly get them to tell me their names." One facilitator from Takukot recalled, "But by the end, the gossip and laughter from the ALC was the noisiest in the village. I would have to insist that they talk in turn. Everyone wanted to talk all the time."

<sup>1</sup>It is important to note that this theory and its techniques were adhered to by most facilitators during the NFE program. See the SC/US Takukot/Majlakuribot *Five Year Retrospective Evaluation 1993* for further detail on facilitator performance and use of NFE materials.

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#### The process of coming to class, talking with strangers and learning in a group is critical to the effectiveness of adult literacy programming that intends to empower

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At the beginning, adult literacy courses were a new idea and the center a place where women met and studied at night, a novel and somewhat threatening concept. Parents feared that young women would be harassed on the paths at night or that they would secretly write love letters and defame family control. Husbands and in-laws worried that educated brides might grow conceited or refuse to work. Women, too, were shy about beginning something new that they feared they would fail at; many were unwilling to go without friends. But over the years, literacy course participation became commonplace. People grew accustomed to seeing girls carrying books, and women huddled around an oil lamp reading became a common village sight. Elders and neighbors stopped worrying as students did not return with boyfriends and did show signs of learning. And in the end, literacy course participation came to be respected and acted on as such. The adult class helped me to express my opinions openly without hesitation," Padam Kumari Ale told us. "Before, I couldn't have imagined talking that way with anyone. All in all, every one of the NFE graduates turned women's leaders that we spoke to agreed. Study promotes self-confidence." (Krishna Kumari Gurung)

#### Step 2 "Women Can Go Places and Speak Face to Face" Increased Participation in the Public Sphere

##### GOING TO SCHOOL

The confidence and excitement that women built in the ALC awakened a powerful sense of possibility that has challenged the immutability of women's life as it was known. For some younger participants, this meant immediate changes and new options. 14 percent joined the public day school on completion of the course and many of these have continued to study up through the tenth class and beyond to college. For older participants' daughters, it often meant the same. Sa Maya Rana, for instance, joined the ALC with her four oldest daughters. At the end of the class, she insisted on enrolling all of them in school. Ten years later, her third child, Dhan Kumari, passed the tenth grade and came to work on this study as an enumerator.

Other women, however, found that the revolutionary potential of discovering their minds was sadly limited by social and domestic responsibilities. As a result of studying, they say they found themselves transformed, but the material circumstances of the worlds around them had not changed, creating an awkward situation and a challenge. Forty percent of the participants were married when they took the course, and another 21 percent and 15 percent respectively were married within five and ten years of completing it, meaning that 76 percent of the participants 10 years ago are married today. The role of the daughter-in-law, or *buhari*, is one of the most restricted in the Nepali kinship system. Often strangers to their husbands, always newcomers to the home, *buharis* are expected to prove themselves through a grueling routine of work and the quick delivery of a son. Confronted with such obligations, most women agree that new wives can rarely find time to actualize hopes of continuing to read or seriously participating in a critical women's community in their husbands' homes, and going to school is all but impossible.<sup>2</sup> If I had gone to

<sup>2</sup>We are aware, however, of a few exceptions to this rule. In all cases, the girl had been going to school when the marriage was arranged, and she was allowed to continue attending from her new home. Only one of these women had children before finishing class ten, and she discontinued her study at the time of the birth. Focus groups have indicated that girls who have gone to school are becoming the preferred daughters-in-law, as at least a high school education becomes standard for boys. If this trend continues, social convention will have to adapt, allowing later marriage ages for girls, delaying childbirth after marriage, and/or new wives to complete their education from their husbands' homes.

school when I was young I could have become a doctor, Shanti Gurung lamented "I am intelligent but now I am married and involved in household work so everything is finished" Having experienced the pleasure of learning, 95 percent of the women surveyed said that they would have liked to have continued to study if their ages work or marital status had permitted but they found they were not able. In hindsight Dil Maya Thapa summarized the sentiments of many older women "My eyes were opened but now it's too late"

Beyond these frustrations though women's new sense of their own possibilities has found other sites for expression in group efforts and in community work

*Women used to be thought of as a frog in a well limited to the house While men were free for movement women were busy at home and on the land But now it is somewhat different Women can go to the places where men used to go and speak face to face Women can also participate in development work and education They can also study and become doctors and engineers " -- Ganga Maya Baramu*

After participating in the literacy program the women of Takukot and Majh Lakuribot have become more active in extra domestic affairs both formally and through informal channels. Informally 25 percent of the participants surveyed said that they had intervened alone or in a group to stop a man from beating his wife. Eighteen percent admit that they have helped friends or neighbors to collect something that had been stolen or misappropriated but was rightfully theirs. And another 18 percent say that they have actively taken part in development decisions about resource allocation speaking for or defending things that would most benefit women. Although there is no baseline data from before the class with which to compare these figures focus groups and extended interviews indicate that most of these events came after participating in the course and were organized in or channeled through the women's groups that were organized at its conclusion.

#### WOMEN'S GROUPS

In keeping with the traditional separation between male and female spaces outside of the home, women have not by and large joined pre-existing public committees but have established their own groups to address issues of particular concern to them. Fifty one percent of participants say that they attend women's group meetings at least once every few months, for instance and another 17 percent say that they make a point of regular monthly attendance. Such groups have become accepted institutions in the communities where they operate. Only one of the women interviewed said that she encountered resistance from her mother in law when she asked to go to a women's group meeting no one else had any problems and even women who did not themselves go to meetings spoke respectfully of the people who did.<sup>3</sup> With so many women interested and participating women's groups have been able to attract other women in the community as well. Women who did not attend the ALC sit in the meetings too, albeit in smaller numbers and with somewhat less commitment (Forty one percent semi regular attendees 4 percent go monthly).

Though popular attendance and participation levels vacillate a cause of much complaint among the leaderships - it is generally understood that women's groups are a place where women can go for support and to talk about issues that affect women in specific or the community as a whole. Recent actions by women's groups have included confronting a man who was planning to take a

<sup>3</sup>Many of the women who don't go say they would like to. A number report that they lack only an invitation. By charter and purpose women's groups (that were not organized specifically for income generation) are democratic and open to all. But as in any small community cliques form feelings may be hurt and local social currents may undermine this ideology in practice.

second wife, organizing a latrine installation drive helping to build a school repairing local roads<sup>4</sup> and establishing a village wide policy of taking legal

action against any married man who attempts to abandon his wife for another. Women's group leadership is accepted as an important female role in the community and many of these positions are occupied by NFE graduates (See Case Studies Manu Maya Rana and Krishna Kumar Gurung). Participants say that women's groups feel like a continuation of the NFE experience because they give them a chance to practice writing their names and keep accounts the meeting can be an important source of information about things such as local development or women's legal rights and at these events they can meet other women and talk together as they did in the class.

The women's group in Keurepanti, Takukot began by raising goats, planting trees, helping to build a local school and working to renovate village paths. A few years later, they introduced a regulation that every family in the village had to build a pit latrine, those who completed it within five days would receive 50 rupees as a reward and those who did not build one would be fined 500 rupees. Such a step demonstrates the power in the community that the women's group had attained. According to Manu Maya Rana, a literacy course participant who was the chairperson of the women's group at that time, "after the toilets were built, the village is much cleaner."

Participants have also moved into other roles. Six percent of the participants interviewed have become Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) since taking the course. Padam Kumari Ale for instance is a CHV in Dandathok village Takukot. After completing the literacy course she says the villagers selected her to attend a training and now she is responsible for caring for pregnant women and newborn babies and overseeing difficult deliveries. She speculates that she may have been selected for the position because "I am a little bit educated now and I don't hesitate to speak frankly, qualities that she credits to studying at the ALC."

#### EMPLOYMENT

Other women say that they would be ready to go to training workshops and/or work at jobs if well. Asked what they would do if they could read and write better than they can now 52 percent of participants say they would seek employment. Reflecting the work available in the area most said they would like to be doctors or teachers or work in an office or a factory. A smaller number said they wanted to establish some sort of cottage industry or to open their own shops. The interest in finding jobs says a lot about the needs and desires of NFE graduates today. In the face of widespread rural poverty jobs offer a much needed cash income that can make a tremendous difference in rural women's lives, but this is not the only thing that makes them attractive. Earning money is perceived as a powerful way to assure respect and independence, and women who work are believed to have more freedom and occupy more respected positions in the home. Focus groups across Takukot and Majh Lakuribot agreed that women who work outside their homes and make significant contributions to family income are more respected than others have greater physical independence, and may have better relations with their husbands and in laws because their value as a wage earner. At this point, it is difficult to know whether this is fantasy or fact since so few rural women do work outside of their homes and this handful tends to be exceptional.

<sup>4</sup>The nearest road head to Takukot and Majh Lakuribot is Gorkha bazaar a seven to ten hour walk away. The village roads referred to here are the steep and winding dirt paths within and between villages that bear all movement related travel trade or work.

in other ways as well. But it does tell us how women imagine they could help themselves and what they think could help them do it.

Notably, participants said that having money in and of itself is not particularly empowering. Though women felt that it could serve as a guarantee of some level of independence in the case that a husband was abusive or took another wife, it was primarily the job aspect of employment that appealed to women, occupying a structured public position in combination with wage earning. When asked what characterized a powerful person for them, participants named money 65 percent less than education. And responses to other questions indicate that neither owning land or cash nor belonging to a wealthy family qualified as especially empowering in the absence of self-determination, critical thought or the ability to manage their own affairs. Independent earning can help

women to be self-reliant and stand on their own feet,' participants at the Lakuribot focus group agreed. But they also agreed that without education, money is not enough. For this reason, 'said Keshari Thapa, 'we have advised others who want to join our women's group to go to the ALC first.'<sup>5</sup>

In spite of the scarcity of formal opportunities for women who have only completed an NFE course, the group of participants who were in a position to take advantage of them have done so. Of the 51 women interviewed in Takukot alone, two have participated in training workshops and become CHVs. Six have studied up to at least class 7, and three have passed class ten and were hired to serve as enumerators for this survey. Of the 11 local high school graduates who worked as enumerators to collect this information, five had begun their education in Save the Children adult literacy classes between 1983 and 87. Overall, it is clear that after completing the literacy class, women felt able and ready to go beyond the household for community work and their own benefit.

*Some changes have been happening nowadays. Our daughters are going to school, women are also participating in community development work, we have come to know that men and women have equal rights. Before, women gathered only at the taps or while going to work in the fields. Now we often go to see what is happening in our village and we participate when there is some work being done. We think this change is due to education. focus group, Kumaltari Village.*

<sup>5</sup>In contrast to participants in many other literacy programs in Nepal, women did not beg for trainings when asked how they could improve their lives in the future. Perhaps because such post-literacy course trainings had not been offered en masse in the area, or perhaps due to how the INGO had managed expectations in the community, or other factors, participants had not developed the same sense of entitlement and passiveness in relation to their own abilities to make changes without external stimulation that characterizes some other post-literacy communities.

Five of the local female enumerators for this study were local girls who began their career in the SC/US adult literacy course. Dhan Kumari Rana, for instance, started the course with her mother and three older sisters. At the end, she joined the *chelibeta* class which served as a bridge to the government school. Krishna Kumari Gurung says that she used to do all the work so her brothers could study until she realized she deserved the same opportunities herself. Nir Maya Shrestha wanted to study so much that she used to go to class without eating dinner since her parents refused to lighten her workload. All of these young women have now passed grade ten and are hoping to pass their SLC exams and go on to college. Each one of them owes her start to the SC/US NFE and each one brought that commitment to her work for this study. Though there will be many trials on the road ahead, they feel eager and ready to face them. As Nir Maya shared her delight, 'we have come so far, who could stop us now?'

### Step 3 "It All Adds Up To A Little Bit More" Work Becomes Easier With New Techniques and Ideas

*"At the beginning women were illiterate but after the adult literacy class we became able to manage our daily lives more easily. We started to clean the village, plant vegetables, construct latrines and smoke outlet stoves, plant trees, work in groups and invest the money that we all put together." -- Nir Kumari Shrestha*

Besides isolation and the long standing tradition of not educating girls, many Nepali women are also limited by their precarious position at the edge of the subsistence struggle. Work is the driving force in rural women's lives. All day, every day, cutting grass to feed the livestock, carrying water, collecting firewood, cooking and cleaning and farming the land, work structures women's days and their worries. The ability to work is of critical importance; it determines whether or not the family eats, the children go to school and the sick receive treatment. Things that make work easier or more effective are empowering because women can only think beyond the next meal when they know that there will be food in the pot. Without this, they are trapped in a hand-to-mouth existence that leaves no room for community participation, extra domestic interests or self-actualization. The power to control one's life begins only when women can assert mastery over their health and their environment, rather than endlessly chasing their escaping basic needs. As participants say, that the NFE class has helped them with this task over the past ten years in their daily lives.

SC/US nonformal education courses include a variety of practical development messages along with the academic curriculum, and for many participants these bits of information have become the most tangible, lasting remainders of their ALC experience. At the time of the SC/US *Five Year Retrospective Evaluation*, 89 percent of participants said that practicing technical innovations was an effective way to keep the excitement they took from the ALC alive. They remembered lessons about health and nutrition, the importance of sanitation, tree plantation and the use of improved seeds and animal stock, family planning, the importance of latrines, smoke outlet stoves and more. As Keshari Thapa told us five years ago, 'it all adds up to a little bit more.'

***Educated People Eat Without Suffering and Those Who Are Uneducated Suffer More***  
Chet Kumari Bhatta

#### READING, WRITING AND ARITHMETIC

For most participants interviewed, being able to read and write has made life easier in critical ways. When asked if they needed to be able to read for their daily lives, 88 percent of the participants said yes; they used these skills for a variety of tasks. In an average day or week, participants say they use their literacy skills to write letters, bonds and receipts, to keep household accounts, and to keep others from cheating them when they go to the market. Before the literacy class, I couldn't recognize money and I never knew the rupee notes. Kamala Thapa told us, 'but afterwards I knew the numbers and in this way I've helped everyone in the village.' Participants now also manage women's groups, buy seeds, read product labels, instructions and signboards, run shops and small businesses and go outside the village. Life in my family is easier now, says Srijana Gurung, because 'it's easy to keep accounts, read and write letters.'

#### What Can You Do Now That You Couldn't Do Before Participating in the Literacy Course?

- \* write letters
- \* know about birth spacing
- \* raise poultry
- \* speak, read and write
- \* run the shop
- \* go to meetings
- \* understand discussions
- \* plant improved vegetables
- \* help make taps and roads
- \* write a name
- \* run the mobile clinic

know the new messages from outside find out the way while walking on the road and evaluate land certificates and bills Plus I no longer have to pay more while shopping as no one can cheat me

### HELPING CHILDREN WITH THEIR EDUCATION

Participants also use what they know to help their children learn Seventy two percent of the participants read to their young children Though they complain that their knowledge is quickly surpassed they are happy to help the young ones as they start out, reading, pointing out letters, and showing them how to write their names The children come and say Mother teach us this! Thuli Kanchi Rana enthuses Seventy one percent say that their relationships with their children have benefited as a result of participating in the class

Participants who have school going children are also active in supervising their studies In contrast to women who did not participate in the class they are able to be more effectively involved in their kids education Notably women who did not study were also concerned to assist their children in whatever ways they could In fact they admitted to actively checking to see that their children had done their homework more often than the participant mothers of whom only 48 percent were at least semi regularly involved in contrast to 62 percent of the control group (29 percent supervised their children s homework every night or almost every night , in contrast to only 17 percent of participants and 33 percent as opposed to 31 percent said they checked sometimes) Yet compared to mothers who did not participate in the class participants are more involved in their children s education in other ways

Seventy two percent of the participants with school going children for instance say that they go to the school at least once a year to meet their children s teachers and check up on their progress They are also concerned to discuss the children s improvement with the kids themselves 76 percent say they talk with their sons and daughters about problems in school and learning (Only 49 percent say they go to teachers and just 52 percent talk about school with their kids ) figures convey is that Overall what these illiterate mothers want to help and support is best they can and she feels able Uneducated women say they are less comfortable going to schools and meeting teachers since they themselves can neither read write or speak easily in such contexts Having never been through the educational process themselves many are ashamed to demonstrate their ignorance and this applies not only to the teachers but to their older kids as well Participants too remember this feeling 67 percent feel that their children respect them more because they are literate though they are quick to point out that the older ones tease them as well for knowing so little at so advanced an age

Overall the way that NFE participation helps mothers to help their kids is best summarized by the difference between Manu Maya Rana s and Kanchi Maya Gurung s answers to the question how do you supervise your children s homework? Kanchi Maya who did not participate in the class, says she lights a lamp for her son and watches him diligently while he studies every night Manu Maya an NFE graduate says that she trusts her kids to do their homework But she says I often

**It was because I talk with my children that my youngest son got a double promotion. He didn't study in grade 2, but was admitted to grade 3 instead. If I were illiterate there would be no possibility of checking their work I enjoy monitoring their test scores and helping them with their homework My sons also feel glad I do this -- Biba Bhatta**

with their sons and problems in school and learning (Only 49 parents say they go to teachers and just 52 school with their kids ) figures convey is that illiterate mothers want their children s studies each does as much as Uneducated women say comfortable going to

ask them about what they are studying, what they learned in school and if they are having any problems I advise them to be on time and listen to the teachers" Both educated and uneducated mothers love their children and do what they can to see that they get ahead But women who participated in the NFE class have themselves been through the experience of learning through study, and they find themselves better prepared for this task

### INCOME GENERATION

Poverty is one of the most destructive forces in Nepal today and as rural villages become more and more closely tied into national and transnational economic systems the need for a cash income increases accordingly This is part of many participants motivation to get jobs but as the rural economy offers very few opportunities for non agricultural employment participants have turned to the home based income generating activities that they learned in the class Today 64 percent of the class are raising animals, vegetables or fruit selling cottage crafts and/or running teashops or stores to provide such extra income <sup>6</sup> Participants often reported implementing income generation projects both individually and together in groups Perhaps continuing their classroom experience of collective effort participants were 17 percent more likely to be involved in income generating activities with others than their friends who had not participated in the course but who were also engaged in similar activities

The money they raise through these efforts they say is usually pooled with other family resources or in some cases deposited in the bank "In our women s group we started out with 500 rps Kamala Thapa told us "We pooled out money together and began raising goats Now we have over 2,000 rps in the bank "

#### Understanding makes work easier

"My life has become easier because now I can understand any subject" Man Kumari Shrestha  
 "The village sisters can understand something and do the work by adjusting ourselves" - Datay Kumari Rana

"No one does unnecessary work after having knowledge so life in the village is very easy" -- Sushila Bohara

"Because of education, all the villagers understand and they do all the work on time" -- Dhak Kumari Thapa

"The village sisters work by organizing themselves and they know that to succeed we have to work in a coordinated manner" - Padam Kumari Ale

### HEALTH AND TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

Ninety two percent of the program participants also report that they still remember health and integrated development lessons, and throughout the interviews they stressed the way that this knowledge has impacted on their lives

The installation of pit latrines and smoke outlet stoves has been one of the most successful technical outcomes of the SC/US programming in Gorkha Ten years after the completion of the program 74 percent of the participants have functioning latrines at their homes and 33 percent of the participants use developed *chulos* or smoke outlet stoves (a number of others said that they had used them until they broke) In both cases the influence of the literacy class and SC/US

<sup>6</sup>The same number of non participants interviewed 64% also say they are involved in similar income generating schemes

recommendation was also influential beyond the direct participant circle 64 percent of the non participants interviewed had latrines and 25 percent had smoke outlet stoves Moreover 43 percent of the non participants who had new *chulos* said they had been convinced to install these by the NFE course facilitator or their by friends who had participated in the literacy class and 9 percent of the control group with latrines said the same Clearly the benefit of latrines and health friendly cooking stoves has been widely recognized in Takukot and Majh Lakuribot these numbers respectively represent a 28 percent and a four percent increase from use and installation rates five years earlier which shows that the communities have continued to install these utilities even after SC/US reduced programming in the area

Better sanitation and nutrition practices also contribute to easier lives Asked what they did differently after taking the course participants said they kept their houses (74 percent) and yards (73 percent) cleaner covered food (71 percent) washed clothes more frequently (66 percent) washed their children more frequently (59 percent) and washed their own hands more (58 percent) practices that can help prevent a variety of maladies They also eat a wider range of foods Ninety five percent of the participants sampled have small kitchen gardens in the vicinity of their homes where among other things, they grow a broad variety of vegetables, and 51 percent say that they use new varieties of fruit or vegetables that Save the Children introduced to the area The women of Takukot and Lakuribot have embraced the information they learned in the class and the overall result is better health for all

Finally as noted above participants have made their lives significantly easier through the use of family planning and birth control Women who participated in the adult literacy course have fewer children than the women who did not (See Appendix 2 *NFE Participation and Integrated Development*) These family sizes are not surprising in light of family planning acceptance rates Eighty percent of the applicable women of child bearing age who took the literacy course do in fact use temporary or permanent contraception today In contrast only 41 percent of the control population are making such efforts to control family size themselves

**Better sanitation practices also contribute to healthier lives 74 percent of the participants have functioning latrines at their homes, a 28 percent increase from 5 years earlier**

*"In my grandmother's time the status of a daughter in law was very low They were not recognized by others no matter how hard they worked They gave birth to many children and didn't know how to care for them They were not health and hygiene conscious Nowadays this is not the same We do family planning and insure food and education to our children I think this awareness is due to education " Jeena Kumari Thapa*

In the ten years since they finished the class, the lessons introduced at the ALC have helped course participants meet the demands of their daily lives themselves Literacy lets them read to their children and manage their affairs Small scale income generation activities provide extra income Improved crops and agriculture makes work more efficient and more food available And smaller families means fewer mouths to feed Translated into the reality of an average Gorkha day this means that women spend less time in the fields and at the sickbed and they have more energy for themselves others and events beyond the home In total 82 percent of the women interviewed say that having participated in the nonformal literacy class simplifies their domestic work and 73 percent say that it has made life in their villages easier For a young woman in Takukot or Majh Lakuribot this makes empowerment

#### Step 4 "Uneducated People Can't Walk Around on the Outside But Educated People Have Gone Everywhere" Increased Self-Determination

*Before when I was illiterate my husband didn't give me money because I couldn't recognize the amount of the notes Now he gives me money and I carry it with me " - Buddha Maya Baram*

Another change that many women have experienced since participating in the literacy course is increased degree of self determination Armed with ideas confidence and information women have slowly begun to assume greater autonomy and claim more authority within their domains this point the acts are frustratingly small and so are the differences but the women we spoke say that they are real nonetheless Having shown that they are capable participants are allowed to do more than before and more than their peers who did not take the class And each step makes another possible, and each act generates momentum for the next

#### IN HOUSEHOLDS

Compared to women of similar age and older who have not participated in a literacy course participants are slightly but consistently more self determining in their households They are more likely to make decisions concerning themselves and their children than women who have not studied for example and they have more freedom to make minor purchases by themselves Of the literacy course participants 34 percent of the women with immunized children said that they had made the decision to immunize their children themselves or in consultation with their husbands or other family members in contrast to only 24 percent of the control group Similarly 47 percent of the ALC participants said they had made the decision about how to treat the last case of childhood diarrhea themselves the last time that their siblings or children were sick Of their uneducated neighbors only 21 percent had similarly made this decision by themselves Further of the women who hadn't taken part in the literacy course 67 percent said they had not even been party to the decision at all In the participant group however only 27 percent had been similarly excluded a point of fact most important decisions are still made by the traditional heads of house but the personal involvement of educated women is clearly increasing Women who have studied make their own decisions more often

Women's Roles in Household Decision Making

% of Women Involved in the Decision	Partic	Control
To Immunize Children	34%	24%
Themselves Prepared ORT*	47%	28%
To Use Family Planning	25%	5%

\*Oral Rehydration Therapy

More striking even is the degree of participation in family planning decisions Twenty percent of the contraceptive users who studied in the course said that they had made the decision to use family planning themselves or had been equal participants in the choice Fifty percent of the participants using family planning also said that they had themselves convinced their husbands to use the method of their choice In contrast such matters were generally not decided by the women in households where they hadn't studied only five percent of the current contraceptive users among the control group had themselves been part of the choice One male participant in the NFE explained how his wife another student convinced him not to have any more children

*I have two sons but I still didn't want to use family planning. My wife kept trying to convince me saying that it was healthier, easier to feed and educate children if there were only a few but I thought I didn't want to do it. Then she said if you won't agree to use temporary methods I'll go and get operated on myself. After that I went for a vasectomy.*

While final decisions about reproductive management take place within partnerships that at least require the husbands' approval, women who have participated in the discussions have had remarkable success in imposing their desires. Notably, many women we spoke to still saw reproductive decisions as the rightful provenance of the husband. But when push comes to shove, participants feel entitled to fight for reproductive control. Confronted with a story of a woman with two children whose husband refused to use any sort of family planning, 49 percent of participants agreed that if he could not be convinced, the wife should still go ahead with her decision to limit family size, and another 49 percent insisted that she never give up trying. It should be just the opposite: a woman from the Lakuribot focus group lamented, commenting on how women often need to convince their husbands themselves. The husband should be the one to say such things to his wife, but instead we must do it. It is better to plan than to give birth to many children, another added in support, if her husband won't agree than she should go herself for permanent planning and not rely on temporary means. Doing it permanently means that she does not have to give birth to another child again, a third exclaimed. It is very difficult for an aging mother to give birth to many children and it is difficult then to raise the children too. Most women agreed that they preferred sterilization over temporary contraceptive methods which they perceived as unreliable and an ineffective long-term solution.

More educated women are also more likely to make small household purchases themselves. Though equal amounts of women from the participant and control samples were responsible for purchasing minor personal effects like *tkas*, hair oil, and bangles, participants were nine percent more likely to go themselves to buy household goods like cooking oil, spices, or kerosene without asking permission first, and 13 percent more were free to buy things for their children such as pens, notebooks, biscuits, and candy.

#### Women's Independence in Purchase Transactions

% of Women Who Are Allowed to Make Purchases Without Asking Permission	Partic	Control
Cooking oil, spices, kerosene	76%	67%
Tikas, hair oil, bangles	76%	76%
Gifts for the children, pens, paper, chocolates	89%	76%

This small difference is especially meaningful because the control group is slightly older on whole than the participant sample and hence would be expected to exert more influence and have more independence in the household. Part of the reason for this greater autonomy in making purchases may be the fact that the educated women are more knowledgeable about money and can check the shopkeepers' math. Buddha Maya Baram explains, "Before, when I was illiterate, my husband didn't give me money because I couldn't recognize the amount of the notes. Now he gives me money and I carry it with me."

#### SUPPORT AND INFORMATION RESOURCES

In addition to these objective indications of greater independence, participants also *feel* that they have more influence over their lives. Young wives recognize that they are generally valued in the home more for their work than for their literacy skills: only seven participants surveyed say that they feel that their mothers-in-law respect them noticeably more because they have studied. But they do feel significant respect from their peers who didn't study, and they also feel respected by others in the home. Seventy-eight percent, for example, say that they regularly share ideas with their husbands, and 21 percent say the same of their older kids. Eleven percent even say that they share their dreams with other young women in the house.<sup>7</sup>

*Sixty-two percent of the participants surveyed said that the presence of a group of educated women had played a part in changing their communities over the past ten years.*

In general, participants feel that they participate more in household discussions because they have studied. They ask for my opinions in family debates. Bindu Maya Magar told an interviewer, "Then if they find it right, they accept it. In fact, it makes sense for many families to ask their

young daughters and daughters-in-law to contribute to discussion, in contrast to women who did not go to the ALC. Participants maintain more sources of information about the world.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, they translate this information access into real facts: participants are better informed than their unschooled neighbors. Fifty-three percent, for instance, were able to give the current Prime Minister's name, in contrast to only 40 percent of the control group. Similarly, 53 percent said they had heard of AIDS (of whom 86 percent could accurately define it), whereas only 38 percent of the others were aware of the disease.

Given that neither the Prime Minister's name nor AIDS information were covered in the ALC ten years ago, these differences indicate that women who have studied in adult literacy classes are more receptive to information and better informed today. Ten years after completing the course, participants are indeed more aware of their worlds and many — if not all — of their families do recognize it. Sita Bhatta Adhikari explains, "Since I studied in the class and learned many new things, everyone in the family asks me now if there is any new work to be done."

In small but significant ways, literacy course participation contributes to women's self-determination. By giving them access to potentially valued information and skills such as recognizing bank notes or being able to read letters and signs, it increases their competence in high-prestige settings, which is recognized and rewarded with increased freedom and respect by their family and friends. Participants are definite, however, that the rewards are limited and to much the same degree as their literacy skills. Both the *Five Year Retrospective Survey* and this one confirm that women who completed the two-year class can read and write basic texts and do simple calculations, which is a far cry from where they started, but also a far cry from the aptitude they would have commanded had they continued in school, and public opinion knows this.

<sup>7</sup>These figures contrast slightly but consistently with responses to the same questions given by the control group: 61 percent, 21 percent, and 6 percent, respectively, say that they regularly share ideas with their husbands, children, and other young women of the house.

<sup>8</sup>Seventy-six percent of participants say that they acquire information from listening to the radio (66 percent control); 25 percent list their friends as sources of knowledge of the world (13 percent), and 22 percent say that they learn things from books and other print sources.

*My friends respect me now but in the house it is not so different Sometimes my family asks my opinion and I tell them but I can not read everything If I had studied more then things would be more dramatically changed Dil Kumari Baramu*

Statistics show that variations in literacy attainment among women who stopped studying after completing the class do not significantly affect individual empowerment. Girls who spent time in the public schools after the course, however, possess a qualitatively different level of knowledge than the others and this knowledge and the sophistication that accompanies it is socially recognized and rewarded. The woman who taught the NFE course in Palku for instance heads women's groups teaches and moves about freely and alone. Born in the village and educated in the local school she is still expected to work in her home, but her exceptional educational standing grants her a degree of mobility and self determination that is qualitatively different from less educated women her age. Similarly, the tenth grade passed NFE graduates who worked on this survey took for granted an exceptional degree of self determination (though still respecting their parents and in laws authority). Though still young and mostly unmarried their educational attainment marked them as learned and respected ones and entitled them to greater opportunities and freedom. All five agreed for instance that though they lived as other girls under their parents now if they could pass the SLC exam, they would be allowed to live away from the village to study at a campus. We have come so far Nir Maya Shrestha said, 'who could stop us now?

#### Step 5 "The Source of Progress Is Education" Education Transforms Tradition

*Education is the main factor for change in the present -- Bindu Maya Magar*

In spite of participants' enthusiastic descriptions of how going through the literacy course excited their intellects and enriched their lives the obvious changes have been frustratingly small. To the outside observer it is clear that some women have been dramatically changed by the opportunities they have taken part in. But most women blend back into the community not readily differentiated from neighbors and friends. For the participants themselves this is a source of frustration and debate. Women see now that they (personally) could be different but the external circumstances of their lives have not changed. Without the daily structure and stimulation that the class provided participants lament, most must continue to live according to the same conditions that prevailed before. We're somewhere in the middle neither ignorant as before nor like the ones in the future might be explained a participant in a focus group in Lakuribot village. 'It is a very odd position she said like a jackfruit on a cliff neither goes up nor comes down.

In addition to this problem caused by work and inertia, women are also limited in acting out changes by a wide variety of societal constraints. Fortunately for the women of Gorkha femininity is not seen as fundamentally threatening to the fabric of society, as in some other cultural settings but women are still controlled and devalued. Because of the tradition of patrilocal residence (when the wife goes to live with her husband's family) and the fact that women's primary value has tended to be linked to her roles as mother and domestic laborer families still feel compelled to invest scarce resources in their sons and see their duties to their daughters as providing good marriages. Both families maintain an interest in regulating girls' behavior to prevent any talk of lack of modesty or unchastity which would compromise both the girl and her household. Yet, in spite of this women in Gorkha area are not as deeply affected by the terrific fear of female sexuality and its destructive potential if not ruthlessly repressed that plagues women's lives in some other places.

*Seventy four percent of participants say they have incorporated "modern" or "developed" behaviors into their lives in the past ten years*

For many reasons this is a good thing but for our purposes especially so because it means that traditional restrictions on women's achievement are more the result of habit than of actively embedded cultural fear or hate. Ignorance is the word that appears when participants talk about repressive customs and most women we spoke to believed that their society would be open to change if the elders could be made to understand things as they did. "Uneducated people follow tradition. Sari Maya Rana said. "But people who have studied can think for themselves. Though everyone agreed men would resist having to give up their privileges participants were adamant that their communities were based on the cooperation of both men and women and together they could work things out and change. Things are going on and slowly we benefit. Bindu Maya Magar explained. Again and again participants told us education is the primary catalyst for this change.

Education transforms tradition by acting both within and across generations. First and foremost participants told us educated people seek out new ideas and do not look solely to tradition to illuminate the way. If someone hasn't studied then he only knows what his parents have told him. Krishna Kumari Gurung explained. But educated people think about progress (Gangai Maya Baramu). Reading opens up a world of imaginative resources for people who study in NFE courses or in school and gives individuals the confidence and the tools to make critical choices for themselves.

*"I am pleased at the way I can think now. Now I can understand so many things. I think and I can decide about the injustices done to women before I accepted that's how things were. My parents didn't allow me to study because they didn't understand. Such things were beyond their capacity. They were illiterate and no one convinced them properly. When people study though then they realize these things - Krishna Kumari Gurung*

Participants were particularly convinced that women had suffered especially severely from the general lack of popular education. If their parents had understood the disservice they were doing their daughters by not sending them to school participants felt they would certainly have sent them, as NFE graduates now try to send their own children.<sup>9</sup> But uneducated themselves and without educated women to act as models participants say their elders didn't realize the importance of education or the capacities of their daughters.

*Illiterate parents are not aware of education. They don't realize that their daughters can participate and can know things that she is also a human being with the capacity to progress if taught properly. These social attitudes are very deep rooted in our society. Nir Maya Shrestha*

Education was similarly seen as the key factor in community approval of women's new social roles. While older women might distrust younger girls' motives for participating in village work or fear a lack of modesty in women who speak in public participants agreed that the problem lay mainly in older people's limited experience with such events and as such it was not immune to change. All this is due to the lack of education. Jeena Kumari Thapa pronounced. We must make these people understand with the help of teachers students neighbors -- educated people.

<sup>9</sup>Asked how a woman should behave if her family refused to send her daughter to school even though she wanted to educate her child 39 percent of participants surveyed said that she should send the child regardless of what other family members said. A further 55 percent said that she should fight with the family and do whatever it took to convince them. In fact it is hard to imagine how such a daily disobedience could be sustained for any length of time but these testimonies show how important the issue of education is such that women would feel legitimately justified in opposing their elders.

woman from the focus group in Lakuribot Village exclaimed Overall, participants were optimistic about women's prospects in the future as more and more people studied and helped others to understand

*Ignorant people criticize women [who go ahead with their ideas regardless of what society says] But this is gradually decreasing because educated people know it is good Educated people understand these women who do social work They also advise other people not to criticize others without any reason Uneducated people who don't understand are gradually being overlapped by the positive mass " Jeena Kumari Thapa*

Evidence for this contention that education challenges custom is amply provided by the fact that ten years after the conclusion of the literacy program 90 percent of the participants with children of school going age are indeed sending their children to school<sup>10</sup> And their neighbors too, are following suite 76 percent of their school aged children were also going to school at the time of the survey

Moreover in addition to sending their daughters to school families are opting less and less to carry out some of the customs that would interfere most with education and personal development for girls Sixty four percent of participants say for instance, that the average marriage age is somewhere between 19 and 22 at present an age that would allow a girl who started school on time to have reached one of the higher grades before being married When asked if this is the same as it was ten years ago 92 percent of the sample said no that expected ages of marriage had increased Asked what they thought was the primary reason for this change the overwhelming response again was education

This bodes well for the promise of a new generation that is open to change and values education for girls as well as boys It is clear in this case that ten years after the literacy course, the program has played a critical role in bringing children into the schools leading women into public spaces and generating widespread community support for both Education leads to progressive thought and more education More than anything else, participants say having studied dissolves the shroud of ignorance and fear that keeps tradition - and women - fixed in their place According to the prediction of Jeena Kumari Thapa In the future, no one will be uneducated

#### Step 6 "The Era of Education" Empowerment Becomes a Community Phenomenon

*This is the era of education Not being educated means difficulties in getting married and getting jobs Being uneducated you lose everything " Padam Kumari Ale*

Participating in the SC/US NFE course has changed the practices and imaginations of the women who took part in the class But these effects have not stopped here both qualitative and quantitative data shows that ideas and practices introduced at the ALC have transcended individual participants to resonate through families and across the community at large

<sup>10</sup>The ten percent of school aged children who are not going to school are in most cases older children who dropped out in advanced grades citing sickness lack of interest or failed exam scores The younger children of the women we spoke to who reached school going age after their mothers had completed the NFE program are now by all accounts currently in school Dropout in the former group seemed influenced more by personal circumstance than by sex nine percent of participants lived in households with school aged boys who were not going to school at the time of the survey and eleven percent lived in households with school aged girls For the control group however the numbers were reversed with a drop out or non enrollment rate of seventeen percent for boys in contrast to only seven percent for girls

This result should not be surprising Common sense would dictate that women who live together share discoveries as well as disappointments And though Nepali villages are far from harmonious utopias where neighbors trust assist and support one another openly as many development planners have assumed the women we spoke to in focus groups and individual interviews were clear that they saw themselves in it together and personal rivalries paled against the reality of common benefit or threat Together at rest and in the fields meeting on the paths and at the tap participants conveyed excitement knowledge and enthusiasm to their friends and in this way a bit of their experience became accessible to everyone As Ganga Maya Baramu explained when a person learns something she shares it with everyone"

More concretely participants say that they have tried to share their basic literacy skills Ten years after the NFE class 80 percent of the participants say that they have read to illiterates since the time of the course and 77 percent say that they have tried to teach friends or family members to read or write For the most part these events have been informal<sup>11</sup> Women talk about explaining to friends the sounds made by each letter of the alphabet or showing an individual how to write her name and they mostly read for others when someone receives

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*Due to education, I have advised my family and others to go to attend the meetings and seminars tell all my friends to send their children to school*  
**Chandra Kumari Bishwakarma**

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a letter or a friend wants to write one But small daily acts are the salt of community life and this is how women's literacy has become part of local tradition Some of the women who did not study also understand things now Jeena Kumari Thapa told us They often ask us the source of our knowledge and what where and how we learned They lament their ignorance and their restricted freedom

Peer pressure and the desire for conformity have also worked to expand empowerment beyond the literacy class One of the most surprising discoveries of this study was that participants did not always stand out clearly from the control group either in terms of their practices or ideas (See *Participant Control Comparisons at the end of this chapter*) While this might be interpreted to mean only that the ALC in fact had little lasting impact on the female participants' lives other evidence suggests that to the contrary the influence of the course and the women who participated was so great that the benefits spread across the community as well

Support for this reading comes from different sources First participants did demonstrate consistently if only slightly higher levels of empowerment than their neighbors as measured by self confidence sense of possibility self determination in the household participation in public/collective actions and critical/imaginative thought suggesting that the direct benefits of actual class attendance were somewhat more powerful than the advantages of secondary contact Secondly women in the control sample told us over and over that they had adopted new practices or techniques like going to women's groups or installing pit latrines because everyone was doing it or everyone had one Everyone sends their daughters to school today " Dil Kumari Baramu who did not go to the ALC told her interviewers The women who studied in the adult class and the ones who did not we all know that boys and girls are equal now Still others say that they were convinced by friends who took the literacy class or by the NFE facilitators themselves

<sup>11</sup>There is the case of Chandra Kumari Bishwakarma however who after completing the NFE program and studying in the public school for 4 ½ years was herself selected to teach a SC/US NFE course in another district where she had moved after her marriage At present Chandra Kumari has two children and is studying for a college degree at the Gorkha campus See the Five Year Retrospective Evaluation for more information

**Non participants Who Began to Use Functional Development  
Techniques After the Course Because "Everyone Was Doing It"**

Immunize Children	20%
Install Latrine*	26%
Install Smoke Outlet Stove**	7%
Use Improve Varieties of Fruit and Vegetables	13%
Treat Childhood Diarrhea with ORT***	5%

\* An additional 9 percent (of the group who had installed latrines) said they were inspired by their friends in the NFE class

\*\* An additional 43 percent (of the group who had installed stoves) said they had been convinced to do so by the NFE course facilitator or their by friends who had participated in the class

\*\*\* An additional 21 percent (of the group who treated childhood diarrhea with oral rehydration therapy) said they had been convinced to do so by the NFE course facilitator or their by friends who had participated in the class

As perhaps everywhere in the world, rural Nepalese have their own version of keeping up with the Jones. And as more and more people educate their children go to women's group meetings install smoke outlet stoves and pit latrines or begin to control their fertility others seize the trend and follow until the new behaviors become customary themselves. On the basis of such evidence of NFE program impact beyond the primary participant group itself this study suggests that village women who did not participate in the course nonetheless demonstrate elevated levels of empowerment which testify to a trans individual community empowerment that we think has developed over the past ten years. Further study in which the control group is drawn from villages or wards in which NFE courses have not been offered will be needed to confirm or disprove this hypothesis but it seems a likely one based on the quantitative outcome of participant and control responses and the known paths through which information enthusiasm and behaviors are transferred through participants to others in their villages.

A major part of this transformation of individual effect to the community level is played by time. Participants have had ten years to practice innovations and share their discoveries time in which people became accustomed to these thoughts and behaviors and some started to pick up new practices themselves. For example Krishna Kumari Gurung says that many women who did not participate in the literacy course nonetheless joined her local women's group.

Although they can't read and didn't attend the ALC some people saw that we were meeting and doing something for women and the village. After that many people started to come to meetings and others came to accompany their friends. In this way everyone thought that it was good to meet and women got permission because everyone was going.

**Biba Bhatta, a 36 year old woman who was born Magar but eloped with a Brahmin, is one of the NFE graduates that women cited as a role model. When she first enrolled in the NFE course in 1984, she was already the mother of 2 sons. On the conclusion of the course, Biba was elected president of a local women's group. She is also a community sales agent for temporary contraceptives, and the keeper of the village box library. Before taking the course, Biba reports that she was quiet and shy. But now, she says, "I'm able to express what I think. I learned to speak and I learned many other new ideas. I thought it was good to read and to learn. I learn new things by reading." (See Also Case Studies: Manu Maya Rana and Krishna Kumari Gurung)**

With other development projects and the political and economic reorganization of the Nepali national landscape over the past few years villagers have been sensitized to a rapid rate of change and differences brought about by the NFE program have been assimilated in this context. The substitution of critical thought for tradition and custom discussed above has contributed to opening villagers' minds and reducing resistance to innovation on the community level. The simple presence of a sizable group of women doing the same thing also helped to legitimize changes. Girls have been going to school and children growing up educated. And finally exceptional women who took the course have had the time to grow and emerge as role models. Sixty-one percent of the participants interviewed offered the name of a local woman who they considered powerful or empowered when asked if they knew anyone in this category many of whom were NFE graduates.

Statistically the study shows that women who were able to name a local woman whom they thought of as powerful themselves exhibited more signs of personal empowerment<sup>12</sup> confirming the hypothesis that role models inspire individuals and open collective space for growth. Linear regressions predicted that women with role models have more confidence in their own possibilities for self determination and influence in the future<sup>13</sup>. They also possess broader imaginations<sup>14</sup>, greater aptitude for critical thought<sup>15</sup> and better access to information resources<sup>16</sup> than women who said they did not know any powerful local women. These tests support the hypothesis that recognizing one or more powerful local woman is positively related to other indicators of personal empowerment. This means that women who have role models are more likely to actualize personal power themselves.

<sup>12</sup>For the purposes of these calculations personal empowerment is indicated by autonomy, mobility, sense of possibility, access to information resources and aptitude for critical thought. These markers were chosen on the basis of the narrative reports of the women interviewed but even then they should not be taken as any complete measure or definition of empowerment as a static state or set of behaviors. Please see the discussions of empowerment in the introduction and conclusion for further discussion of how to interpret empowerment as a process.

<sup>13</sup>This was measured by positive or appropriate answers to 4 questions about whether the respondent thought she would be able to convince her husband or family (1) not to take another wife (2) to allow her to attend a training in Kathmandu (3) to allow her daughter to go to school (4) to invest in improved varieties of vegetables or livestock plus the following questions: Can women be powerful? Could you be powerful? What would you do if you had the power to make it happen? Can women accomplish [projects] without the direction of men? (Positive relationship P Value .000). P Values less than 0.05 indicate a strong relationship between the independent and dependent values in a linear regression meaning that one has a demonstrably significant effect on the other. They do this by measuring the probability of a relationship between the variables occurring by chance alone and hence by negative evidence demonstrate that one variable indeed affects the other in meaningful ways.

<sup>14</sup>Measured by articulating appropriate responses to 3 questions about what they hoped to achieve in life and how they intended to pursue it (as opposed to women who could not offer any such ideas and repeatedly answered that they hadn't thought about it or didn't know.) (Positive relationship P Value .000).

<sup>15</sup>Measured by being able to identify a problem or problems that faced them in life and suggest ways that this had been or could be lessened or overcome. (Positive relationship P Value .002).

<sup>16</sup>Measured by women's levels of knowledge of current issues and events that bear on their own lives in health, development and politics. (Positive relationship P value .003).

Pearson product moment analysis similarly confirms these findings and extends them. According to these tests, women who can name local women who they think are powerful are themselves more likely to act in the community and to imagine their futures as within their control. They are also more likely to be able to imagine non-traditional futures altogether and to demonstrate a higher level of critical analytical thought. More tests are needed to definitively establish this link between role models and individual empowerment but simple observation and qualitative reports support these findings as well. As Padam Kumari Ale put it, talking about her role model, she is educated, works for women, and can understand everything. She can go everywhere and convince people about what is right. If I could read more, I could be like her. I would work for women and convince the other illiterates too.

The importance of progressive female role models can not be underestimated. Children model themselves on others as they grow, and adults look to friends and neighbors for examples of the possibilities open to themselves. After completing the literacy class, many participants went on to study or assumed prominent social service roles in the community. And as they themselves followed their role models in these endeavors, their presence in the community may also inspire others. Some of the women cited as role models by participants and others had gone through the SC/US literacy class, and in the future, as others grow up, we predict there will be more. This tells us that nonformal educational programs contribute to women's empowerment by producing a solid mass of proud and literate women through direct interactions between these women and their companions who did not study, and by contributing to the formation of a few exceptional individuals who lead the way.

Empowerment is a community phenomenon. Nonformal education courses give women the ideas, skills, and enthusiasm to begin small steps for change in their lives, and they, in turn, share these opportunities with others. The process is slow and filled with obstacles and blocks, but as individuals influence their communities, that shift itself opens up possibilities for more and for others. And as participants reach out to their friends, husbands, parents, and children, women's empowerment empowers everyone. Some of the outcomes of the 10 years of women's understanding and action that followed the ALC, participants told us, are a general acceptance of boy and girl children's equality, a community-wide commitment to educating children now and in the future, and a greater sense of possibility for all children growing up in Gorkha today. Looking from the past toward the future, the progress is heartening. If traditionally parents did not send their daughters to school in the past for fear of breaking with social norms or because there was thought to be no need to educate girls whose only need was to be married off anyhow, as 19 percent and 24 percent of the respondents speculated, things have changed. At present, education is a critical attribute for a future wife and daughter-in-law. We prefer to select educated daughters-in-law, said the focus group in Kumaltari. We like that, and if the son is educated, he will ask for an educated wife too. For educated couples, it will be easy to manage their lives.

*The future is hopeful if the present practices continue. It will take a long time to change the community and I don't know if everyone will ever be changed. It is very difficult to change old habits. Illiterate parents are not aware of education. They don't realize that their daughters can participate and know things that she is also a human being with the capacity to progress if taught properly. These social attitudes are very deep-rooted in our society. The project people must educate the parents first. But it is women's right to be educated, to learn, and be knowledgeable. When this is accepted, our society will thrive. Nri Maya Shrestha*

#### MANU MAYA RANA LOCAL WOMEN'S LEADER

Manu Maya Rana was the chairperson for her local women's group. She left the post a few months ago because 'I was everywhere -- on the village management committee, environmental programs, working as a CHIV -- everywhere. Then I thought that it was not productive to be everywhere and it was impossible to do all that work well.' While she was chair, the women's group conducted a tree plantation program, assisted in building a local school, started goat farming, and renovated village streets. 'We also used to discuss the oppression of women in the meetings and think about how to solve these problems,' she says. 'We have had trainings, and many of us participated in the ALC.'

Manu Maya continues to work as a community health volunteer. 'I think I was chosen to receive training to be a CHIV because they knew I would do my best and I can speak in the community and understand the nature of my job. I got training and certificates from both the government and Save the Children. As a CHIV, I have to go to visit pregnant women. I help them to care for their babies in the womb. I've treated so many pregnant women -- properly positioned their babies in the womb. They often feel relieved after I've checked them.'

Last year, I handled a severe case. In my absence, a woman was improperly treated during labor. The old people in the family massaged the belly of a woman in labor, and the baby became silent inside the womb. Then they remembered to call me. The baby died before being born, the mother was bleeding too much. With a lot of work, I saved the woman, but for her baby, it was too late. To be a skilled woman in the village is very good. To go out of the village in such cases is expensive and often it is downright impossible. I've been doing this work as my duty. It is a difficult job, and I can be called at any time. My husband supports me; he knows it is important. And so far, the community has also accepted my work -- they have even been saying that I'm doing a great job!

#### PARTICIPANT-CONTROL COMPARISONS

##### Women's Perceptions of Their Own Ability to Influence Their Families

	Partic	Control
Thought They Could Convince Their Husbands Not to Take a Second Wife	76%	63%
Say That They Regularly Share Ideas with Their Husbands	21%	11%
Say That They Tell Their Dreams to Other Women in the House	11%	6%

##### Women's Roles in Household Decision Making

% of Women Involved in the Decision	Partic	Control
To Immunize Children	34%	24%
Themselves Prepared ORT	47%	28%
To Use Family Planning	25%	5%

##### Women's Independence in Purchase Transactions

% of Women Who Are Allowed to Make Purchases Without Asking Permission	Partic	Control
Cooking oil, spices, kerosene	76%	67%
Tikas, hair oil, bangles	76%	76%
Gifts for the children, pens, paper, chocolates	89%	76%

### Women's Participation in Extra-Domestic Activities/Public Sphere

	Partic	Control
Have Intervened To Stop a Man From Beating His Wife	25%	21%
Helped Someone Else to Claim or Collect Something That Was Rightfully Hers	18%	15%
Actively Participated in Development Resource Allocation Decisions	18%	13%
Attend Women s Group Meetings Regularly/Monthly	17%	4%
Attend Women s Group Meetings on at Least a Semi Regular Basis	51%	41%

### Women's Involvement in School Going Children's Schoolwork

	Partic	Control
Go to the School at Least Once a Year to Meet Their Children s Teachers	72%	49%
Supervise Children s Homework Regularly ( every night or almost every night )	17%	29%
Supervise Children s Homework Semi Regularly ( sometimes )	31%	33%
Discuss Children s Progress in School with Their Children	76%	52%

### Perceived Experience of Change

	Partic	Control
Say That Women in Their Communities Do Things Now That They Didn t Do 10 Years Ago	82%	57%
Say That They Have Begun to Do Modern Behaviors That They Didn t 10 Years Ago	74%	43%

### Critical Thinking/Action Table

	Partic	Control
Could Identify/Narrate Recent Problems	73%	66%
Could Suggest Solutions	45%	38%
Had Acted to Address a Problem Identified	56%	32%
Can Articulate Goals for Their Futures	59%	57%
Can Identify a Plan to Make this Happen	59%	54%
Able to Identify and Discuss the Obstacles that Stand in Their Ways	76%	65%

## CONCLUSION WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT?

*After the ALC we women were requested to participate in community development activities. We gathered where other people gathered held discussions made plans and participated in social works. In the past it was not a practice for men and women to work together. I think women started to understand their importance and men did too so everything is changing now - Padam Kumari Ale*

Having examined the movements and moments of empowerment as experienced now and over the past 10 years by the women of Takukot and Majh Lakuribot we are now in a position to ask what is empowerment and to what extent have the participants of the SC/US 1983 87 NFC program indeed been empowered? To answer this question we must start with the limits. Women in Gorkha are limited by poverty isolation and tradition. Poverty ties them to the home leaves no time or energy to expend on non essential works and little hope or resources to invest in themselves and their children. Isolation restricts their access to support (human and information) and the options available to help them help themselves. And tradition separates them from financial or family resources ideologically women are devalued and structurally subordinated and they are customarily denied equal material resources as after marriage they lose claim to their natal home and property and have no assured means of protection against abuses in their husband's houses. Within these constraints the women of Takukot and Majh Lakuribot have taken significant steps toward equality and opportunity though they are still defining forces in many if not all women's lives. Empowerment then is lived within the fissures of these forces and in the challenge to them.

Perhaps for this reason the women of Takukot and Majh Lakuribot themselves see empowerment in ways that are inseparable from community action. With few exceptions the women we spoke to told us that the empowered village woman is someone who commands knowledge and leads other women to the benefit of women in general and the community as a whole. When we asked respondents to describe a powerful woman whom they respected and wanted to be like, 56 percent of the respondents interviewed said she was educated or intelligent. Another 44 percent said she teaches others what she knows. According to the women of Gorkha an empowered woman is someone who guides and teaches, 'thinks and cares for pregnant women gives encouragement and respect to people who are suffering' and goes forward for women" to bring plans and projects by fighting. She may be a women's group secretary a literacy instructor a community health volunteer or a clever advisor at the well but what these women have in common is a commitment to helping people mobility and visibility in the region the confidence to speak in public and some education. More than having money or coming from an important family participants tell us empowerment grows when education confidence and commitment intersect in community life.<sup>11</sup>

Nonformal education empowers for empowerment. Never a state to be reached or defined empowerment is a process of struggle and change. The SC/US adult literacy course helped to begin this by bringing women together and helping them to claim the tools and confidence they needed to set their own agendas and pursue their own goals. In the process women learned to speak and interact in extra domestic contexts and they came to see their own potential and desire to actualize it. Negotiating that goal within the structural constraints of their lives an

<sup>11</sup> Participants do think that having money of her own can help a woman to be independent and to demand more respect in the home. Yet the number of women we interviewed who had any significant independent income was negligible. In most everyone felt that they had benefited from the course as it was without further skill trainings or follow up employment. (See Step 2. Increased Participation in the Public Sphere. Employment.)

communities has been the project of the past 10 years and is likely to continue for a long long time. The six steps have been part of this process and they are the movements of empowerment in action - *not* the precursors to it or the final result. Nonformal educational programming is important because it brings participants together in a voyage of discovery that builds bonds between them while allowing for transformative individual discovery. And by forging a new tradition grounded in women's actions and words it bridges individual and community joining limitation and innovation in the embodied practice of the NFE participants as they go about their days.

Many women who complete the NFE course will never become leaders or experience great changes in their lives. They may be too old or too poor with failing eyesight or exceptionally restrictive families. They may marry away after the class into villages where they know no one or they may spend all their time alone in the house or the field. Nir Maya Gurung describes herself as like a savage who lives in a jungle and laments that she has changed little because she is all alone. Bagwati Gurung developed a degenerative disease after the class that has left her entirely crippled and unable to leave her home. She passes her time reading now and though she is as intellectually sophisticated as anyone she cries the bitter tears of loneliness and frustrated hopes every day.

The real lives of real women in Takukot and Majh Lakuribot show that the planner's empowerment is a deeply flawed and vitally hopeful - concept. It is flawed by the way it imposes Western feminist notions of women's liberation on to Third World women and attempts to measure them by that standard. Yet it is hopeful in its honest efforts to improve other people's lives. The situation in Takukot and Majh Lakuribot now is one of slow transformation. On the surface some things look very much the same as they may have ten years ago: clothes, houses, work, social patterns - all of these remain roughly the same. But the villages are better maintained and cleaner, most homes and people exude a relative air of prosperity and women seem more unified, confident and visible in public life.

Area residents see the difference too. Eighty six percent of the participants surveyed and 85 percent of the control group talked about the ways that their communities had changed in the past ten years and 62 percent of the participants (60 percent of the control group) more than half of the adult female population of the area felt that the presence of a group of educated women had played a major role in that transformation. Now we go to women's groups we talk freely everyone knows that women have rights said Kamala Thapa. In the past girls didn't go to school we didn't know about family planning and we couldn't read. Tej Maya Gurung told us. Although the change is coming slowly we can read now and go places. We know the importance of education and we can do all kinds of new work added Dil Kumari Baram. The overall sense is that the people and villages are the same as they were 10 years before but better and this is how people want it to be.

The long term effects of the women's literacy program have evolved in this way - subtly slowly and within the logics of the local cultural system. Discovering their own power and possibility and learning that women have rights has not in Gorkha meant that chronic structural problems are directly challenged or opposed. For instance empowerment has not meant that a woman with a violent and abusive husband simply packed up and left him or that women whose husbands are taking second wives actually appeal to the legal system to have them fined and imprisoned though they now know they can. Human emotions are much more complicated than that and as the culture values intact families the women who live within it want whole relationships too. Oppositional feminism when women are encouraged to put their own needs and interests above all else is inappropriate in a place where social intercourse and material well being are

dependent upon performing specific identities with structured roles and women who depart from these culturally integrated positions must suffer both isolation and the material consequences of social exile. Furthermore this is not by definition a gender problem individuality is configured very differently vis á vis the social group in South Asia than in Euro America and participation in the corporate group is prized over individual interest for both men and women.<sup>18</sup> Empowerment envisioned as women agitating for their own advantage is misplaced and insensible in such a world.

This does not mean however that women are doomed to silent suffering. In the past ten years the women of Takukot and Majh Lakuribot have taken many steps to improve their lives and lots within the values that they know and that make them who they are. Leaving a husband who is alcoholic and abusive is not a solution, explained a woman from the Kumaltari Village focus group. Because she has children she can't go to her mother's house and living separately she can't survive. Instead she advocated to the approval of all in the room she should talk with the other women in the community about her problem or ask for help with the elders of the village. She can stop providing him with alcohol at home and ask other people to keep him from drinking. If he is so incurable she can leave him. But it is better to appeal to others and try to work it out.

**"I think about social matters and how I can improve myself and my family and my village so that we can become an example. I would have liked to become a doctor, an engineer or a pilot but I didn't get the chance to read in time. Now my eyes are opened, but it's too late" - Sita Bhatta Adhikari**

**"She has two children, her husband has three wives," said one woman at the Kumaltari focus group, pointing to another woman in the room. "She was married at the age of eight. Now she is 28 years old and she has been struggling since then. She's the first wife to her husband, but he married again and again. She could not protest it or stop him, nor could she leave because where would she go? If she had known about her legal rights then, she could have demanded her due. Such things have not happened in our village, but we have heard of events in the neighborhood, that if a husband marries a second wife and stays with her then the first one gets equal land and property for herself. After a short imprisonment the married one will still be married - she loses her husband anyway and her life is spoiled. But she will at least get her property rights because otherwise she would die."**

Women have also taken similar steps to protect themselves from husbands who take multiple wives. Although there have been no actual cases of women going to the courts and suing for support that we know of a number of women's groups have established all village resolutions to prosecute in such cases which they hope will act as a deterrent. Similarly a few women's groups have confronted individual men to prevent second marriages before they happened or to demand support for marginalized first wives. Knowing their rights and having the confidence to demand them has enabled women to address critical problems in ways that they think are culturally appropriate. They are not demanding total revolution but they are mobilizing new found knowledge and power to help themselves within this world.

According to theories that measure empowerment in terms of a pre defined set of behaviors unmarried or separated/divorced women living in their parents home are the most empowered. Compared to married women who live in their husbands homes these women tend to have more autonomy and self determination greater influence in household decision making greater mobility more support and opportunity for self development (going to school reading for

<sup>18</sup>See Louis Dumont Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1980.

information) and elevated economic standings<sup>19</sup> which features have come to be accepted as generic indicators of empowerment in much of Nepal. The problem with this assessment and the mode from which it is derived is that it is ultimately absurd in a practical context because it ascribes value to a culturally untenable solution and reverses the preferences of the women it would seek to serve. If getting married and having children is somehow understood to be the bottom line on disempowerment then how can such wrongly conceived empowerment programs help ordinary people? The women we spoke to dreamed of romantic love as teenagers take pleasure in watching their children grow and want to get married and claim their places as socially integrated adults. Their words tell us that these things - self determination, decision making, mobility, social and familial support and economic well being - are critical resources that help them lay claim to active and transformative power. But mistaken for the goal and divorced from the women and the process they neither comprise nor describe empowerment in any meaningful way. As a categorical understanding of empowerment *per se* these indexes are as ridiculous as the idea that the unmarried and divorced women of Takukot and Majh Lakuribot - the infantilized and displaced according to local social thought - in fact lead the richest and most actualized lives. And programs that would promote empowerment based on these assumptions fail to comprehend what local women want, need or how they help themselves.

The women who participated in the SC/US adult literacy program ten years ago in Takukot and Majh Lakuribot are still the same people facing the same problems. What is new is their changed consciousness. The villages in Takukot and Majh Lakuribot are basically similar to others in the area and the women resemble their sisters outside the district as well. But a battery of subtle transformations has begun to take place that is altering the very fabric of community life. Like any other people anywhere else in the world, the women of Takukot and Majh Lakuribot love their families and respect the basic tenets of the culture that they call their own. But now they have begun to examine their structures and traditions critically and those they don't like they can question and act to challenge. Many women still feel compelled to tolerate oppressive situations, but fewer and fewer find themselves condemned to tolerating these in silence. Neither radically different nor unaffectedly the same, women are working out ways to improve their lives and the lots of future generations within the cultural and material frameworks that condition their lives and values. In most cases their strategies are not dramatic, oppositional or even fully conscious, but they are forging and acting out empowerment in the worlds that they live in and in the ways that they want.

When asked what makes a woman powerful, 85 percent of the participants interviewed identified education or knowledge as the primary factor. And though many felt that it was too late to fully realize their own potential in their lives, they pointed to the next generation with hope. Nonformal education was not the only catalyst for the changes that we have seen and described, but the women themselves call it the prime force, even those who did not study. And so in the end, having studied at the ALC does work in small and not so small ways to improve these women's lives too as it affects everyone - men and women - in the area. The most dramatic affects we see become the experience of the literacy course participants themselves. But finally the steps taken by one group reverberate throughout the community to benefit all. We call these steps empowerment.

<sup>19</sup>This is because many women have taken advantage of these (above mentioned) freedoms and parental support to risk opening shops or initiating other large scale, time consuming income generating ventures that *buharis* are not as likely to be able to do in their in-law's homes but which bring in significantly more money than less intensive income generating works.

## HOW NONFORMAL EDUCATION EMPOWERS WOMEN

Main Disempowering Structures or Factors	How Nonformal Education Works Against Disempowerment
<p><b>Isolation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Limits access to information resources</li> <li>* Limits community access and extra-domestic human support</li> <li>* Lack of stimulation</li> <li>* Limits sense of possibility</li> <li>* Restricts (transformative) social interaction</li> </ul> <p><b>Poverty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Traps women in day to-day hard to-mouth routine</li> <li>* Requires constant productive work</li> <li>* Contributes to sickness</li> <li>* No money or labor/time to invest in children, education or other long term goals</li> <li>* Contributes to feelings of helplessness</li> </ul> <p>(Girls and women often bear the brunt of poverty due to uneven work distribution patterns, preferential food allocation and cultural preference for investing scarce resources in boys)</p> <p><b>Tradition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Marriage is the defining social institution in women's lives</li> <li>* Girls are considered an unwise investment since any benefit of their personal improvement will later accrue to another home</li> <li>* Patri-local residence and patrilineal inheritance policies alienate women from claims to natal support leaving them with no independent resources after marriage</li> <li>* Early marriage limits time available for education (in years)</li> <li>* Domestic work limits time available for education (in hours of the day)</li> <li>* Notions of female modesty limits women's mobility and voice</li> <li>* History of illiteracy + kinship/social roles favor elders and men and limits women's power and autonomy in the home and beyond (including rights to self defense by argument or breaking with the household in the case of alcoholism, the husband bringing a co-wife and/or severe physical or emotional abuse)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Isolation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Brings women together in support and communication networks that endure over time.</li> <li>* Increases information resources and sense of possibility</li> <li>* Establishes public space for women's activity and exchange</li> <li>* Generates ideas for how to improve lives within structural constraints</li> </ul> <p><b>Poverty</b></p> <p>Functional Development lessons included in the NFE curriculum help women to maximize agricultural output, take preventative measures to protect and improve health and nutrition, limit family size and establish complementary sources of cash income that can be carried out simultaneously with day to day work in the house and the field.</p> <p>Literacy and numeracy skills support these small scale income generating projects and in some cases make larger income generating ventures possible (e.g. opening shops, working for local offices and agencies.)</p> <p><b>Tradition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Education enables women to challenge traditional inequalities in their own minds and helps them to develop a voice to express these challenges in their families and communities</li> <li>* While studying together, women form friendships and networks for mutual support and action, including women's groups which may later act for women's advantage in the community at large</li> <li>* Development of an increasingly educated community means that more people will be open to considering tradition critically rather than rehearsing or defending it unthinkingly</li> <li>* Innovations become customary through repetition over time</li> <li>* Role models inspire women to personal achievement and offer an alternative vision of gendered action and roles</li> <li>* Individual innovations affect community practice, and community practice affects individual opportunity in an ever evolving feedback loop</li> </ul>

## CASE STUDIES AND APPENDICES

### CASE STUDY JEENA KUMARI THAPA

Jeena Kumari Thapa is a community health volunteer in Kumaltari Village Majh Lakuribot Aged 32 she was married at 20 but now lives alone with her mother father and a sister in her parent's home Though she has separated from her husband Jeena feels that she is lucky among women

*There are lots of problems in the village Parents didn't used to send children to school Early marriage to a traditional family in a remote location where the daughter in law has to face many difficulties In some families there are problems due to alcoholism Even after working hard women do not have time for rest and girls have to face all sorts of physical and emotional tortures from their mother in laws and their husbands' sisters In our society women face every kind of abuse*

In contrast Jeena says that she separated from her husband because she has no brothers and so was compelled to come and care for her parents herself 'When we married my parents wanted to adopt my husband and have him come here to live with us she explained but he is an only son so that was impossible Jeena and her husband separated amicably He agreed I could stay with my mother and I agreed he should take another wife I didn't feel hurt he didn't do anything wrong to me All of this was done as a compromise

Jeena contrasts her situation to that of other women around her

*Other women whose husbands have taken second wives suffer greatly and cry and complain In my village there is a woman with a couple of children whose husband married a second wife and completely stopped caring for her We held a meeting of the women's group and forced the man to bear the responsibility of providing food and clothes for his children at least He accepted but she is still poor and alone*

Jeena says that education is important because it can help women to help themselves First, she says "girls should be educated If the daughter doesn't go to school, then she will have to face the same problems as her mother Only after that can women become independent and not have to tolerate these kinds of abuses Now, if their husbands marry others they may have no place to go - if their parents don't understand it is a hopeless situation But in a literate society, these problems are easily solved Where there is education there is social awareness

She credits the NFE program for teaching women about their rights and how to support one another An educated person knows her rights We didn't know anything before participating in the ALC but afterwards we came to know what women's rights mean If a woman's husband drinks and abuses her, she can go to the other women in the community for help If he doesn't change she can appeal to the VDC or the police We've seen many such cases where women from the community help to prevent future injustices

For herself Jeena says she has earned respect and much more from participating in the class Other women respect me more now In comparison to them I can read write understand things and work effectively in the women's group In the ALC we learned many things and it helps us to live hygienically prevent disease and do social work I learned how to count money without having to know it from its color and size I can read and write letters read religious stories and look on the calendar to see when it is a full or half moon She observes however that she could have gone farther if she had the chance to study more I too respect the people

who are more educated than me Because they can understand many things they are capable of solving more difficult problems than me

Jeena says that she first became aware of the possibility of doing social work while attending the ALC and that this has been an important part of her life since then I talk with my friends about the problems of women Jeena told us usually the topics are related to the restrictions imposed on going out participating in social activities and such She says that she hopes to make an impact on society When I can convince men [to help improve] the situation of women then I will be happy I have worked a lot toward this goal

Whatever her limitations have been however Jeena is clear that the future is hopeful

*We've seen our grandmother's lives and our mothers Unfortunately our parents were not able to educate us But these days there are planned families parents take care of the children properly and are more health and hygiene conscious so tomorrow is certainly hopeful I want to live happily to eat delicious food not to quarrel with anyone and to have no one dominate me this is my dream for life Now people are getting educated and everything will change Tomorrow I think men and women will be equal in all aspects of society*

### CASE STUDY KRISHNA KUMARI GURUNG

Krishna Kumari Gurung is a 23 year woman from Takukot An NFE graduate she studied in the public school up through class 10 (the final year) and is now preparing for her S L C exam Quiet but committed Krishna is one of the new generation of educated girls in this part of Gorkha Though much of her time up till now has been taken up in school Krishna is active in community affairs and has already emerged as a young leader The road to empowerment is being forged in Gorkha today by NFE graduates and growing young women And although it is unsure what her future will hold it seems likely that wherever the road goes Krishna Kumari will be at the head of it

*I had wanted to study since my childhood but at that time I could not because I have many brothers Like other girls I was told to let my brothers study and I did all the work to free the path for them I thought my brothers' bright future would also be mine Gradually though I came to realize that I am equal to them that we are of the same flesh and blood and that similar rights should also be mine It may be my fate but at that time I got the opportunity to participate in the adult literacy program given by SC/US I studied for 3 years there and then joined the chelibeti program and continued in school From class 4 to class 10 I did well My school days were without any trouble from other children I want always to help my fellow women though no one can say what will happen in the future*

One of Krishna's primary concerns is to help other women who did not have the chance to study as she did Of the women around here some are like me and others' lives have been harder than mine she said in an interview For instance my friend Srijana she was my classmate in the ALC but while studying she got married and after the chelibeti program she had to manage her household We were both sad because we wanted to have similar lives to one another but now she is a wife and mother and only I went to school

Krishna feels that the problems women face are structural and that education and community service are the best defense

*The main obstacles that women face are lack of time family cooperation and understanding Plus they feel inferior and are afraid to speak and assert themselves These problems are most acute for buharis (daughters in law) But motivating people to participate actively in community programs helps Once educated people will learn and understand things better*

*If I hadn't participated in the adult literacy class I would have spent my time working and enjoying myself at local fairs Then I might have had spoiled habits I wouldn't have been able to teach my family new things Now my parents attitudes are changed They understand that boy and girl children are equal which means equal education equal rights equal property and shared work*

*I feel sad for my illiterate friends I thought I would have the same life as them but then I got the chance to meet and mix up in things that I never thought of I do social work so that they can have similar opportunities too*

Krishna was secretary of her local women's group for many years leaving it only to study more effectively for the S L C During that time, the women's group did many projects

*We constructed roads and volunteered for community works We raised funds by helping to carry stones for the school and spent that money to pay extra teachers We did potato farming and organized cultural shows at festivals With other money we raised we did relief work inside the village We started by organizing the buharis but afterwards many went outside with their husbands Others were unmarried and later married into houses far away Now our activities are stopped because of the difficulties of organizing women but when we were performing well we did so many things It was truly a collective work And we became more empowered with each completed task*

With the rise of the women's group came the interest of the men however, and this she says caused some problems

*Some [of the men] were more cooperative but others were hesitant to support us and help They often complained that it wasn't fair that we did our work alone and wouldn't include them as well This caused a controversy and it is because of this that the group is no longer effective But the leaders thought that women's rights would be better understood by women*

Within the women's group and beyond, Krishna said that women who had participated in the literacy course stood out "Some of the women in the group were illiterate," she told us "They were narrow minded jealous and they didn't know how to understand each other's points of view and get along It is difficult to maintain cooperation among such people In contrast, she explained a literate person is industrious She will try to do work and will accept help from others in order to succeed Women who did not study often have their own attitudes but ALC participants work hard and work together

Since resigning from the group Krishna says she has still tried to work for women's benefit I help people in the trouble In case of disaster I'll help the community I do as much as I can for the sick people and I have started to try to teach those who can't read and write

In conclusion she says she will continue to study and follow her heart

*I don't know what I'll do in the future I'm not sure about marriage I'll try to study further to pass the SLC and go to college Anyway I won't leave studying no matter how much trouble it is Education is the key to helping my village friends*

#### CASE STUDY MANU MAYA RANA

*Manu Maya Rana is an NFE graduate from Keurepani Takukot She works as a community health volunteer and since the class has been head of her women's group as well as active in village management and local environmental and development actions When other women were asked to name an empowered local woman Manu Maya's name was on the top of the list The following are excerpts from an unstructured interview where she shared some ideas about her life community and work*

I was a motherless child from a farmer's family Manu Maya began her interview I remember very little of my mother - others putting flower garlands on her photo We were two daughters and three brothers in the family Out of seven children two had died There were all sorts of problems in my childhood not enough food too much work, only the boy children were sent to school all my brothers became *lahure* (soldiers in the Indian army) and now one is a police subinspector in Kathmandu, another works at a factory and the third is an officer in a bank I'm the only one who is a little bit poor A mother is the guide for her daughters and not having a mother spoiled our lives "

I'm 40 years old now I was married at 17 and had my first child at 19 I have 4 children - two boys and two girls My older son failed four subjects in school and dropped out after class 8 My older daughter fell ill and left after class 6 I tried to send her back at the time but she said it was too late and she couldn't follow the lessons What's more, by the following year her younger brother had already succeeded her Now, my younger son is studying in class 7 and my younger daughter is in class 6

I'm sure that girls of the next generation will certainly progress more than me Younger women are getting education After studying they won't be afraid to speak and they can know their rights The source of progress is education Women can do most of the same work as men in our society if they are educated As far as settling disputes for instance educated women are already doing the same job as men In my generation we spent our lives farming sometimes attending local fairs this is how life was going on Women here are responsible for so many things and even then men don't recognize this and give them credit In the next generation it will be different The difference between the women of our times and the women now is that we had no choice but to accept whatever was ordered but now women are free to accept this or not This is good because whatever they do is for a better life

I was the chairperson for the women's group until recently I left the post because I was everywhere on the village management committee environmental programs working as a CHV everywhere Then I thought that it was not productive to be everywhere and it was impossible to do all that work well and I was always too busy In my time the women's group conducted a tree plantation program assisted in building a local school started goat farming and renovated village streets We also used to discuss the oppression of women in the meetings and think about how to solve these problems We have had trainings and many of us participated in the AIC But other women can be so hard to convince to [go from just attending meetings to accepting responsibility for] work for our activities Once we introduced a regulation that if any family

prepared a latrine within 5 days they would get 50 rupees as a reward and those who didn't build one within a given time frame would be fined 500 rps as a punishment. Within the time, the latrines were made. Now our village is much cleaner.

In some places men have encouraged women to come out of the house and expand their role. In others women are repressed. People must understand that women are not trying to do anything wrong but on the contrary to learn good things. Men here are accepting the activities done by the women's group. They encourage us. But everyone must know that women or men alone can't do all the work. Women must also give importance to men and think about it when they offer advice on out activities. The most important thing is mutual understanding.

I think I was chosen to receive training to be a community health volunteer because they knew I would do my best and I can speak in the community and understand the nature of my job. I got training and certificates from both the government and Save the Children. As a CHV I have to go to visit pregnant women. I help them to care for their babies in the womb. I've treated so many pregnant women - properly positioned their babies in the womb. They often feel relieved after I've checked them.

I'm doing whatever is possible here, but at times it is really difficult. I have the reading and writing skills that are necessary for this profession but they didn't provide us with the necessary equipment along with the CHV training. Without equipment it is hard to do this job. Sometimes pregnant women need to be operated on and I do not have the necessary equipment for that. Also there can be complications in delivery and I don't even have a catheter! Without equipment what is the point of the training?

Last year I handled a severe case. In my absence a woman was improperly treated during labor. The old people in the family massaged the belly of a woman in labor and the baby became silent inside the womb. Then they remembered to call me. The baby died before being born. The mother was bleeding too much. With a lot of work, I saved the woman but for her baby it was too late.

To be a skilled woman in the village is very good. To go out of the village in such cases is expensive and often it is downright impossible. I've been doing this work as my duty. It is a difficult job and I can be called at any time. My husband supports me, he knows it is important. And so far, the community has also accepted my work - they have even been saying that I'm doing a great job!

#### CASE STUDY NIR MAYA SHRESTHA

Nir Maya Shrestha was born in a village in Takukot VDC Gorkha district Nepal. Her mother and father were farmers and though neither had studied themselves they sent her three brothers to school keeping the four girls at home for work. Nir Maya was the youngest but she did not spend her childhood playing. Instead she says I spent my life cutting grass going to the field and collecting firewood. I was born in a poor family and it was not a happy one.

Nir Maya like 4 of the other enumerators who worked on this study had begun her education in the SC/US adult literacy class that we were investigating. I was 12 when Save the Children came and the adult literacy class started she told us later.

*I wanted to go but I didn't have the time. I was busy taking care of the cattle until late in the evening and then I had to help my mother in the kitchen. But since I wanted it so much I somehow managed to finish my housework quickly. I asked my parents for permission to go but they wondered what a woman would do even if she were educated and said it was foolish to start studying at that age. I disagreed however and started to go to the class not even caring if I had eaten dinner or not. I found the class very interesting. There were lots of new things to learn. I studied for the first six months and then for another six months and then for another three.*

*During that time SC/US supervisors visited the class from time to time. They advised me to go to school but I explained that I had no time. Then they started a chelibeti class in the morning to teach up to class 4. We studied in the morning and appeared with the regular students in the exam. Because I was so old I felt ashamed to go to the examination hall. But I passed class 4 in the first division and continued in class 5 in the day school.*

*Even during the chelibeti class I could hardly manage the time to study. At that time I was 15 years old. 16 when I completed it I had three hours of class in the morning and I used to finish half of my housework before the class and the other half afterward. Meanwhile my parents started accepting my study because I was doing well at school and my brothers advised them to let me continue. I topped the 5th class and the 6th but in grade 7 the situation changed.*

*I found myself growing up at that point and there was gossip of my marriage that disturbed me very much. I did not want to marry until passing the SLC but my parents were eager to unburden me. If their daughters are married it is said that parents will go to heaven after their death. Otherwise there is no chance of paradise. They proposed to marry me to a widower. I strongly disagreed. He was not well educated and was much older than me. I was a virgin and wanted the same. My parents put tremendous pressure on me to marry him -- they even threatened not to consider me their daughter. The day for the marriage was fixed by my family. Since it was his second marriage they planned just to go quickly to the temple and put sindoor (red powder worn by married women along the part of the hair) on the bride. The conspiracy was almost carried out without my approval. Suddenly though I learned of it and the day before the marriage I ran away from home to a better life.*

*I was married to my husband at the age of 18 while studying in the 7th class. He is my friend and he loves me. He has helped me very much in my study since 7th grade. At the time of the widower's proposal he advised me to concentrate on my study and not to think about other things. He insisted on the need for education. When the problem with*

the widower occurred I talked over the issue with him He told me that if I thought there could be any future with him he was ready to accept me He is an artist studying at the IA level (college) in Kathmandu

Living in her husband's home Nir Maya continued to study through class ten and appeared for the SLC (School Leaving Certificate) exam Like most of the hopeful exam takers across Nepal the first time she took it she did not pass At this point in the interview she hung her head low I feel so ashamed telling my story She says that she plans to take it again however and wants to continue in college to earn a degree

At present, Nir Maya lives with her husband's parents not far from her *maati* (natal home) She says her mother in law is supportive of her schooling She is illiterate but she consoles me when I have doubts telling me her own story of ignorance and darkness Like me she hopes that I will get a job she is also pleased that I understand things better In spite of this support though her husband is the only son and she is the only daughter in law, so there is always a lot of work to be done While she was in school Nir Maya says she worked in other people's fields to earn money for the family as well as taking care of the daily routine While working on this study too she rose early to cut grass or collect fodder before beginning her day with the team Occasionally she visits her husband and two of her brothers who live in Kathmandu She says she would like to go there and enroll in an SLC preparation class to help her secure a passing mark I was happier than ever before when I passed tenth grade she says and I would be even happier to pass the SLC It will be the happiest moment of my life when my dreams come true

Nir Maya's story is uniquely her own, but it is similar to many other women's in the region, some who also got the opportunity to go to school and most of whom didn't So far I have been successful in taking a few steps," Nir Maya told me The frog is out of the well and resting in the sunshine I have found some light in the darkness 'Still very few changes have occurred so far, Nir Maya observed There are still so many things I hope to achieve "

Today's villages are not isolated islands where women can pick out a living by traditional means The need for surplus income has sent men to work afield and women often follow them Ideas and opportunities from urban centers are becoming part of rural enclaves bringing new opportunities and deadly challenges And without an awareness that they can think and understand, women are often unprepared to comprehend the changing conditions and unable to mould them to their own advantage

Nir Maya was fortunate that her age skill and determination permitted her to study in school But for most women in the area adult literacy courses are their only window to the world Rural Nepal is changing and by choice or necessity its women must change too Nonformal education courses are a critical beginning As the past ten years have shown the SC/US program has given its participants the skills they will need to begin to claim their place in today's world

## APPENDIX 1 LITERACY USE AND RETENTION

### READING

10 years after the completion of the course overall reading fluency has decreased but comprehension among those who can still read has improved

87 percent of the participants say that they feel the need to read in their daily lives

At present 53 percent of the participants report that they can still read with little or no difficulty 39 percent report that they can read a little 8 percent lament that they can no longer read at all

When asked about their ability to read specific texts over half of the participants who could still read said they were able to read their old NFE primers (56 percent) and *Koselee* or other books designed for neo literates (55 percent) without much difficulty They also reported feeling comfortable with the simple documents they encountered in their villages like posters (58 percent) and product labels (61 percent) When reading these things participants reported that they understood all or most of what they read about half of the time, with higher levels of understanding for short practical items like posters (56 percent) and product labels (61 percent) and slightly more difficulty understanding more diversified texts like *Naya Goreto* (47 percent) and *Koselee* (48 percent) Only 18 percent of the sample said they were able to read text books from the government school with any level of understanding but these same participants (18 percent) were also able to read and understand newspapers and magazines

Participant Reading and Comprehension

Materials Available in the Village	Can Read Easily	Can Understand All or Most of the Texts
NFE textbook ( <i>Naya Goreto</i> )	56%	47%
Texts for neoliterates ( <i>Koselee</i> , etc )	55%	48%
Posters	58%	56%
Product Labels	61%	61%
Public school textbooks magazines, newspapers	18%	18%

These results point to a positive trend in literacy retention Compared to the results of similar estimations five years ago participants are reporting significantly higher levels of comprehension In part this may reflect the small change in the sample base self inflation in the responses or the fact that some of the participants surveyed had continued in school in the intervening years Yet other studies indicate that given anything at all to read and any level of interest literacy performance may increase over time In this case it appears that participants who could still read in 1991 have improved their levels of comprehension of the texts they see on a regular basis This surprising result belies participants' fears as reported in 1991 that in upcoming years they would completely forget what they learned in the class

In 1991 for instance just 19 participants reported understanding all or most of the product labels they read 27 more said they understood some In 1995 however 40 participants say they understand all or most of the product labels they read indicating that comprehension levels have increased for the participants whose understandings were limited in 1991 but who continued

reading Reading performance on *Naya Goreto* and posters and public notices follow similar trends

Even with this encouraging discovery however the fact remains that the figures are low and the raw numbers have decreased Five years ago 70 percent of the sample proved to be fluent or semi fluent readers when asked to read for a literacy test at present only 53 percent put themselves in this category Moreover though comprehension levels have increased a gap still remains between the ability to sound out letters and words and true reading comprehension for many participants

In the final analysis about half of the participants remember enough from the course to use what they learned in village life reading Teej songs letters, product labels, public notices school fees legal and land related documents invoices and transaction receipts If they continue to read results indicate that they can expect both reading fluency and comprehension to increase But without reading longer and more complicated documents most of the women are unlikely to make the jump between functional competence in village tasks and reading newspapers magazines school books and other texts that carry more abstract information

Exceptional cases however prove that the nonformal education program did teach the skills that participants needed to reach the highest levels of reading and comprehension if they had continued to read after the class Bagwati Gurung for instance developed a degenerative disease shortly after the NFE class that left her crippled and unable to leave her house Passing her time in cooking and light cleaning she spends her many free hours reading and says she can now read anything newspapers magazines development tracts manuals poetry school books and novels brought by her brothers from the bazaar Though she is the only one who through this sad circumstance had the time and inclination to continue studying seriously by herself at home at the end of the course Bagwati's success demonstrates that NFE classes are an effective way to educate rural adults limited in their achievement more by the circumstances of the students lives than by any gaps in the method or the texts

In addition the 14% of the class who joined the government school system after completing the NFE course have also become competent readers Though a far lower number than agencies might have dreamt the 18% who say they can read the government school books, newspapers and magazines have achieved and maintained the broadest range of literacy

Five years ago, 70 percent of the sample proved to be fluent or semi fluent readers when asked to read for a literacy test, at present, only 53 percent put themselves in this category Moreover, though comprehension levels have increased, a gap still remains between the ability to sound out letters and words and true reading comprehension for many participants

Still the fact remains that about half of the participants remember enough from the course to use what they learned in village life -- reading Teej songs, letters, product labels public notices, school fees, land notices and basic receipts -- and if they continue to read, results indicate that they can expect both reading fluency and comprehension to increase

Moreover, exceptional cases prove that the nonformal education program did teach the skills that participants need to reach the highest levels of reading and comprehension Though a far lower number than agencies might wish, the 18 percent who can read the government school books, newspapers and magazines have achieved fully literacy competence

## WRITING AND MATHEMATICS

As the 1991 survey demonstrated reading offers a good indicator for performance of other literacy skills Linear regressions predicted ability to write, write letters and do math with P-values of .000, .003 and .000 respectively Ten years after completing the course 63 percent of the participants sampled said that they could and did write letters to family or friends outside of the village, Eighty six percent said they could still write all the letters of the alphabet, and 92 percent could still write their names which had been and remains a powerful source of pride

Participant Writing Abilities

	Part %
Continue to Write Letters to Friends and Family	63%
Can Write All the Letters of the Alphabet	86%
Can Write Their Names	92%
Can Do Basic Math	76%

Seventy six percent said that they could still do basic mathematical operations that they had learned at the ALC

These performance figures indicate that writing and mathematical skill levels have not changed dramatically since 1991 when a literacy test indicated that 66 percent of the participants could write in the process of functional tasks and 77 percent could perform simple math

## PATTERNS OF USE

Participants report using what they learned in the class more frequently now than they did five years earlier At present 10 percent of the participant sample say that they read on a daily basis 10 percent say they write every day and 23 percent report using math calculations

## IN DAILY LIFE

This greater use confirms the practical integration of simple literacy techniques into villagers' daily lives In the past year participants report reading stories letters books and magazines for neo literates, songs poetry product labels public notices newspapers school books and their NIF primers Frequent readers say they look at product labels public notices favorite stories or poems their own schoolwork and/or their children's homework on a daily or weekly basis

Skill Use Frequency	Read	Write	Math
Daily (in 1991)	7%	14%	12%
Daily (in 1995)	10%	10%	23%
Weekly (in 1991)	10%	6%	3%
Weekly (in 1995)	19%	1%	3%
Sometimes (in 1991)	36%	44%	26%
Sometimes (in 1995)	24%	61%	41%

Similarly participants report writing letters (40 percent) and Teej songs (14 percent) in the past year with some degree of frequency. Being able to read and write letters is an important skill they say for it insures that others within the community or the home do not learn of their private business and can not misrepresent facts or cheat them a matter that is particularly salient for the structurally powerless daughters in law whose main sources of emotional support may come through letters from their family friends or husbands outside. Participants also write their names on the registry at community meetings (22 percent) and talk about how being able to sign their names makes them feel competent and proud. My life is easier now. Dil Kumari Gurung told us, because I can write my name at offices and I can speak at the meetings due to education.

The most often used skills on a daily basis are arithmetic and basic accounting. Participants use math to run businesses, pay laborers and collect their own labor dues, keep accounts of their income generating activities and women's groups, run their homes and keep household accounts and in daily transaction situations when they make purchases. Thirty one percent of the participants sampled mentioned the benefits associated with knowing math when asked how the ALC had made their lives easier. Being able to do calculations themselves is an important and empowering skill. Within the household and in relations with others, knowing that they can not be cheated helps women to retain their money and their pride.

#### GREATER PARTICIPATION IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Participants also use the literacy skills that they learned in the class to benefit their children's education. Whether as a result of the class or due to changes in the local economy, educating children is an established community value in 1995. In focus groups and unstructured discussions women said that they felt that their lives were harder because they had not been educated and they stressed their determination that their children would not suffer in the same way. To this end they make every effort to help their children with their schoolwork and to monitor their educational progress.

Forty seven percent of the women with school going children said that they made a consistent effort to supervise their children when they did their homework and another 72 percent said they met with their children's teachers at least once a year. Likewise 76 percent said that they asked their children what they were learning in school or otherwise made efforts to discuss their children's progress with the children themselves. In fact education is not a value that is limited to the participants alone. 62 percent of the control group made efforts to check that their children did the required homework and 52 percent talked about school with their kids. But contact between the parents and school was much more pronounced in the participant group as only 49 percent of the parents who had not attended the ALC met with their children's teachers on at least a yearly basis to discuss the children's progress and work.

Parental Involvement in Children's Education

	Partic	Control
Check That Children Do Their Homework	47%	62%
Discuss School Progress With Their Children	76%	52%
Meet Children's Teacher At Least Once Per Year	72%	49%

Parents who can read also send positive educational messages to the children by actually reading with them. 72 percent of the applicable participants say that they read to or with their children at least from time to time. Moreover parents feel that their own literacy is something meaningful for their children. Sixty seven percent of the women who had children before taking the literacy

course say that their relationships with their children improved as a result and 72 percent say that they feel that the children respect them more now that they have studied in the nonformal education class.

(See also *Step 3 Work Becomes Easier With New Techniques and Ideas* in the main body of the report.)

#### HELPING OTHER VILLAGERS

Participants use what they learned in the class to help others in the community. Eighty percent of the women who can still read now say that they read to people who can not read themselves such as younger siblings, other adults in the home, and illiterate adults from the village. Likewise these women have also been called on to write for their friends. Seventy eight percent of the participants who can still write say they write letters, bills or receipts for other people on at least a semi regular basis.

In addition neoliterates have tried to pass on their knowledge to others. Seventy six percent of the participants say they have tried to teach someone who wasn't able to participate in the class to read, write or do math. The fact remains that without further study neoliterates can not actually educate the village themselves but their efforts to help and teach their neighbors shows how programs initially involving only a few may indirectly benefit the whole.

#### TAKING ON NEW ROLES IN THE COMMUNITY

10 years after completing the nonformal education course the women who participated in it have moved to take on a range of new activities and roles in the community. They have joined the formal sector as shopkeepers, public school students, women's group members and leaders and community health volunteers. One exceptional woman has even become a local NFE enumerator herself. In their nonformal interactions participants' roles are even more broad reaching. Once limited to the darkness of their circumscribed experience in the house and the field participants now find themselves respected and called on by others to read and write letters, advise them in transactions, counsel them about development and explain to them various ideas and skills.

*Participants now use their literacy skills as teachers, shopkeepers, and Community Health Volunteers. They go to high school and campus read to illiterates, teach their children, sign the register at community meetings and manage income generating schemes. Some of the women who began in the SC/US literacy class 10 years ago even worked as research enumerators for this study!*

(See also *Step 2 Greater Involvement in the Public Sphere* in the main body of the report.)

#### LIMITATIONS TO LITERACY

The single most powerful factor preventing participants from reading now is lack of time (64 percent). Family disapproval of such non-productive work (16 percent), scarcity of reading materials (13 percent) and inability to read well enough for it to be rewarding (10 percent) also contribute to participants not reading or reading less than they would like. But the major limitation that most participants face is living in an environment whose requirements for daily life center around agricultural production, gathering grass and fodder, tending livestock and cooking and caring for the household. Women, and especially young women, rise early and sleep late. They read the signs and labels that present themselves in the course of daily life, letters when they come and do whatever they can for the children. But although everyone who could still read

agreed that reading made them happy, few women could find time in the course of a busy working day and at the end of the day most everyone was tired

The irony of this situation is that participants recognize literacy as something that makes their life easier and helps reduce their workload. But many remain caught in the bitter cycle of work and hunger nonetheless and reading is a luxury for which they have neither energy nor time. Participants who can read well now explain that they learn things while reading that make their lives easier and their work more efficient yet they comprise only 18 percent of the total participant group. Women who cannot read well tell us that they still benefit in terms of knowledge acquired, development strategies learned, self-confidence and specific skills like writing their name or learning to do calculations and recognize money. But they remain mostly excluded from the powerful benefits of command in the written world.

Still the fact that 82 percent of the participant group (in contrast to 57 percent of the control) can name new ways of thinking and acting for women that have become common in the village over the past 10 years and 74 percent (57 percent) say that they themselves have incorporated "modern" or "developed" behaviors into their lives over the past 10 years tells us that women's lives in Takukot and Majh Lakuribot are opening and transforming in myriad ways. However they read whatever they write, and whether or not they are fully literate, NFE participants are leading the change.

## APPENDIX 2 NFE PARTICIPATION AND INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT

As the 1991 survey indicated, nonformal education is an effective lead in to other types of community development.

### WHY NFE WORKS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Literacy course participation and the acceptance and practice of other functional development techniques are linked in many ways. First, the NFE curriculum introduces course participants to technological innovations, explains their functions and usefulness in local women's lives, and gives the participants a chance to discuss the meaning and implications of these changes themselves. Secondly, the 12 month course run by Save the Children actually teaches the participants how to implement the development technologies introduced. From designing a latrine or building a smoke-outlet stove to planting seedlings in landslide areas and preparing *jeevan jal* and nutritionally enriched cereals, participants remember doing these things themselves and they have seen and experienced how it is done.

Participants enjoy the NFE classes and they relish the knowledge that they can learn and change. One of the saddest laments afterward is that having realized while studying that they can do things that they rural women have the power to alter some aspects of their lives -- when the course ends and the women stop meeting, life stays basically the same though the participants feel fundamentally changed. Implementing micro technologies is a way that participants can retain a link to the class and continue to act on what they learned. In 1991, 89% of the participants said they felt that they felt happy as they had during the course when carrying out functional development projects. When the children fall sick and they prepare *jeevan jal*, they are reminded that they have the knowledge to help their families. Using latrines and walking through clean paths and fields, they know that their water sources are safer and they will be healthy. They are proud of this understanding and they tell their friends.

After studying in the ALC and discovering their own capacities for learning and control, participants are eager to continue the transformations of their villages and their lives through appropriate development strategies. In this way, it is true that literacy empowers women for development, in the words of Keshari Thapa "it all adds up to a little bit more."

### APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY: PIT LATRINE AND SMOKE-OUTLET STOVE

The installation of pit latrines has been one of the most successful technical outcomes of the ALC program in Takukot and Majh Lakuribot. Ten years after the completion of the program, 74 percent of the participants had functioning latrines at their homes. Moreover, the publicity that latrines received during the literacy course and while Save the Children was in the area affected more than just the ALC participants. Sixty four percent of the control group had also installed latrines of whom 9 percent said they were inspired to do this by their friends who had participated in the NFE class.

74 percent of the participants sampled have working latrines at their homes

Notably, this 74 percent participant installation rate represents a 28 percent increase over the number of latrines at the time of the first study five years earlier. This indicates that the community has continued to build latrines on its own even after Save the Children withdrew from the area and as more and more people build and use them, latrines become less controversial day by day. In fact, fully 22 percent of the participants and 27 percent of the control group said the

installed the latrines at their homes because everyone else in the village had one too. As one woman exclaimed in a focus group in Majh Lakuribot "our village streets used to be so dirty that you couldn't walk without your nose uncovered, but now things are neat and clean. If latrines were once a strange and uncomfortable invention they are fast becoming integrated into daily village life."

Participants are less enthusiastic about smoke outlet stoves because they break more easily and are less efficient for preparing food and alcohol that require large cooking pots, but the women who do use them appreciate their advantages. Thirty three percent of the participant sample and 25 percent of the control group now use these 'developed' *chulos* in their houses and a few others said that they had and had liked them until they broke down and could not be easily replaced. As with the latrines, the influence of Save the Children's recommendation and the literacy class was influential beyond the direct participant circle. Fully 43 percent of the control group who had installed these said they had been convinced to do so by the NFE course facilitator or their friends who were attending the class.

#### DOMESTIC AND COMMUNITY AGRICULTURE

##### KITCHEN GARDEN, TREE PLANTATION, IMPROVED FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

###### Agricultural Interventions

	Partic	Control
Do You Have a Kitchen Garden?	95%	92%
Have You Planted Trees in the Past Year?	69%	57%
Do You Use Improved Varieties of Fruit and/or Vegetables?	51%	51%

Whether due to the discussion of these features in the adult literacy class or to other features of Save the Children's programming in the area, agricultural innovations have been put into action by much of the community. Ninety five percent and 92 percent of the participants and control groups respectively have small vegetable gardens in the immediate vicinity of their homes. Fifty one percent of both samples say that they use new varieties of fruit or vegetables that Save the Children introduced to the area. Sixty nine percent of the participants and 57 percent of the control group say they have planted trees as a preventative measure against landslides in the past year. The message is clearly that agricultural improvements have been well received throughout Takukot and Majh Lakuribot.

#### SANITATION

Ninety two percent of the participants sampled said that remembered the sanitation lessons from the NFE course and that they made efforts to implement these in their daily lives. Asked to list what they did differently after taking the course, participants said they kept their houses (74 percent) and yards (73 percent) cleaner, covered food (71 percent), washed clothes more frequently (66 percent), washed their children more frequently (59 percent) and washed their own hands more often (58 percent). Later when the control group was asked what they did as prevention against disease, many mentioned these same precautions. But with the exception of keeping the yard clean, which 70 percent of the control group said they made some effort to do, the numbers were 15 percent lower on average than the participant group.

#### INCOME GENERATION

Sixty four percent of the participants say they have begun income generating activities individually and/or in groups since studying in the class, including 5 women who have opened their own shops. While women who did not take the course also do income generating activities at this same rate (64 percent), participants are more likely to have multiple income generating strategies operating at once, and they work in groups 18 percent more frequently than the women who did not attend the class.

The most common income generating activities now are raising livestock (49 percent of participant group), improved varieties of fruits and vegetables (29 percent), sewing or knitting (9 percent) and running shops or teashops (6 percent). Eighty eight percent of the participants who began income generating activities at the time of the NFE say that they are still involved in these today.

Most women say that they give the money that they earn in these enterprises to their families, but not under apparent coercion. In focus groups and individual interviews, women repeatedly emphasized their solidarity with other members of the household. In cases where the woman was ill treated, they were quick to agree that she should hold onto her earnings, but they said that for most women in the area this was not a serious problem. That within the customary structures that privilege men over women and elders over younger, interpersonal relations were generally caring and kind. In cases when a woman was sincerely abused in the household, participants agreed that she should keep any money she could to help herself, but they thought such situations were not the local norm. As one woman from a focus group in Kumaltari expressed it fairly summarizing the sentiments of many others, "when the family looks after your needs, you should contribute what you can too. If they do not consider your personal expenses, then you can take these from your earnings."

#### CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND IMMUNIZATION

Women who participated in the nonformal education course are more active in immunizing their children and caring for childhood diarrhea with oral rehydration therapies. Of the participants, oldest children 75 percent had been fully immunized, in contrast to only 48 percent of the oldest children of the women who had not participated in the class. In part, this discrepancy may be due to the slight age difference between the two groups, but to the extent that it is also reflected in immunization patterns of the youngest children, the data indicates that even after public immunization programs have been established and publicized, women who participated in adult education courses immunize their children more regularly than other villagers.

###### Child Immunization Patterns

	Partic	Control
Oldest Children Who Are Fully Immunized	75%	48%
Youngest Children Who Are Fully Immunized	79%	65%

Women who studied at the ALC are also more likely to treat childhood diarrhea with oral rehydration therapies. Seventy percent of the applicable participants said that the last time their children had suffered from childhood diarrhea, they had treated it with *jeevan jal* or salt sugar water. Another 30 percent said that the illness seemed so serious that they had taken the child to a health post, in many cases after oral rehydration therapies had failed to heal the disease. In contrast, only 50 percent of the control group had attempted to administer ORT themselves in a similar situation. To their credit, nine percent had taken the child immediately to a health post, but

others said they had gone to a traditional healer or simply had not known about ORT or how to prepare it

Method of Treatment of Last Case of Childhood Diarrhea

	Partic	Control
Jeevan Jal Alone	46%	28%
Jeevan Jal with Salt Sugar Water	70%	50%
Visit to Health Post	8%	9%
Health Post after ORT at Home	30%	23%

Considering the widespread publicity that oral rehydration therapy has received in Gorkha over the past ten years this data demonstrates that NFE programs are an effective complement to other integrated development programs. Of the control women who did use *jeevan jal* 5 percent said they used it because it was common practice among their friends and 21 percent said they were influenced by what they had heard from the literacy course or Save the Children staff

#### FAMILY PLANNING AND AIDS

Participants reported using family planning in much greater numbers than the control group, and they knew about AIDS and could describe it more often. At the time of the survey 80 percent of the applicable participants said they were using or had used family planning in contrast to only 41 percent of the control group. For the participants practicing family planning now sterilization of the woman or the husband was the most frequently used method (78 percent). After this birth control pills were most popular (15 percent) followed by Depo Provera which has decreased in popularity. Twenty five percent of the participants using family planning said the choice of method was their own and 50 percent said they had been the ones who convinced their husbands to use family planning at all.

Participants were also much more aware of AIDS than their unstudied friends. Fifty three percent of participants said that they had heard of the disease of whom 86 percent were able to describe it accurately. In contrast only 38 percent of the control group even recognized the name. Due to the sexual nature of one form of transmission no questions were asked about whether they worry about acquiring it or what they might have done to avoid it, so there is no information about AIDS affect on women's sexual practices available from this study. But participants did tell us that those who had heard of it had learned it from the radio (64 percent) or their friends or family (33 percent). It is clear that women who participated in the ALC are presently far more knowledgeable on the topic than others which is especially important for what it tells us about their continued ability to access new information since AIDS information was not covered in the literacy course.

## GLOSSARY

- ALC Adult Literacy Center Used to speak of nonformal education classes
- Buhari The Nepali language word for daughter in law. As discussed daughter in laws are expected to be the hardest working member of any household unit and generally receive the least respect from other family members though their statuses will increase over time and with the birth of children especially boys
- Chelibeti The interim course designed to prepare recent NFE graduates to join the public school system in grade 4. Participants studied in the morning *chelibeti* class most of the year and then appeared with other students for the government exam
- Chulo Traditional cooking stove used in rural Nepali households in the mid hills region. "Developed or improved *chulos* or smoke outlet stoves conduct smoke from the wood cooking fires outside of the house and thus protect women who do most of the cooking from a variety of respiratory ailments
- CHV Community Health Volunteer. A government sponsored position awarded to rural women. CHVs are responsible for providing health education and supplementary pregnancy and post natal care in their residence areas. CHVs may also serve as sales outlets for *Jeevan Jal* or temporary contraceptive products. Save the Children/US has provided health training and other types of support to these women
- INGO International/Non government Organization e.g. Save the Children US
- Jeevan Jal A brand of oral rehydration therapy approved for treatment of childhood diarrhea
- Koselee A neo literacy materials package designed and published by SC/US
- NFE Nonformal Education. A method developed for teaching adult literacy that de-emphasizes the hierarchical relation between participants (learners) and facilitators (instructors) and stresses the acquisition of literacy skills in the context of broader problems of problem solving and critical thoughts which are designed to draw on and validate adult learners' non classroom knowledge and practical experience
- ORT Oral Rehydration Therapy. A solution for the treatment of dehydration especially that caused by childhood diarrhea. Sold as a rehydration salt in Nepal under the label *Jeevan Jal* and others or made from a combination of salt sugar and water
- SLC School Leaving Certificate. An exam that 10th grade graduates must pass in order to apply to college
- SC/US Save the Children US
- Village Development Committee (VDC) A local political and administrative unit in Nepal