

Unequal Ground

**LAND ACCESS, POVERTY
AND DALIT MARGINALIZATION**

Unequal Ground 2026

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Collaborative Partners

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Cover Photo: A Dalit woman sits in front of her small thatched hut in Mahara Tole, Janaknandani Municipality-3, Dhanusha District. Her family is landless and lives without secure tenure, reflecting the housing insecurity faced by many marginalized households in the area.

Photo: Bishwash Nepali.

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Foreword

Land ownership has long been one of the most decisive determinants of household security, dignity, and social standing in Nepal. Beyond serving as a source of shelter and livelihood, land forms the foundation for social recognition, access to credit, participation in community life, and engagement in local governance. In a predominantly agrarian society, land is not merely an economic asset; it is power, identity, and dignity.

Yet, for generations, Dalit communities in Nepal have been systematically excluded from equitable access to land. Deeply entrenched caste-based discrimination and structural inequalities have confined many Dalits to landlessness or to extremely small landholdings. Even among those who possess land, the size and quality of holdings are often insufficient to sustain a dignified livelihood. As a result, Dalits remain disproportionately represented at the bottom of the land distribution structure.

Landlessness among Dalits is not only an economic concern, it is fundamentally a democratic challenge. Without secure land tenure, Dalit households face barriers to meaningful participation in local decision-making processes. Their exclusion weakens their collective voice, limits access to state services and entitlements, and perpetuates cycles of poverty, forced migration, and dependency. Such realities undermine the constitutional vision of equality, inclusion, and social justice enshrined in Nepal's legal framework.

Although the Constitution of Nepal guarantees the rights of Dalits including the right to land under Clause 40, implementation gaps persist. Existing policies and programs have not sufficiently dismantled the structural and systemic barriers that prevent landless Dalits from securing ownership and tenure security.

At the same time, Nepal is witnessing significant socio-economic transitions. Out-migration from rural areas is increasing, and substantial areas of agricultural land remain fallow. While this trend presents challenges for national food security and rural vitality, it also opens new opportunities to enhance access to land for landless Dalit communities through innovative policy measures, local government initiatives, and community-based solutions.

In this context, the Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Lutheran Community Welfare Society (LCWS), and Rastriya Mukta Haliya Samaj Federation-Nepal (RMHSF-N), jointly conducted the study *Secure the Soil, Secure Lives: A Call to Ensure Land Access and Ownership for Landless Dalit Communities in Nepal*. This study seeks to generate evidence, elevate the voices of affected landless communities, and contribute to policy dialogue aimed at realizing land rights in practice not only in principle.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the lead researcher, Dr. Suresh Dhakal, Researcher Bishwash Nepali, and the entire research team for their rigorous analysis and committed engagement with communities. Their work provides critical insights into the lived realities of landless Dalits and offers practical recommendations for transformative action.

We believe this report will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, local governments, civil society organizations, development partners, and community leaders. It is our collective responsibility to translate constitutional commitments into tangible change in people's lives.

We reaffirm our commitment to continue advocacy, policy engagement, and collaborative action on land rights in partnership with local governments and other stakeholders in the days ahead. Securing land for landless Dalit communities is not only about property. It is about securing lives, dignity, and the future of inclusive democracy in Nepal.

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Executive Summary

This study examines landlessness among Dalit communities in Nepal as a structural outcome of caste-based social exclusion embedded within historical, legal, and political systems. Dalits—groups historically positioned at the lowest strata of South Asia’s caste hierarchy—have long faced systematic barriers to land ownership, economic mobility, and political participation. In Nepal, these patterns are particularly pronounced among Dalits residing in the southern plains (the Tarai), where agrarian land relations, rigid social hierarchies, and weak tenure security intersect to reproduce chronic poverty and vulnerability.

Nepal is a predominantly agrarian country in which access to land remains a primary determinant of livelihood security, food production, social status, and political voice. Although Dalits constitute approximately 13.4 percent of the national population, their access to land is disproportionately limited due to historically entrenched discrimination. Landlessness is most severe among Tarai Dalits, reflecting a legacy of exclusion from land distribution processes during state formation and agrarian reforms. In Madhesh Province, one of Nepal’s most densely populated and agriculturally significant regions, an estimated 44 percent of Dalit households do not own land.

For Dalit communities, landlessness functions both as a cause and a consequence of multidimensional poverty. Without secure tenure, households remain economically dependent and socially precarious, often compelled to engage in informal, low-paid, and exploitative labor arrangements. In the Tarai, this includes bonded or semi-bonded agricultural labor systems such as *Harawa-Charawa*, which persist despite formal abolition. More than half of Dalit households in the study areas experience conditions of critical vulnerability, marked by food insecurity, unstable income, and limited access to basic services.

The impacts of landlessness are profoundly gendered. Dalit women face intersecting forms of discrimination based on caste and gender, resulting in systematic exclusion from land inheritance and ownership within patriarchal family structures. This “double discrimination” intensifies women’s economic dependence and social marginalization. While the empirical focus of this study is on selected districts in Madhesh and Far-West Provinces, the patterns of caste-based land exclusion and gendered disadvantage identified here reflect broader national and regional dynamics across Nepal.

The study employs a mixed-methods research design to capture both the scale and lived experience of landlessness. Quantitative data were collected through a household survey of 1,727 Dalit households across eight municipalities in Madhesh and Far-West Provinces, representing approximately 11.6 percent of Dalit households in the study sites. Qualitative data were generated through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and in-depth case studies, enabling triangulation and contextual interpretation of survey findings.

Empirical results demonstrate a strong association between landlessness and multidimensional deprivation. Educational attainment among Dalit households remains markedly low, with only 32 percent of respondents reported as literate and just 1 percent having completed tertiary education. Housing conditions reflect deep material insecurity: approximately 70 percent of households live in temporary dwellings constructed from mud and bamboo. Although access

to electricity is relatively widespread, nearly one-third of households lack sanitation facilities, primarily due to insufficient land for construction.

Food insecurity is pervasive. Nearly 59 percent of surveyed households do not produce any food crops because they lack access to agricultural land, and 96 percent rely on market purchases for food, placing sustained pressure on limited incomes and constraining opportunities for savings or investment. Livelihood insecurity has also contributed to high levels of labor migration. Seventy-one percent of households reported that at least one family member had migrated for work, primarily to neighboring India or to Gulf countries. Qualitative evidence suggests that migration—particularly seasonal and circular migration to India—is likely underreported in official data.

Land ownership and tenure insecurity constitute a central dimension of exclusion. Only 34 percent of Dalit households own the land on which their homes are built, while approximately 41 percent reside on unregistered or state land, exposing them to constant risk of eviction. Access to agricultural land is even more limited: 69 percent of households have no agricultural land at all. For those who cultivate land under informal or contractual arrangements, plot sizes are extremely small, averaging between 0.06 and 0.08 hectares per household. Although official records classify 17 percent of land in the study areas as barren, only a small portion is made available for cultivation, indicating significant underutilization. Qualitative findings further suggest that the extent of uncultivated land is underestimated in official statistics.

Nepal's constitutional and legal framework formally recognizes land as a right for historically marginalized groups. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) includes provisions mandating state support for landless Dalits, reflecting international human rights commitments. However, this study identifies a persistent gap between legal guarantees and implementation. The absence of specific, enforceable legislation has limited the realization of constitutional provisions. Moreover, inconsistencies in land-related laws and amendments have produced unequal outcomes, often restricting Dalits' access to land relative to other groups. The state-led Land Issues Resolving Commission, widely perceived as a final institutional avenue for landless Dalits, has achieved limited reach due to weak local implementation, procedural complexity, and insufficient outreach.

The study concludes that land for Dalit communities in Nepal should be understood not merely as an economic asset, but as a foundation for dignity, social inclusion, citizenship, and the realization of basic human rights. Without deliberate and sustained intervention, the gap between constitutional commitments and lived realities will continue to reproduce intergenerational poverty and caste-based exclusion.

The findings underscore the need for enforceable legal reforms, strengthened local governance, gender-equitable land ownership arrangements, and integrated livelihood support. Ensuring transparency through caste- and gender-disaggregated data and utilizing idle or underused land for inclusive agrarian development are also critical. More broadly, the study argues that addressing Dalit landlessness requires not only redistributive measures, but also institutional reform and caste-sensitive governance capable of dismantling historically entrenched systems of exclusion.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CSRC	Community Self-Reliance Centre
FW	Far West
HHs	Household Survey
LCWS	Lutheran Community Welfare Society
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
NSO	National Statistical Office
RMHSF	Rastriya Mukta Haliya Samaj Federation

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Land ownership occupies a central place in Nepal's agrarian political economy. In a society where agriculture remains a primary source of livelihood, access to land shapes household well-being, food security, social status, and political participation (Upreti & Adhikari, 2017). Land is not only a productive asset but also a marker of social recognition and security. Yet access to this resource is deeply unequal.

Dalits, historically positioned at the lowest levels of the caste hierarchy, continue to experience systematic exclusion from land ownership. Compared to other social groups, Dalits own significantly less land, and a substantial proportion remain entirely landless. This exclusion is most pronounced among Tarai Dalits, nearly 44 percent of whom do not own any land (National Dalit Commission [NDC], 2023). Persistent landlessness constrains livelihood opportunities, deepens economic vulnerability, and reinforces social and political marginalization. It also reproduces caste-based economic hierarchies by limiting access to productive resources and sustainable livelihoods.

According to the National Population and Housing Census 2021, Dalits constitute 13.4 percent of Nepal's population, with Hill Dalits accounting for 8.6 percent and Tarai Dalits 4.8 percent (National Statistical Office [NSO], 2022). For Dalit communities, landlessness is both a driver and an outcome of poverty. In the absence of secure tenure, households face limited opportunities for economic mobility and remain dependent on informal and often exploitative labor arrangements. These conditions contribute to persistent cycles of deprivation and social exclusion (CSRC, 2019; Ghimire, 2020).

Empirical evidence illustrates the severity of these conditions. A study conducted by the Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC) in Dhanusha District found that 74.15 percent of Harawa–Charawa (bonded agricultural laborer) households were Tarai Dalits. More than half of these households lived under conditions of critical vulnerability and bondage. Only 29 percent had been able to construct houses on land they owned, indicating widespread tenure insecurity (Dhakal, Karki, & Shrestha, 2020). Landlessness also contributes directly to food insecurity. Approximately 40 percent of these households were unable to produce sufficient food for annual consumption, while only 1 percent were fully self-sufficient.

Beyond economic deprivation, Dalits face entrenched social, cultural, and political barriers to securing land rights. Discriminatory norms, limited institutional support, and weak political representation have constrained Dalits' ability to claim land rights guaranteed under law (Rana et al., 2018). Administrative obstacles—including complex documentation requirements and inconsistent implementation—further undermine access to formal tenure.

Within Dalit communities, these constraints are intensified by gender-based inequalities. Dalit women experience intersecting forms of exclusion rooted in both caste and gender. Patriarchal inheritance practices and caste hierarchies often prevent women from owning or inheriting land, even within their own households. This intersectional exclusion limits women's economic autonomy and weakens their social and political position.

Existing scholarship demonstrates that legal, cultural, and administrative barriers continue to restrict women's access to and control over land, particularly among poor and Dalit populations (UNDP, 2020; Tiwari, 2022). Addressing these inequalities requires more than formal legal provisions. It demands institutional reform and social transformation that recognize Dalit women as legitimate landholders and economic actors.

Land ownership holds particular significance for Dalit women and men alike. Secure land rights enhance economic stability, enable engagement in agriculture and income generation, and reduce dependence on exploitative labor systems. Land also functions as an intergenerational asset, offering a pathway toward long-term security and social mobility.

In addition to its economic value, land ownership carries important social and political implications. For women, secure land rights can enhance status within households and communities, strengthen participation in decision-making, and challenge entrenched caste- and gender-based hierarchies. Land ownership is also associated with reduced vulnerability to gender-based violence and improved access to state services, including agricultural subsidies and development programs.

From a legal and normative perspective, securing land rights for Dalits aligns with Nepal's constitutional commitments to equality, inclusion, and social justice. It also contributes to the realization of international development goals, including those related to poverty reduction, gender equality, and access to justice. More broadly, land ownership reinforces dignity, citizenship, and a sense of belonging.

Against this background, this book examines land rights, land ownership, and land access among Dalit communities, with particular attention to Tarai Dalits and Dalit women. It addresses the following questions:

What is the current status of land rights, land ownership, and land access among Tarai Dalits, particularly Dalit women?

What structural, social, and institutional factors prevent Dalits, and especially Dalit women, from accessing and owning land?

What policy and implementation gaps constrain land access for Dalits in Madhesh and Sudur Paschim Provinces?

What institutional, legal, and programmatic measures can strengthen land rights and tenure security for Dalits, particularly Dalit women?

1.2 Conceptual Framework

This study follows the conceptual framework (Fig. 1a) that conceptualizes Dalit landlessness in the study area, and more broadly in Nepal, as a structural and intersectional condition. It is embedded in historically entrenched caste hierarchies and gender-based discrimination. Hence, landlessness is not merely an outcome of poverty. The landless among Dalit functions simultaneously as both a cause and a consequence of multidimensional poverty.

The absence of secure land access for Dalits undermines their livelihoods and limits productive opportunities. It also intensifies food insecurity. These constraints force seasonal or distress-driven migration and reinforce socio-economic exclusion.

The effects are particularly severe for Dalit women. Their marginalization is shaped by the intersecting dynamics of caste, gender, and class. Although constitutional provisions formally recognize land and housing rights, their realization remains limited. Weak institutional capacity, fragmented governance, and gaps between legislation and implementation constrain effective outcomes in practice.

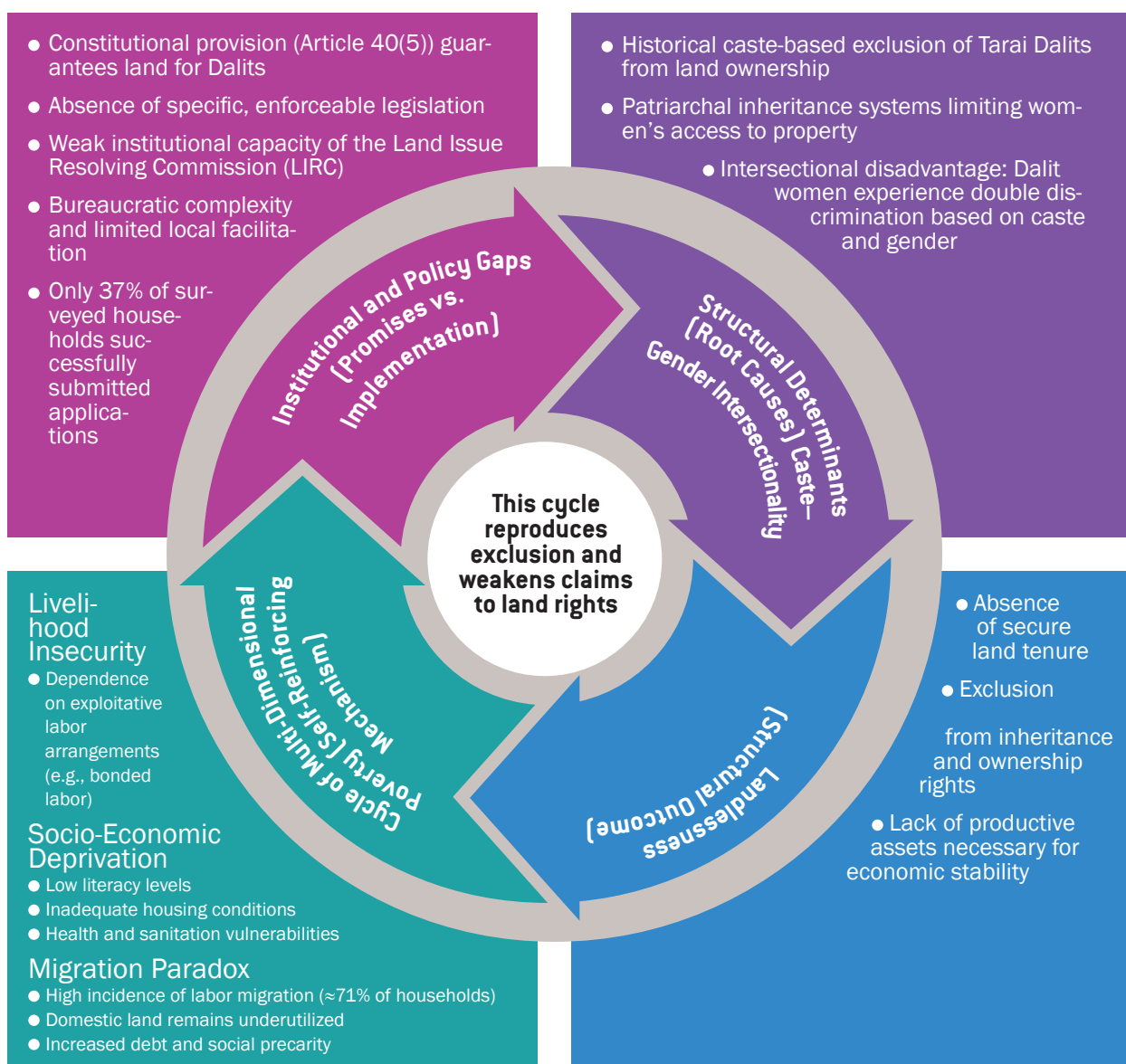


Figure 1a : Conceptual Framework

Building on this diagnosis, the framework advances a theory of change (Fig. 1b). It identifies secure and legally enforceable land rights as a critical entry point for addressing structural exclusion. The framework posits that strengthened local institutions and effective enforcement mechanisms are essential. It also emphasizes gender-responsive land titling. This includes the recognition of women’s and joint land ownership (JLO) rights. These measures can transform land from a source of vulnerability into a foundation for livelihood security, dignity, and substantive citizenship. Through these pathways, improved land governance is expected to enhance economic stability and reduce forced migration. It can also foster social inclusion. Together, these changes can interrupt the intergenerational reproduction of Dalit poverty and exclusion.

Thus, this framework conceptualizes Dalit landlessness in Nepal as a structurally produced condition shaped by caste and gender hierarchies. It demonstrates how landlessness sustains a cycle of multi-dimensional poverty, exacerbated by institutional and policy failures, and identifies legal, institutional, and socio-economic interventions necessary to transform land into a foundation for dignity and social inclusion.

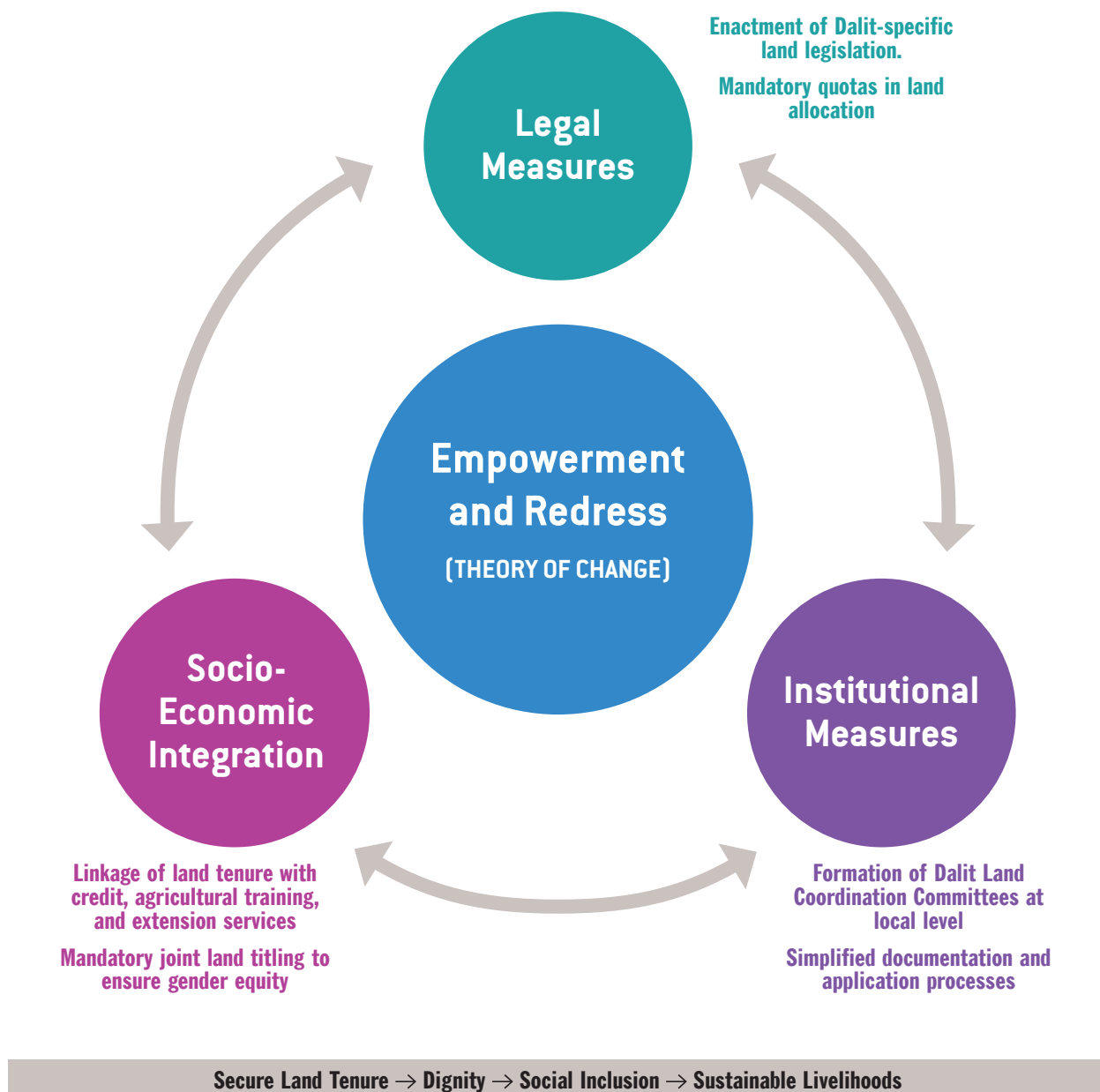


Figure 1b : Theory of Change

2. Method of Study

This study adopted a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach was adopted to achieve a comprehensive and balanced analysis.

Quantitative data were collected through a Household Survey (HHs). Data collection software (Kobo Toolbox) was used to ensure accuracy and efficiency. Additional quantitative data were obtained from secondary sources, including the Census (2021), Agriculture Census, Living Standard Surveys, and relevant research reports.

Qualitative data were collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), case studies, life histories, and field observations. These methods helped capture deeper insights into lived experiences. Qualitative findings were also used to interpret and contextualize quantitative results.

The qualitative methods focused on understanding perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to land ownership and access. Special attention was given to marginalized groups within the Dalit community.

A literature review complemented both primary quantitative and qualitative data. In addition, a separate policy analysis section was included to assess existing legal and institutional frameworks.

2.1 Selection of the Study Sites

The study was conducted in four districts: Siraha and Dhanusha from Madhesh Province, and Doti and Kanchanpur from Far-West Province. Two municipalities (palikas) were selected from each district.

Districts were selected purposively to support future programmatic interventions. Municipalities were chosen based on predefined criteria, including the number of Dalit households and the severity of landlessness. This ensured adequate and representative sample coverage.

In Madhesh Province, municipalities extending toward the southern border and along the east-west highway were also considered. This helped ensure wider geographical representation.

Municipality selection was carried out in consultation with the Lutheran Community Welfare Society (LCWS), and the Rastriya Mukta Haliya Samaj Federation (RMHSF) team. The applied criteria reflected Dalits' access to and ownership of land in each district.

As the study aims to inform future advocacy and policy interventions on land rights, access, and ownership—particularly for Tarai Dalit communities and Dalit women—the selected municipalities were considered representative of the broader context.

2.2 Selection of Samples

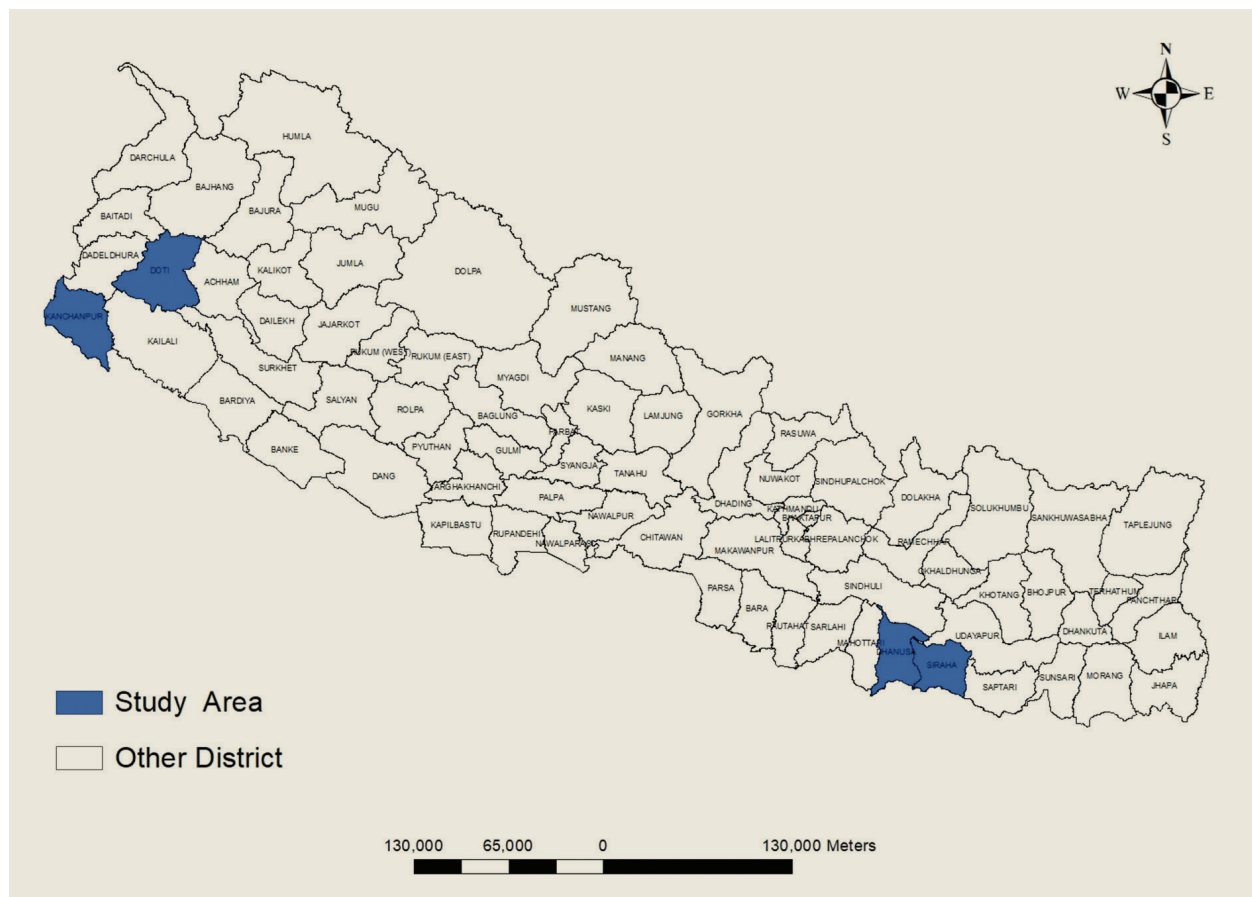
2.2.a Household Survey

Ten percent of the total households in each municipality were surveyed as samples to make it statistically representative of the universe (total population of the study sites).

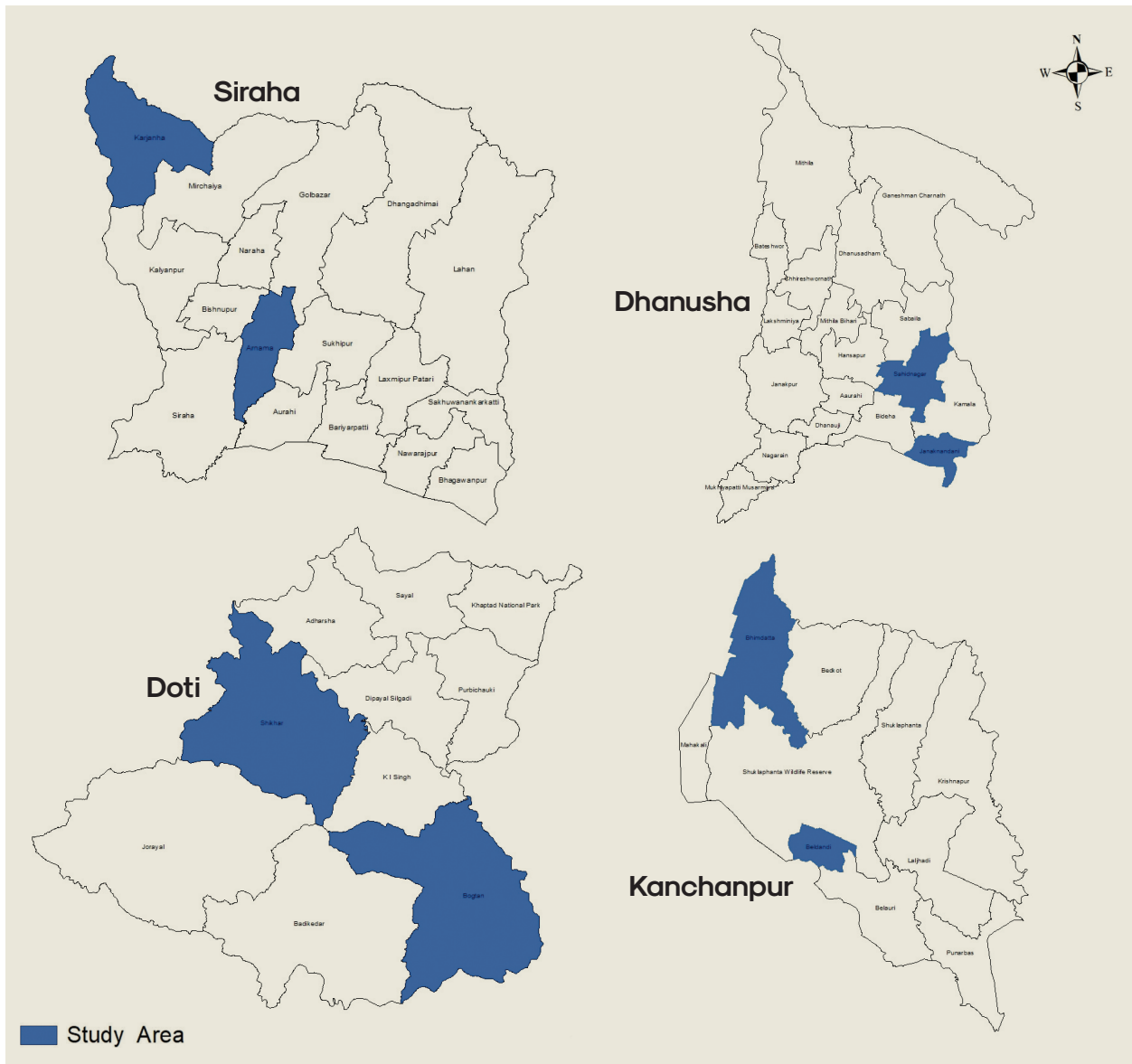
The total population was estimated from the 2021 population census. The required 10 percent of households were selected through systematic random sampling. Considering the large area of the selected municipalities, and thereby the micro-geographical variations, the municipalities were divided into 16 squares, and the sampled number of households is distributed equally to all squares.

A roster of Dalit households was prepared with the help of the ward office and local CSOs working in the field. Then, the required number of households was surveyed in each square following a simple random method; that is, every 11th household was included in the survey.

The survey collected the vital information, for example, the current status of land rights, land ownership, and land access among the Tarai Dalits and Dalit women. See Annex for survey questionnaire.



Map 1a: Map of Nepal Showing Study Districts and Municipalities



Map 1b: Map of Nepal Showing Study Districts and Municipalities

2.2.b Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interviews were the principal method of data collection for this study. Informants constituted three distinct groups: Dalit men and women, representatives of local governments, land rights activists, representatives of CSOS, and development organizations.

Interviews were semi-structured, and separate checklists were prepared for each group of informants. See Annex for the Checklist

2.2.c Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Two FGDs were conducted in each municipality, with Dalit women and with Dalit men. Separate sets of checklists were prepared for men and women. Each FGD invited 6–10 participants; however, there were more than a dozen participants on some occasions. See Annex FGD Checklist.

2.2.d Case Studies and Life Histories

Case studies and life histories were collected to illustrate the key barriers and challenges to accessing land by Dalit families in Madhesh Province and in Far-West Province. About 10 such illustrative case studies or life histories were collected. These cases helped describe and explain the patterns drawn from the survey.

2.2.e Literature Review

A review of existing laws, policies, and reports on land ownership and tenure, particularly those related to Dalit communities in Nepal, was conducted. To some extent, relevant academic research, reports published by various I/NGOs, and official documents at the ward/municipality, provincial, and federal levels were also reviewed. The review of relevant policies and legal provisions was done as a separate chapter.

2.2.f Policy Analysis

The policy review was carried out, not only to review the existing policies, as such, but also to identify gaps *to inform future advocacy efforts and policy interventions to strengthen land rights, land access, and land ownership for Terai Dalit women and men. Policy review is presented as a separate chapter in this report.*

The key elements of policy review, among other issues, were to assess existing policies that facilitated access to land rights by Dalits, their implementation status, key implementation challenges, identified policy gaps, and to draw policy recommendations. The review focused mainly on national, provincial, and local policies affecting the land rights of Dalits, particularly Dalit women.

2.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the HHs are presented in tabular form. The percentage and simple mean are presented. The quantitative data are described and interpreted under relevant headings. The patterns drawn by the quantitative data are further analyzed and explained with the help of qualitative information gathered through various techniques.

As the constituent elements of analysis, direct quotes are used to add authenticity by capturing Dalit women and men's exact voices and perspectives.

Likewise, short case stories that are unique and deviant are presented to provide context and illustrate how findings apply in real-life situations, and to highlight the issues of landlessness and deception they experienced.

In some cases, it was found that the number of some of the questions was under-reported, for example, of migration, which this study clarifies as when needed in the relevant sections.

3. Policies, Promises and Performance, A Review

This chapter, Policies: Promises and Performance, A Review, is presented as a constitutive chapter of Findings and Discussions, which is divided into three major chapters. Along with Policies: Promises and Performance, A Review (Chapter 4), there are two more chapters, namely, Study Population and Socio-Economic Conditions (Chapter 5) and Access to and Ownership of Land (Chapter 6). Chapter 3 is primarily a review chapter, whereas Chapters 6 and 7 present the findings of quantitative data and qualitative information, with analysis and interpretations. Hence, chapters 4-6 constitute the core chapters of this study report.

3.1 Policies, Promises, Performance, and Gaps

Nepal has introduced several policy measures to improve access to land for marginalized groups, especially Dalits and small or landless farmers. The Constitution of Nepal (2015)¹ provides a strong legal foundation by obligating the state to “provide land to landless Dalits” This constitutional commitment is supported by key policies such as the National Land Policy (2019)², Land Use Policy (2015)³, Land Use Act (2019)⁴, and successive amendments to the Land Act (7th, 8th, and 9th Amendments)⁵. In addition, the government established a Land Issues Resolving Commission to address persistent problems of landlessness among Dalits and other marginalized communities.

Despite this progressive framework, serious implementation challenges remain. Article 40(5) of the Constitution explicitly guarantees land to landless Dalits, but structural and procedural barriers continue to hinder its realization. Weak institutional coordination, bureaucratic inefficiency, and lack of effective monitoring have limited the impact of these policies. This demonstrates that legal guarantees alone are not enough to address deep-rooted inequalities in land ownership. Effective implementation, clear guidelines, and stronger accountability mechanisms are crucial.

Moreover, inconsistencies within the legal framework create further inequities. For instance, the Eighth Amendment to the Land Act (2021)⁶ provides landless Dalits and Sukumbasi

1 Constitution of Nepal. (2015). *Government of Nepal*.

2 Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation (MoLMCPA). (2019). *National Land Policy 2019*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.

3 Ministry of Land Reform and Management. (2015). *Land Use Policy 2015*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.

4 Government of Nepal. (2019). *Land Use Act 2019 (2076)*. Kathmandu: Law Books Management Committee.

5 Government of Nepal. (2021). *Land Act (8th Amendment), 2021*. Kathmandu: Law Books Management Committee.

6 Ibid.

with *either* residential or agricultural land, while informal settlers are entitled to *both*. Such disparities highlight policy-level discrimination that undermines the land rights of Dalits. Many existing laws are inadequately enforced or insufficiently pro-poor, reinforcing structural exclusion rather than remedying it.

Ground realities illustrate these gaps vividly. In one municipality in Saptari District, Dalit families occupying three *katthas* (about 1,015 sq. meters) of land were entitled to ownership but received only 15 *dhurs* (about 254 sq. meters). Similarly, in Dhanusha District, a Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC)⁷ study found that 52.94% of Harawa-Charawa households, mostly Tarai Dalits, still live in bonded labor despite repeated policy commitments to end such practices. These examples reflect the persistent structural inequities and the urgent need for targeted interventions to ensure equitable land reform.

3.2 Constitutional Promises

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 has categorically recognized Dalit as one of the population group eligible for affirmative actions by the State. Such recognition is reflected in the fundamental right to equality guaranteed under Article 18 that requires the state to ensure substantive equality through adopting special measures by making a law. This clause aims at protection, empowerment and development of specific groups including Dalit. By virtue of this provision, all tiers of government have responsibilities to take measures including in relation to access to land in order to enable them to live a life with dignity and equality.⁸ In the same vein, the Constitution has created a separate Dalit Commission to look after the interest and grievances of Dalit community. Dalit is the only Dalit group that is bestowed with a separate commission.⁹

ESCR, including the right to have access to land, enjoys a special place in the constitution. As guaranteed under the social justice clause,¹⁰ every peasant has the right to have access to land for agricultural activities. As a community dependent on land for livelihood, the peasants from Dalit community are therefore entitled to have access to land for agricultural activities. The “policies relating to social justice and inclusion” under Part 4 (Directive Principles, Policies and Obligations of the State)¹¹ are also of special importance in this regard. One of the significant responsibilities under the Directive Principles is “to identify the freed bonded labourers, *Haruwa*,¹² *Charuwa*,¹³ tillers, landless, squatters”¹⁴ and rehabilitate them by providing “housing, housing plot for residence and cultivable land or employment for their livelihoods”.¹⁵

The constitution has a set of obligations for land reform. If carried out, it would enable the marginalized communities, such as Dalits, to enjoy their rights relating to food, housing, work, social justice, and the right to live with human dignity. Creating an exception to the right to property under Article 25(4), the Constitution empowers the state to make “land reforms, management and regulation in accordance with law for the purposes of enhancement of produce and productivity of lands, modernization and commercialization of agriculture, environment protection and planned housing and urban development.” Land reform is further elaborated under the Directive Principles to guide the State for protecting the interests of the farmers and ending

7 Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC). (2020). *Status of Harawa-Charawa in Dhanusha District*. Kathmandu: CSRC.

8 The Constitution of Nepal 2015, Proviso of Article 18(3).

9 *Ibid*, article 263.

10 *Ibid*, article 42(3).

11 Article 50 and 51.

12 *Haruwa* means “ploughman”.

13 *Charuwa* means “cattle herder”.

14 Article 51j(6).

15 Article 51j(6).

the dual ownership (ownership of landlords as well as tenants) of lands,¹⁶ enhancing produce and productivity, discouraging inactive land ownership and making proper use of lands.¹⁷

Recognizing the right to housing as a part of fundamental rights in a standalone clause,¹⁸ Article 37 on the “right relating to housing” provides twofold guarantees: (1) Every citizen shall have the right to appropriate housing and that (2) No citizen shall be evicted from the residence owned by him or her nor shall his or her residence be infringed except in accordance with law. In order to enjoy the right to housing, access to land resource is vital. However, the guarantee against forced eviction¹⁹ under Article 37(2) came into existence with a shortcoming as the constitutional protection is completely “owner-driven”. It means that the protection against forced eviction would only be available to those who own the house or land they occupy. This is criticised for its obvious adverse effect on Dalit community such as Dalit given their dependence on unregistered land and the lack of security of tenure. This deserves to be rectified either through judicial interpretation or by introducing a constitutional amendment.²⁰

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) not only inherits the right to food sovereignty from the Interim Constitution but also protects the right to food and freedom from hunger more comprehensively. Guarantees under Article 36 of the 2015 Constitution include: (1) Every citizen shall have the right to food; (2) Every citizen shall have the right to be protected from the state of being in danger of life from the scarcity of food; (3) Every citizen shall have the right to food sovereignty in accordance with law. The right to food and food sovereignty can't be enjoyed by communities including Dalit which are dependent on land unless their access to arable land and natural resources is ensured.

Additional promises have been made under the Directive Principles (Articles 50 and 51) with implications for the land rights. The state is directed to “make Dalit peoples participate in decisions concerning them” and make “special provisions for opportunities and benefits in order to guarantee the right of these nationalities to live with dignity, along with their identity”.²¹ Under the policies relating to basic needs of the citizens, the state is directed to manage unplanned settlement and develop planned and systematic settlement.²²

In the context of federalism, the constitution reinforces the responsibilities of all spheres of the government to respect and protect human rights, fundamental rights, and the rule of law guaranteed under the constitution.²³ When the stated fundamental rights, the constitution also guarantees the availability of different forms (e.g., judicial, non-judicial) of remedies.²⁴

16 Section 26D1 inserted in the Lands Act through its Fourth Amendment (1997) introduced a provision to allocate the land proportionately between landowners and tenants and thereby put an end to dual ownership.

17 Article 51(e) Policies relating to agriculture and land reforms: (1) to make scientific land reforms having regard to the interests of the farmers, while ending the dual ownership existing in the lands, (2) to enhance product and productivity by carrying out land pooling, while discouraging absentee land ownership, (3) to make land management and commercialization, industrialization, diversification and modernization of agriculture, by pursuing land-use policies to enhance agriculture product and productivity, while protecting and promoting the rights and interests of the farmers, (4) to make proper use of lands, while regulating and managing lands on the basis of, inter alia, productivity, nature of lands and ecological balance, (5) to provide for the farmers' access to agricultural inputs, agro-products at fair price and market.

18 Though the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 had recognized a number of economic, social and cultural rights, there was no guarantee concerning the right to housing, which was basically confined to the directive principles and the policies of the state.

19 Initial draft language proposed by the Constituent Assembly's Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles had recognized the right against forced eviction regardless of the evidence of ownership. As crafted by the Committee, the right to housing clause reads: “(1) Every citizen shall have the right to proper housing as provided for in law. (2) No citizen shall be evicted from the place of residence and no infringement shall be made on the residence except in accordance with law or an order issued by a court of law.” See the Preliminary Draft Section of the Concept (2009) submitted by the Constituent Assembly's Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles, p. 45.

20 Amnesty International, *Adequate Housing for All: Commentary on the Right to Housing Act 2018*, p....

21 *Ibid*, Article 51j(8).

22 *Ibid*, article 51h(11).

23 *Ibid*, article 56(6).

24 For example, Article 133 of the Constitution entrusts the Supreme Court with the extraordinary jurisdiction to enforce fundamental rights through prerogative writs. Article 144 empowers High Courts to enforce fundamental rights through its writ jurisdiction. Article 249 mandates the National Human Rights Commission to inquire into any violation of the fundamental rights.

3.3 International human rights obligations

‘Land is not a commodity but an essential element for the realization of many human rights.’²⁵ Access to, use of, and control over land directly affect the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights.²⁶ While there is currently no explicit reference to a general human right to land, several international human rights instruments link land issues to the enjoyment of specific substantive human rights. References to land are made in relation to the right to food, right to housing, equality between women and men, and the rights of Dalit peoples and their relationship with their ancestral lands or territories.

There are ample international human rights standards that obligate Nepal to enhance access to land by Dalit peoples including Dalits. Such standards come from both: general human rights standards with broader application and instruments that concern specific groups such as Dalit peoples. Nepal is a party to most of the core international human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).²⁷ Nepal has also ratified a number of International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions including the Convention No. 169 that, among other things, protects rights of Dalit peoples to land.²⁸ Nepal’s duty to comply with the obligations under the ratified treaties has been reinforced constitutionally and statutorily. The Constitution obligates the State to implement the ratified treaties.²⁹ Similarly, Nepal Treaty Act provides for the prominence of the provisions of the ratified treaty over the domestic laws.³⁰

Article 11 of the ICESCR makes explicit reference to land in relation to the right to adequate standards of living. As guaranteed under Article 11(1) of the ICESCR, everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living and for his or her family, including food, housing and water, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. In many circumstances, land may be an essential element for the improvement of living conditions.³¹ In order to enjoy the “fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger”, States are obliged to “improve the methods of production, conservation and distribution of food, including by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources.” The special rapporteur on the right to food has expressed his belief that “the access to land is one of the key elements necessary for eradicating hunger in the world”. As noted by him, “many rural people suffer from hunger because either they are landless, they do not hold secure tenure or their properties are so small that they cannot grow enough food to feed themselves.”³²

Under the international human rights laws, “Security of tenure is understood as a set of relationships with respect to housing and land, established through statutory or customary law or informal and hybrid arrangements, that enables one to live in one’s home in security, peace and dignity.”³³ The

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26 OHCHR, Land and Human Rights: Standards and Application.....

27 Other relevant treaties include International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

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29 Constitution of Nepal, Article 51(B)(3).

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31 See Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 25, and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 11.1. See also Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights general comments No. 4, para. 8, No. 12, para. 12, No. 14, para. 27, and No. 15, para. 16 (d).

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33 Therefore, land tenure security can be understood as certainty for the recognition and protection of a person’s right to land, especially in the event of specific challenges.⁴ At a minimum, land tenure security should protect occupants/users against forced eviction,⁵ harassment and other threats related to land regardless of the type of tenure. In this context, land tenure security can be viewed as the degree of confidence individuals and groups enjoy in maintaining access to, use of and control over land. This is a prerequisite for their full enjoyment of human rights by: (a.) Their not being arbitrarily deprived of access to, use of and control over land without due process in conformity with national and international standards; (b.) Having their land tenure recognized as legitimate, including in cases where these entitlements are not stipulated in statutory law but may arise from indigenous, customary and other forms of tenure rights; and

informality of tenure (such as tenure rights exercised in informal settlements) is not a justification in itself for the denial of security of tenure.³⁴ As interpreted by the Committee on ESCR, lack of the landownership or tenure is deemed as the prohibited ground of discrimination.³⁵ The Committee also clarified that the access to water services and protection from forced evictions should not be made conditional on a person's land tenure status, including on living in informal settlement.³⁶ The Committee also observed that state is required to pay sufficient attention to “groups of individuals who suffer historical and persistent prejudice.”³⁷

Article 6 of the ICCPR guarantees the right against the arbitrary deprivation of life. For the full enjoyment of this right, no one should be deprived of his or her own means of subsistence, including those deriving from land.³⁸

3.4 Statutory provisions

Following the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal 2015, a number of laws have been enacted, including those to give effect to the guarantees under fundamental rights. Though some of such laws (e.g., the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, the Rights to Housing Act) are still awaiting their actual operationalization, as the necessary regulations haven't yet been formulated. Key of the provisions having implications for Dalit peoples are discussed below.

The Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, 2018, which came into force on 18 September 2018, aims at implementing the constitutional guarantees of the “rights relating to food”. “Peasant” is defined to include “those who maintain their livelihood based on agriculture, agricultural labourers who spend 6 months annually in the agricultural sector or an individual who manufactures traditional agricultural tools and the family members dependent on them.”³⁹ The guarantees offered under this Act include, among other things, access to cultivable land by a peasant and protection against forceful eviction of a peasant from agricultural occupation.⁴⁰ Most importantly, an act of displacing a peasant from his occupation and depriving him/her of livelihood is an offence punishable with a maximum 5 years imprisonment and a fine of up to 10 thousand.⁴¹ All three tiers of government are conferred with the obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil such guarantees.⁴² However, there is no clarity on the forms of access (for example, use rights, control rights, and transfer rights).⁴³ There is no mention of the prioritization of access to cultivable land for peasants belonging to marginalized groups and land-dependent Dalit peoples, including Dalit.

The Government of Nepal has enacted the Right to Housing Act 2018, which also came into force on 18 September 2018⁴⁴, with the objective to provide a legislative framework for the

.....
 (c.) There being effective dispute resolution mechanisms in the event of disputes and competing claims, and effective recourse mechanisms and remedies where there is violation of tenure rights.

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35 See Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 20 (2009) on non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights, para. 25.

36 CESCR, general comment No. 15 (2002) on the right to water, para 16(c).

37 CESCR, General comment No. 20 (2009).....

38 see Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 7, para. 4.

39 Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, Section 2(b).

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43 As elaborated by FAO, access to land is generally understood as use rights (the right to use the land for grazing, growing subsistence crops, gathering minor forestry products, etc); control rights (the right to make decisions on how the land should be used and to benefit financially from the sale of crops, etc); and transfer rights (the right to sell or mortgage the land, to convey the land to others through intra-community reallocations or to heirs, and to reallocate use and control rights). See, FAO, “What is access to land?”, www.fao.org/docrep/005/Y4308E/y4308e04.htm

44 On 14 August 2018, the Ministry for Urban Development had submitted a “Bill made to provide for the right to housing” in the Parliament Secretariat of Nepal.

implementation of the right to housing guaranteed under the Constitution.⁴⁵ While assessing this in view of the international standards, a number of provisions are found to be flawed. For instance, the protection against forced eviction is completely ownership-driven.⁴⁶ The “right to be compensated” and “resettlement facility” are available only for those evicted from the housing facility built on “the land that they own”. This clearly excludes slum dwellers or those residing in informal settlements from the scope of legal protection. Application of the provision would have a disproportionate effect on those already marginalized, including Dalit peasants residing in unregistered land.

Following the promulgation of the new Constitution in 2015,⁴⁷ the Eighth Amendment to the Lands Act 1964 was enacted to provide a legal framework to create a basis for granting ownership of land for “landless squatters”⁴⁸ and “unmanaged dwellers”.⁴⁹ However, the Government of Nepal has failed to take a holistic approach to addressing the land-related problems faced by Dalit communities. These amendments do not include in their scope the constitutional promises for land reform and access to cultivable land for peasants, including from Dalit peoples.

As the Constitution doesn’t detail out the function and mandate of the Commission, the Dalit Commission Act has been enacted to provide a legal framework for the Dalit Commission established to look after the rights and interests of the Dalit Community and ensure their empowerment.⁵⁰ The recommendatory power is limited to the Government of Nepal. There is no explicit provision authorizing the commission to make recommendations to the provincial and local governments. There also exists an absence of an explicit provision mandating the commission to deal with issues concerning the land and exploitative land relations. As everything, including the organogram, staff, and budget, are contingent on the government, no autonomy is guaranteed.

Hence, in summary, among several policy documents, the Constitution of Nepal 2015 (2072 BS) is the most significant and prominent one that includes several provisions aimed at addressing the historical marginalization and discrimination against Dalits.

The preamble of the Constitution explains to end discrimination, oppression, and exclusion based on class, caste, region, language, religion, and gender.

The fundamental rights section of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015, includes various rights,

45 Article 37. Right to housing: (1) Every citizen shall have the right to an appropriate housing. (2) No citizen shall be evicted from the residence owned by him or her nor shall his or her residence be infringed except in accordance with law. See below detailed analysis of the constitutional framework concerning the right to housing (“3. Constitutional Promises”).

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47 Came in force on 20 September 2015.

48 As proposed under Section 52B(13)(a) of the Bill, “Landless dweller” is defined to include “the individual and members of the family dependent on him/her who or his/her family never had any land since generations under their ownership and is unable to manage land through his/her or their family’s source of income, sources or efforts.”

49 As proposed under Section 52B(13)(b) of the Bill, “unmanaged dwellers” is defined as “the individuals and the members of the family depending on him/her who have a registered private land in his/her or their family ownership within the State of Nepal and is living by building a house, tent in government unregistered, unused or forest land.”

50 The Commission is mandated to carry out the following functions and duties: To study overall situation of the Tharu Commission and recommend to the Nepal government for policy, legal and institutional reform; To recommend to the Government of Nepal for formulation of national policy and program towards empowerment of the community and the protection of rights and interest of the community; To monitor and investigate about whether the provisions for empowerment and protection of the interest and rights of the community have been implemented effectively and recommend; To provide recommendation in relation to the laws and policies under consideration; To assess, monitor and evaluate Tharu community relates policies and programs; To recommend to the Government of Nepal for advancement and empowerment of the individuals lagged behind from economic and social perspective; To carry out a study and recommend for development and protection of language, scripts, history, literature, tradition and arts of the Tharu community; To conduct programs aimed at raising sensitization; To recommend for empowerment of the community by putting an end to all forms of ill practices and exploitations; To conduct a monitoring and make recommendations for implementation of the international treaty provisions applicable in relation to Tharu community; To receive complaints against those who violated the rights of the Tharu community and make recommendation to the concerned agency for investigation.

upliftment, and special arrangements for the Dalit community. For example, Article 18-Right to Equality, Article 24- Right against Untouchability and Discrimination, Article 40- Rights of Dalits, and Article 42- Right to Social Justice are some of the foundational principles.

The special provision for Landless Dalits is in Article 40. Article 40 (5) maintains, ‘the State shall provide land on a one-off basis to the landless Dalits in accordance with law’. And, (6) directs to provide land to homeless Dalits for shelter.

“Policies relating to social justice and inclusion” (Article 42) under Part 4 (Directive Principles, Policies and Obligations of the State) contains a second set of obligations related to land. As guaranteed under Article 42(4), every peasant has the right to have access to lands for agricultural activities, the operationalization of which is also subject to legislative enactment. The state is also obligated under directive principles³³ “to identify the freed bonded labourers, Kamalari, Haruwa, Charuwa, tillers, landless, squatters.”⁵¹

3.5 Land Act 2021 B.S., (7th Amendment)

Similarly, the 7th Amendment of the Land Act was approved by the parliament of Nepal on the 18th September 2018. Article 52 (Ka) was added to the Act, which stated: Provision of land,

- (1) The Government of Nepal shall provide the land to landless Dalits at one time within a period of three years.
- (2) Those who received the land from this process, not allowed to sell or transfer the ownership for the ten-year period. But to share or transfer within family members as a part of the property share is allowed.
- (3) The Government of Nepal shall establish the Commission, Committee, or Task Force for land distribution, which was published in the Nepal Gazette.

3.6 Land Act 2021 B.S., (8th Amendment)

On the 11th February 2018, the Parliament of Nepal approved the 8th Amendment to the Land Act, 2021. The Act was amended, adding Article 52 (Kha), which provides the Land for Landless Squatters. (1) The Government of Nepal shall provide land to landless squatters within the limits prescribed by law. This land shall either be the land they have already occupied and cultivated, or land managed by the Government. Landless Dalits can also benefit from this law and its provisions.

Likewise, in Clause (6), for the purpose of providing land to landless squatters, the Government shall establish a commission through a public notice in the Nepal Gazette. The commission will be responsible for identifying landless squatters, collecting applications, conducting field studies, collecting land-related data, gathering necessary evidence, and identifying suitable land to be distributed to the verified landless squatters.

Likewise, the 8th Amendment also added Article 52 (Ga) for management of informal settlers, Clause (1) of which stated: “The Government of Nepal shall provide land to informal settlers within the land ceiling prescribed by law. The land may include public land (*Ailani*), other government land, or recorded forest land. However, such land must have been converted into settlement or

51 Cited from NEPAL: *LAND FOR LANDLESS PEASANTS COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON AMENDMENT TO THE LANDS ACT 1964*. 2019.

residential areas and used for housing or farming for at least the past ten years. Landless Dalits were included as beneficiaries of this law and its provisions.

In Clause (3) and sub-clause (1) of the same maintained that ‘informal settlers are required to pay a tax to register the land.’ The Government will determine the amount of tax based on an assessment of the informal settler’s economic condition, the condition of their settlement and housing, the nature and area of the land, its value, the duration of land use, and whether or not they own land in other areas. However, landless Dalits and landless squatters are not required to pay such tax during the land registration process.

Hence, there are constitutional and various policy provisions that provide a legal basis to provide land rights to the landless Dalits and landless squatters. However, all those constitutional and other policy provisions have been ineffective for various reasons. Therefore, the concerns of land rights of Dalits, women, and men have persisted.

3.7 Identifying the Gaps

Despite the existence of several policies and legislative provisions, there has been limited progress in securing land and livelihoods for Dalits. In practice, there are still no effective laws to implement Article 40 of the Constitution. Although Article 40 mandates that the State provide land on a one-off basis to landless Dalits and arrange housing for Dalits without housing “in accordance with law,” there is no comprehensive, specific, and enforceable legislation that fully translates these constitutional guarantees into practice.

One CSRC study highlights the absence of a statutory definition of “landless Dalits,” which has created confusion over eligibility and remains a major obstacle to implementation.⁵² The same study notes that the Constitution does not specify the quantum, quality, location, or type of land to be provided—whether for sustainable livelihoods or merely for shelter—leaving these critical issues to executive rules that are weak and inconsistent (ibid.). In addition, there are no legally binding timelines for providing land or housing, raising serious concerns about accountability.

There are also significant gaps in land reform and land-related legislation. The 8th Amendment of the Land Act suffers from an inadequate legislative framework and lacks comprehensive provisions to meet constitutional obligations, particularly in addressing Dalits’ socio-economic needs. A CSRC Discussion Paper, *Land Related Policies and Laws in Nepal* (2021)⁵³, points out that although multiple policies exist—such as the National Land Policy, amendments to the Land Act, and Land Regulations—poor coordination among them has resulted in contradictory interpretations and delays.

Another critical gap is the failure to address gender–caste intersectionality. A CSRC–IOM study emphasizes that Dalit women face compounded barriers due to both gender and caste, yet existing laws do not adequately address this intersectionality through targeted measures.⁵⁴

In summary, Nepal still lacks a comprehensive law on Dalit land and housing rights that is aligned with constitutional guarantees. Weak institutional frameworks, unclear governmental roles, and insufficient implementation and accountability mechanisms further undermine government initiatives to realize Dalits’ land rights.

52 https://www.amnesty.org/ar/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ASA3112212019ENGLISH.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

53 https://csrcnepal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Discussion-Paper.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

54 https://csrcnepal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Discussion-Paper.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

4. Study Population and Socio-Economic Conditions

This chapter presents the general features of the study population and their socio-economic condition. Even though only 10 percent of households were included in the survey as samples, this study claims that the findings are representative.

4.1 Total Households, Dalit Households, and Sampled Households

In the HHs, only Dalit households were included. The survey was conducted among 10 percent of the sampled Dalit households. The following table presents the total population and the total households of the sampled municipalities and the Dalit population and Dalit households, and the number of households sampled for the HHs.

Thus, a total of 1727 Dalit households were included in the HHs. To make sure the spatial and social representation in some cases, 27 households were included, which makes the total sampled households 11.58 percent.

Table 1: Number of Landless Dalit Households and Sample Households

S.N	Municipalities	Total Population	Total Household	Dalit Population	Dalit Household	Sampled HH (10%)	Total Surveyed HHs	Remarks
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	27899	6384	6096	1395	139	147	8
2	Karjnaha Municipality	38557	8823	11169	2556	256	256	0
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	53812	12314	14665	3356	336	343	7
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	27146	6212	5643	1291	129	129	0
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	122320	27991	21226	4857	486	486	0
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	21888	5009	3353	767	77	83	6
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	15540	3556	3193	731	73	74	1
8	Shikhar Municipality	30399	6956	8902	2037	204	209	5
Total		337561	77245	74247	16990	1700	1727	27

Source: Nepal Statistical Office (NSO), 2022.

According to the table 1, out of 1727, the highest number of households was included from Bhimdatta Municipality of Kanchanpur, where 486 households were included in the HHs. Likewise, the lowest number of households was from Bogatan Foodsild Rural Municipality of Doti, where only 74 households were included. The higher and lower numbers of households indicate the total Dalit households in the studied municipalities. For example, In Bhimdatta, there were only about 17 percent Dalit households, but the highest number of households was included in the survey; whereas, in Bogtana Foodsil, there were about 21 percent of Dalit households, but the lowest number of households was included in the HHs. Both municipalities with the highest and lowest sample households belong to Far-West Province.

The Table below (Table 2) presents the total population and male-female ratio among the sample population.

Table 2: Total Household and Populations

S.N	Municipalities	Total HH in HHs	% of HHs per Municipality	Total Populations	Male	Female	% of Population
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	147	8.51	918	471	447	8.66
2	Karjnaha Municipality	256	14.82	1392	705	687	13.14
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	343	19.86	2135	1165	970	20.15
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	129	7.47	755	378	377	7.13
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	486	28.14	2928	1486	1442	27.64
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	83	4.81	587	306	281	5.54
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	74	4.28	527	256	271	4.97
8	Shikhar Municipality	209	12.10	1353	651	702	12.77
Total		1727	100	10595	5418	5177	100
In %				100.00	51.14	48.86	

Overall, there are more males compared to females. However, the ratio varies across space. This male-female ratio of the study population is the opposite of the national sex ratio, where females make up about 51.04 percent. That is, among the study population, there are 95.5 females per 100 males, whereas in the national context, there are 95.91 males per 100 females.

A higher male population among the study population could be explained by the notion of male child preferences at birth, or the higher girl-child mortality.

Table 3a: Age Distribution of Study Population

S.N	Municipalities	0-5 Years			6-19 Years			20-39 Years			40-59 Years		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	70	61	131	129	110	239	149	152	301	87	88	175
2	Karjnaha Municipality	94	135	229	220	195	415	192	207	399	139	113	252
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	152	123	275	331	280	611	352	322	674	254	167	421
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	57	51	108	97	109	206	123	131	254	80	62	142
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	165	184	349	466	428	894	525	510	1035	251	223	474
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	31	21	52	80	73	153	128	98	226	50	58	108
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	26	37	63	84	70	154	82	76	158	40	45	85
8	Shikhar Municipality	69	82	151	233	218	451	211	237	448	98	109	207
Total		664	694	1358	1640	1483	3123	1762	1733	3495	999	865	1864
In %		6.27	6.55	12.82	15.48	14.00	29.48	16.63	16.36	32.99	9.43	8.16	17.59

Table 3b: Age Distribution of Study Population

S.N	Municipalities	60-80 Years			80 Years Above			Total		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	32	33	65	4	3	7	471	447	918
2	Karjnaha Municipality	57	37	94	3	0	3	705	687	1392
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	74	75	149	2	3	4	1165	970	2135
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	20	21	41	1	3	4	378	377	755
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	74	94	168	5	3	8	1486	1442	2928
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	17	31	48	0	0	0	306	281	587
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	21	38	59	3	5	8	256	271	527
8	Shikhar Municipality	40	54	94	0	2	2	651	702	1353
Total		335	383	718	18	19	36	5418	5177	10595
In %		3.16	3.61	6.78	0.17	0.18	0.34	51.14	48.86	100

Source: Household Survey, 2025

The HHs revealed that about 51 percent of the total population is economically active, that is, the population in the age group of 20-59 years. Only about 7 percent of the total population is 60

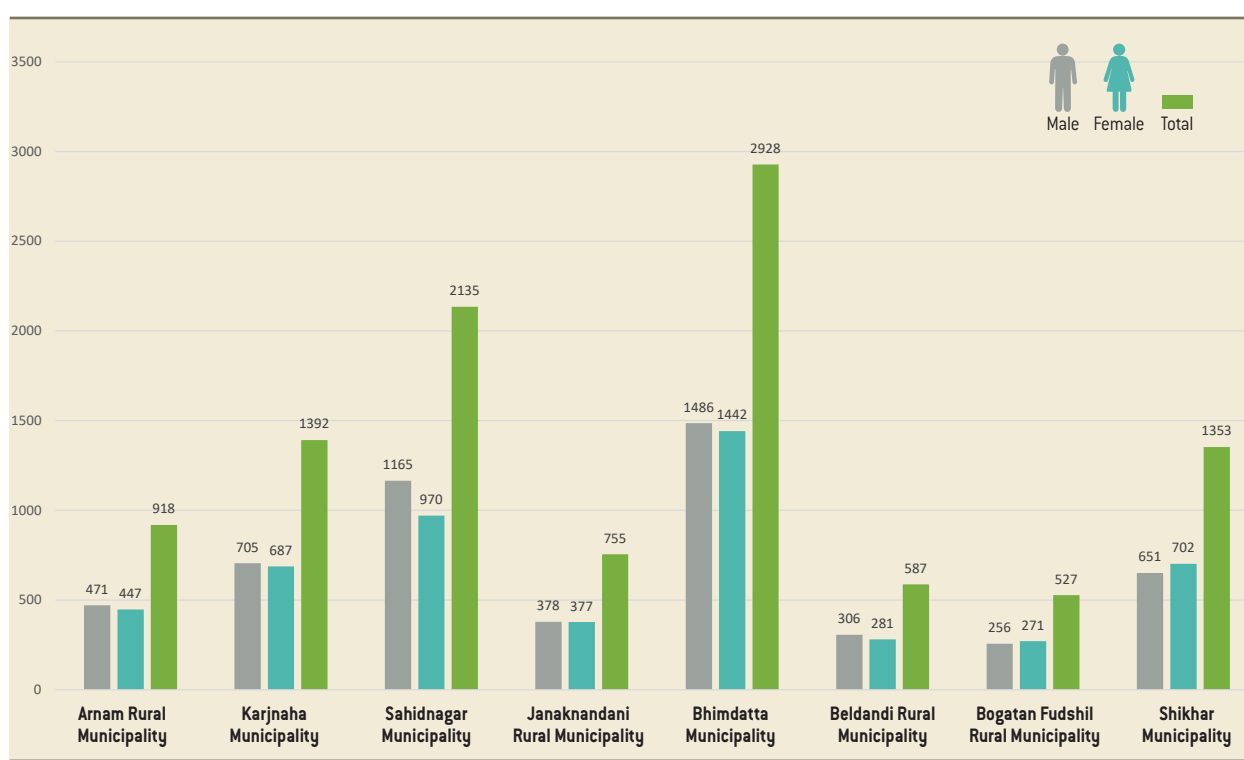


Figure 2: Age Distribution of Study Population

years and above. However, the population below 19 years is nearly 43 percent. The smaller size of the 60 years and above population is explained by the fact that the life expectancy of Dalits is 61, whereas the national average is 68.7 years. This means, generally, a Dalit lives 7.7 years less than the national population. Likewise, under-5 mortality is also higher among Dalits, which is 90 per 1000 live births compared to the national average, which is 68 per 1000.¹

1 DWO Annual org Study FY 2078-79_20230901123519.pdf

4.2 Access to Education

Among Dalits in Nepal, landlessness, poverty, and low educational attainment are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Lack of land deprives Dalit households of a stable livelihood base, forcing them into low-paid, insecure labor and chronic poverty. Persistent poverty, in turn, limits their ability to afford schooling costs, contributes to child labor, and leads to irregular school attendance and early dropout. At the same time, low educational attainment reduces access to better employment opportunities and awareness of legal rights, making it harder for Dalits to escape landlessness or claim land and state support. Together, these factors create a cycle of deprivation that reproduces socio-economic exclusion across generations.

In this broader context, this study explored the educational attainment of Dalits in the study area. The following table (Table 4) presents the education level of individuals across the studied municipalities.

Table 4a: Access to Education of Dalits

S.N	Municipalities	Literate			Up to Class 5			Up to Class 10			SLC/SEE		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	15	39	54	73	43	116	15	15	30	28	18	46
2	Karjnaha Municipality	70	41	111	92	91	183	11	37	48	9	18	27
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	44	57	101	173	117	290	47	49	96	64	23	87
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	19	15	34	51	29	80	17	3	20	10	5	15
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	157	302	459	457	460	917	398	316	714	81	47	128
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	36	61	97	111	95	206	84	57	141	10	1	11
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	161	129	290	46	30	76	38	32	70	13	7	20
8	Shikhar Municipality	410	346	756	104	96	200	72	82	154	20	16	36
Total		912	990	1902	1107	961	2068	682	591	1273	235	135	370
In %		15	17	32	19	16	35	12	10	22	4	2	6

Table 4b: Access to Education of Dalits

S.N	Municipalities	Intermediate			Bachler			Masters			Total		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	Total
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	5	4	9	2	2	4	0	2	2	138	123	261
2	Karjnaha Municipality	2	9	11	0	1	1	0	0	0	184	197	381
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	37	16	53	6	2	8	6	0	6	377	264	641
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	3	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	54	154
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	63	36	99	12	8	20	1	1	2	1169	1170	2339
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	10	5	15	2	0	2	1	0	1	254	219	473
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	7	4	11	2	1	3	2	2	4	269	205	474
8	Shikhar Municipality	20	14	34	9	4	13	1	1	2	636	559	1195
Total		147	90	237	33	18	51	11	6	17	3037	2791	5918
In %		2	2	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	51	47	100

Source: Household Survey, 2025

The survey revealed that the literacy rates of Dalits are much lower than the national average. Overall, 32 percent of Dalits in the study area are only literate, 35 percent of them have attained primary education, and 22 percent of them have reached up to class 10. Dalits' access to and attainment of higher education is much lower compared to the national average. For example, only 6 percent of them have passed SLC or SEE; 4 percent have passed Intermediate or +2 level,

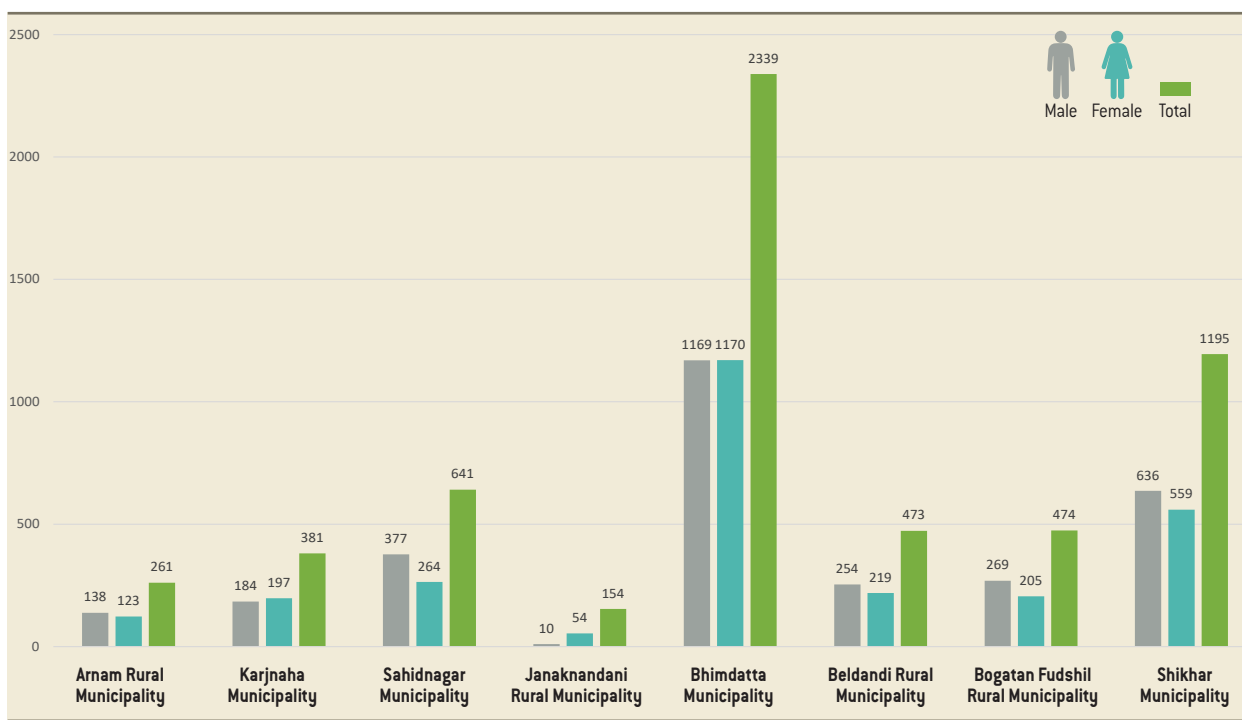


Figure 3: Access to Education of Dalits

and only 1 percent have a Bachelor's Degree. Out of 5918, only 17 individuals have passed a Master's Degree.

Hence, such a low attainment of education among Dalits could be explained by their landlessness, poverty, and level of awareness. However, there is growing awareness among Dalits about educating their children. The following story of Jurani Devi is an illustrative caste story.



Education can take us out of poverty²

Jurani Devi Sada (43) began her story by explaining how she got her name. She was born on the day of Jur Sital, Baisaksh 2, therefore, her parents gave her the name Jurani. She married at the age of 16 years to Raslala Sada (48). They have two sons, Pramod (24) and Manoj (20). Pramod has passed +2 and now owns a mobile shop. Manoj is currently studying in class 12. Her husband, Raslala, who is just literate, has been in Saudi Arabia for the last 8 years, for which he had to borrow a loan from his Girhath (the landlord) at the rate of 48 % to 36%. They still have a loan of 2.5 lakh, which is primarily to invest in the mobile phone shop that her elder son had to pay the fees of the boarding school for the younger son. Although she was illiterate, she

always thought that since they did not have other assets, only education for the children could get them out of poverty.

She does not know how they came to be settled in this village. They are told that the land they are occupying is somebody else's private property. The landowner often comes and warns them to leave the land as soon as possible and move elsewhere. Arun Sada, a local land rights activist, who was present during the conversation, added that the landowner has warned the locals not to invest

² Based on the conversation with Jurani Devi on the 2nd of November in Karjnaha -4, Bhulke, Mushahari Tole.

any money in the houses or any physical infrastructure, as it is going to be removed any day. They warned that your investment will go to waste, as you have to leave this place anyway.

Jarani Devi looks hopeful that they will have a better future, even if they are landless; now they have grown-up sons with better education. A few other women listening to the conversation appreciated, ‘despite all hardship, she [Jurani Devi] was determined to send their children to school. Now, we can see her future is brighter than ours.’

4.3 Assets and Access to Basic Facilities

Land is the primary asset for an agrarian-based household, and the majority of Dalits are landless; therefore, they are also at the bottom of the economic ladder.

In this survey, we have assessed some of the indicators to assess their prosperity and poverty. The following table (Table 5) presents the types of houses they are living. Generally, the majority of Tarai Dalits in the Madhesh Pradesh live in Kachhi (temporary) houses, compared to those, mostly hill Dalits who migrated to Kanchanpur (Tarai of Far West Nepal) have permanent structures. However, the majority of Dalit households in the hills of Far West are Kachhi.

4.3.1 Types of Houses

Among Dalits in Nepal, housing type is a strong indicator of poverty and socioeconomic status. Many Dalit households live in Kacchi or semi-Pakki houses made of mud, bamboo, thatch, or other temporary materials, reflecting low income, insecure land tenure, and limited access to basic services. These conditions often lack durability, sanitation, and protection from natural hazards, increasing vulnerability to health risks and displacement. In contrast, the relatively small proportion of Dalits living in Pakki houses typically reflects better economic conditions, secure land ownership, and improved access to resources, underscoring how housing type closely mirrors underlying poverty and exclusion.

The following table (Table 5) presents the types of houses Dalits in the study areas own.

Table 5: Types of Houses

S.N	Municipalities	Pakki [Permanent]	Kacchi [Temporary]	Kachhi-Pakki [Semi-Permanent]	Others	Total	##%
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	4	138	5	0	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	21	223	10	2	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	55	252	36	0	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	17	106	6	0	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	209	164	103	10	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	17	64	2	0	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	1	72	0	1	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	14	189	3	3	209	12.10
Total		338	1208	165	16	1727	100
In %		19.57	69.95	9.55	0.93	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

According to the table (Table 5), only 20 percent of Dalits live in Pakki houses, 10 percent in Kachhi-Pakki (semi-permanent), and the majority of them (70%) live in Kachhi houses. The type of houses owned by Dalits indicates their poverty level. On top of that, the land on which the houses were constructed may not have been owned by them.

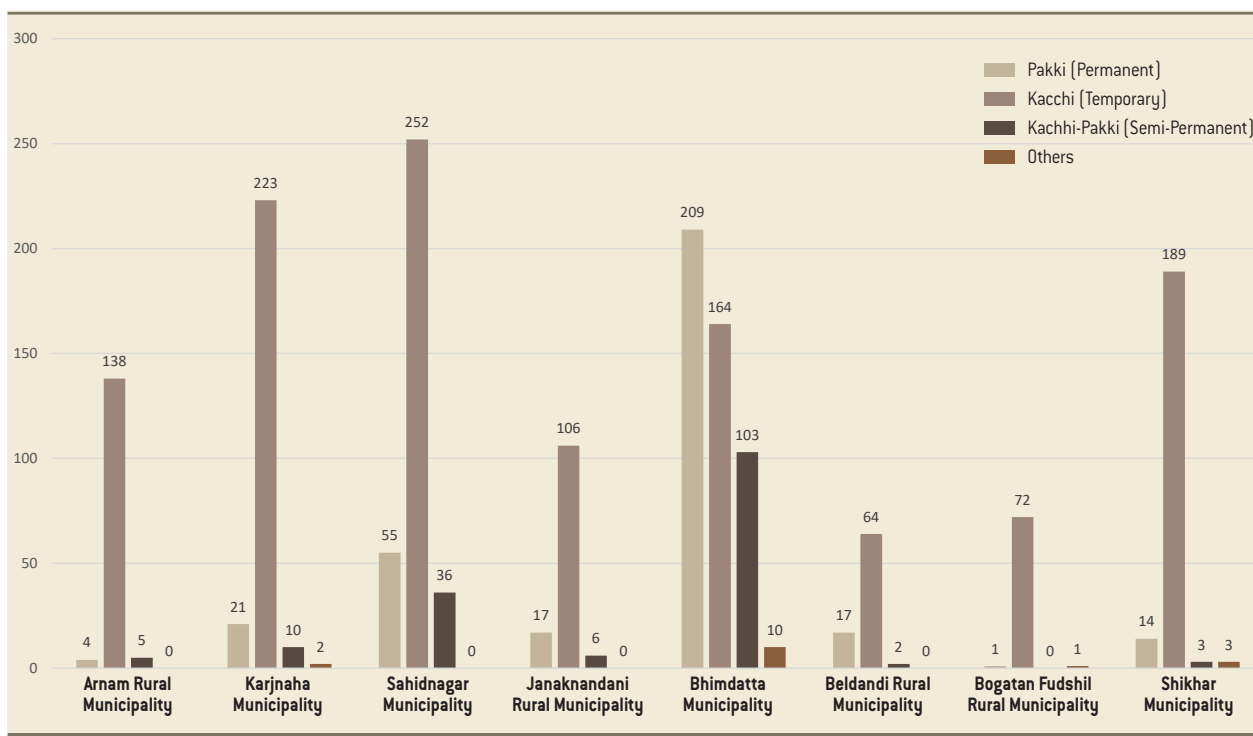


Figure 4: Types of Houses

Some of the houses they are living in can hardly be called a ‘house.’ A Mahara woman, a mother of disabled children of Janak Nandini-3, Mahuwa, Mahara Tole, in a grieved tone, said,

“Sometimes I feel our lives are not any better than an animal’s life. An animal has someone to think of its need for a safe shelter, but we do not have anyone to think for us. We are living such a destitute life”.

The field observations, interviews, and discussions suggested that, in some settlements in Madhesh Province, in Gau Blocks, in particular, and Bhidatta Municipality in the Far-West, Pakki houses are built by those who have saved enough remittance money to invest in the house construction. In Bhimdatta Municipality, in the Far-West, some houses are constructed by various government and non-governmental organizations. On the other had, a few reported that they could not build a Pakki house simply because the land where they are living does not belong to them; therefore, they do not get permission to build Pakki structures.

Despite having some Pakki structure, the issue of land ownership persists. Bidur Kumar Mahara (43), of Shahid Nagar-5, Birta, Pacharwa, pointing to his concrete house, says, आफ्नो हो, आफ्नो होइन. He took us around the settlement and described, ‘these are the houses they built with their own hands, where children were born, and elders grew old, yet they are never truly theirs. He lives caught between belonging and fear, rooted in a place that still refuses to recognize him and his community.’

4.3.2 Access to Sources of Drinking Water

The majority of Dalit houses and settlements do not have basic facilities, like sources of safe drinking water, electricity, toilets, and so on. During the field observations, it was noticed that, majority of the settlements do not have even reliable sources of drinking water.

The following table (Table 6) presents the distribution of households accessing different sources of drinking water.

Table 6: Access to Sources of Drinking Water

S.N	Municipalities	Tube Well (Personal)	Tube Well (sharing-neighbors)	Pipe Water	Community tube well/Pipe Supply	Pond/ Dug well	Others	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	90	55	0	2	0	0	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	142	50	63	1	0	0	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	262	53	0	28	0	0	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	98	20	0	11	0	0	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	212	3	208	49	3	11	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	65	2	15	0	0	1	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	0	0	74	0	0	0	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	0	0	183	0	22	4	209	12.10
Total		869	183	543	91	25	16	1727	100
In %		50.32	10.60	31.44	5.27	1.45	0.93	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

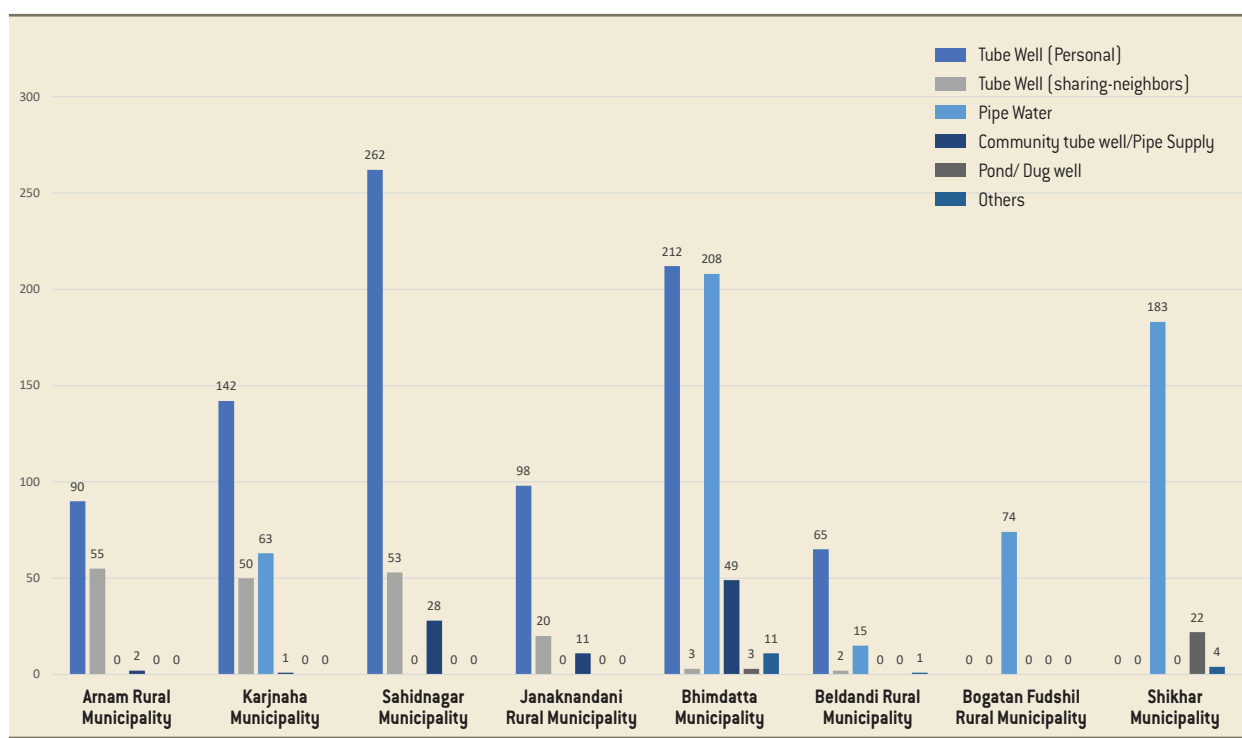


Figure 5: Access to Sources of Drinking Water

The majority of Madhesh/Tarai households have access to a tube-well for drinking water. 50 percent of them have personal tube wells, and about 11 percent of them have access to a common tube well in the neighbourhood. A little more than 31 percent of households have access to piped water. However, it is a good indicator that 50 percent of them have their personal tube-well or sources of drinking water.

It was reported that local governments and NGOs working in the respective sites have roles in distributing tube-wells and piped water in those areas.

4.3.3 Access to Sources of Cooking Fuel

The use of indoor biomass fuel, particularly as a source of cooking, causes several health hazards. One of the studies provides evidence that “the use of indoor biomass fuel, particularly as a source of heating, is associated with TB in women. It also provides the first evidence that using kerosene stoves and wick lamps is associated with TB.”³

According to the survey, 72.15 percent of households use firewood as the major source of cooking. This means they are vulnerable to several health hazards. Another 10.31 percent uses a combination of firewood and dried cow dung, which is even more hazardous. Only 2.2 percent use LP gas as cooking fuel.

Table 7: Access to Sources of Cooking Fuel

S.N	Municipalities	Firewood	Firewood & Dung cake	Firewood, Dung cake & LPG	Firewood & LPG	LPG Gas	Bio Gyas	Electric	Other	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	135	1	0	10	0	0	1	-	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	229	20	0	7	0	0	0	0	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	153	105	46	35	4	0	0	0	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	49	49	12	19	0	0	0	0	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	343	2	1	105	30	4	0	1	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	61	1	0	18	3	0	0	0	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	74	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	202	0	0	6	1	0	0	0	209	12.10
Total		1246	178	59	200	38	4	1	1	1727	100.00
In %		72.15	10.31	3.42	11.58	2.20	0.23	0.06	0.06	100	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

This statistical information is significant as sources of cooking fuel are closely associated with both poverty levels and health outcomes. Poor households, including many Dalit families in the study areas, often rely on traditional biomass fuels such as firewood (72%), agricultural residue or dung (11%), because they are cheaper and more accessible than cleaner alternatives.

Some households with relatively higher income levels are more likely to use cleaner fuels such as LPG or electricity, which reflects better economic status and contributes to improved health and living conditions. Across all municipalities, a little more than 2 percent use LPG, and less than one percent of them use biogas or electricity.

3 Amod K. Pokhrel, Michael N. Bates, Sharat C. Verma, Hari S. Joshi, Chandrashekhar T., & Sreeramareddy. and Kirk R. Smith. Tuberculosis and Indoor Biomass and Kerosene Use in Nepal: A Case-Control Study. *Environmental Health Perspectives*. volume 118 | number 4 | April 2010.

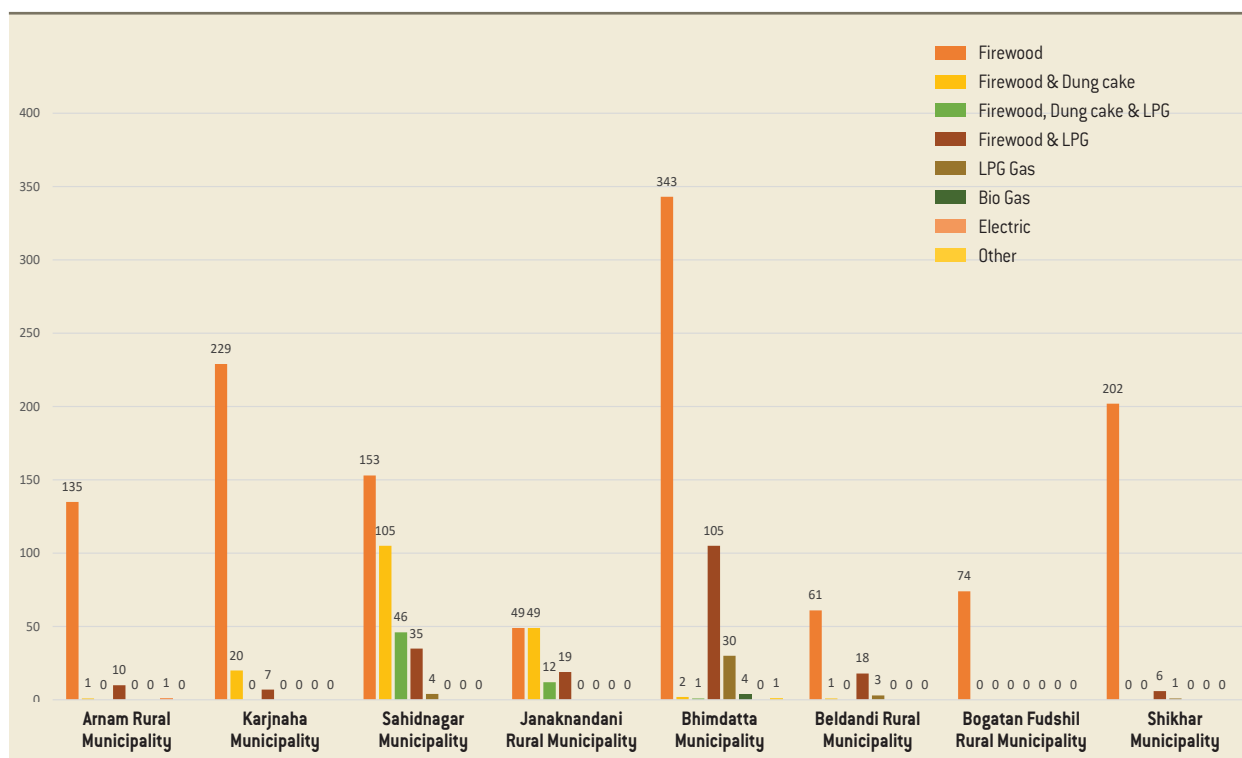


Figure 6: Access to Sources of Cooking Fuel

4.3.4 Sources of Light

Access to sources of light, as in the case of cooking fuel, is an indicator not only of access to basic facilities but also of health risks. In the study area, 95.19 percent of the households have access to electricity as a source of light.

The following table (Table 8) presents the number of households accessing different sources of light.

Table 8: Households Accessing Different Sources of Light

S.N	Municipalities	Electricity (National Grid)	Kerosene Lamp	Biogas Lamp	Solar Power	Other	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	147	0	0	0	0	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	255	1	0	0	0	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	340	3	0	0	0	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	120	9	0	0	0	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	472	0	0	2	12	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	83	0	0	0	0	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	23	0	0	49	2	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	204	0	0	0	5	209	12.10
Total		1644	13	0	51	19	1727	100.00
In %		95.19	0.75	0.00	2.95	1.10	100	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

Thanks to the local government, which allowed access to electricity even to those households that do not have *Lalpurja*, the land owner certificate of the land where their houses are built.

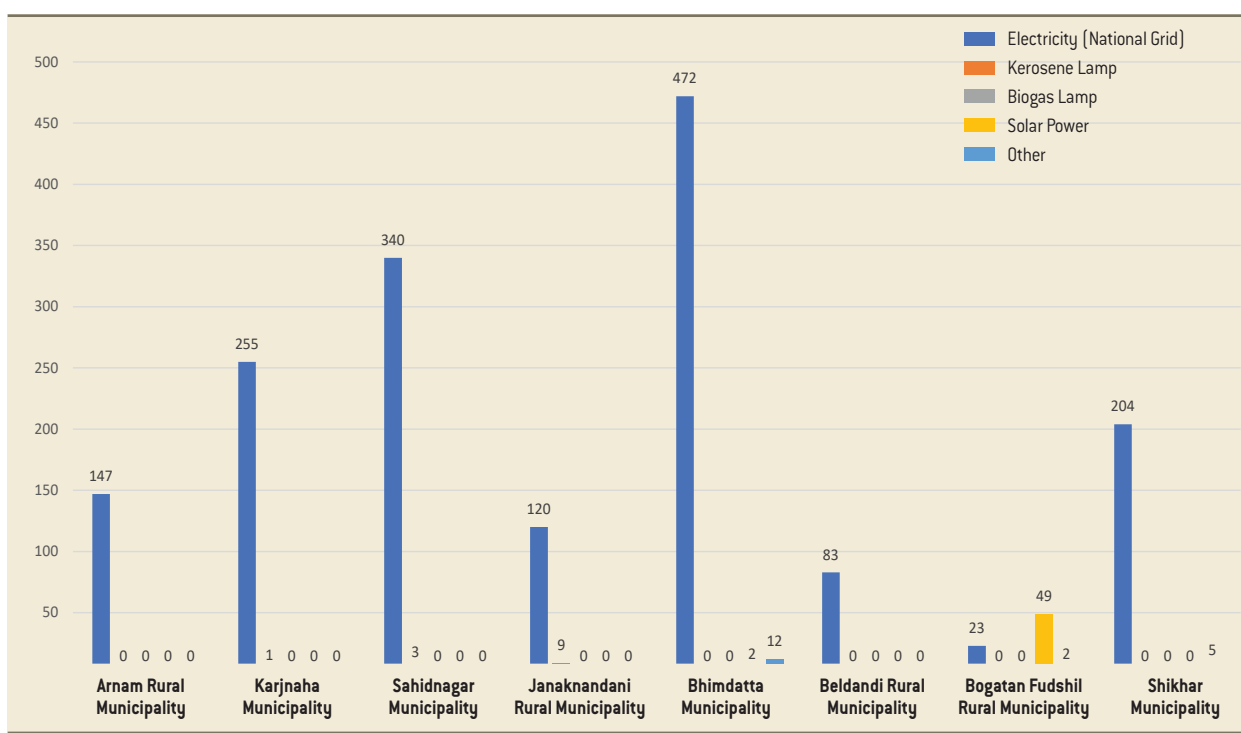


Figure 7: Households Accessing Different Sources of Light

4.3.5 Access to Toilet Facilities

When we asked about toilets, a common answer was, “We do not even have enough space to build a house, how come we have toilets?” This was reality. During the field visits, we intended to use and observe the condition of the toilets; it was found that even those who had reported during the survey that they had toilets were hardly usable.

The table below (Table 9) presents the number of households with toilet facilities, and households without it.

Table 9: Status of Toilets of the Household

S.N	Municipalities	Yes	Under Construction	No	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	65	1	81	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	141	0	115	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	170	1	172	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	41	0	88	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	435	5	46	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	77	0	6	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	69	5	0	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	188	21	0	209	12.10
Total		1186	33	508	1727	100.00
In %		68.67	1.91	29.42	100	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

The table (Table 9) shows that 68 percent to 69 percent of households have toilet facilities of different types. 29.42 percent have no toilet facilities, and others have reported that theirs are under construction. Of those 20 percent of households that do not have toilets were reported from Madhesh Pradesh. Not having toilets also indicates the condition of landlessness. The

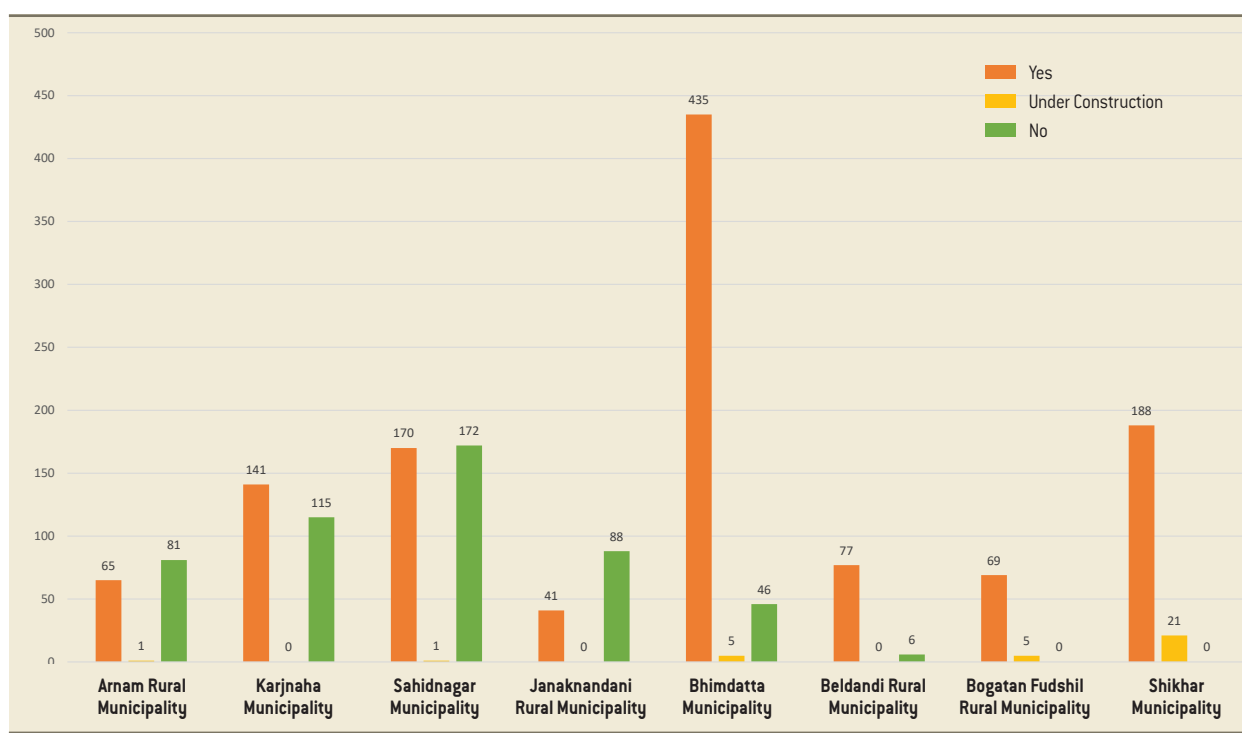


Figure 8: Status of Toilets of the Household

majority of the settlements we visited during the fieldwork were located in the marginal lands, and shelters were built as if they were temporary constructions.

Of those who had reported of having toilets also reported the types of toilets they had. The table below (Table 10) presents the number of households using different types of toilets.

Table 10: Households with Different Types of Toilet

S.N	Municipalities	Pit toilet	Flush toilet (Improved)	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	16	50	66	5.41
2	Karjnaha Municipality	100	41	141	11.57
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	91	80	171	14.03
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	19	22	41	3.36
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	167	273	440	36.10
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	55	22	77	6.32
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	74	0	74	6.07
8	Shikhar Municipality	208	1	209	17.15
Total		730	489	1219	100.00
In %		59.89	40.11	100	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

Hence, as table (Table 10) revealed, a little more than 40 percent of respondents reported that they have improved toilets with pans; however, the majority of them (60%) have pit toilets. In our observations, during the fieldwork, even if they have pit latrines, they were also using open space along with others who do not have toilets.

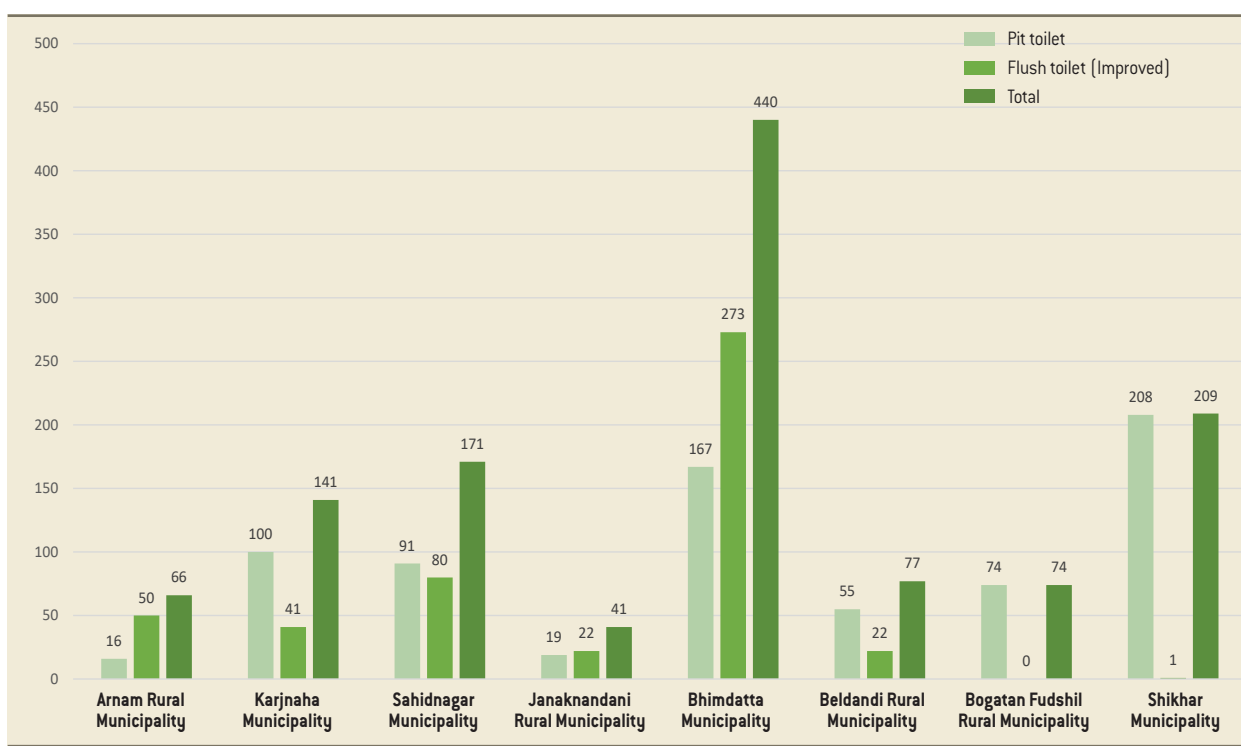


Figure 9: Households with Different Types of Toilet

4.4 Access to Agricultural Land

The majority of Dalit households reported that their main strategy of survival is agriculture. However, the majority (69%) of them do not have access to agricultural land. This data reveals the paradox of Nepali agriculture: the land fallow and the underproduction. (See the table below, Table 11).

Nevertheless, it was observed during the fieldwork that the majority of Dalit households depend on remittances they receive from India for living.

Table 11: Household with Differential Access to Agricultural Land

S.N	Municipalities	Yes	No	Total	In %
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	22	125	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	25	231	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	87	256	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	17	112	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	172	314	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	58	25	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	68	6	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	87	122	209	12.10
	Total	536	1191	1727	100.00
	In %	31.04	68.96	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

This statistical information is critical as access to agricultural land is critically essential for landless Dalits in Nepal, particularly when nearly 70 percent lack any access to cultivable land. Without land, Dalit households remain dependent on low-paid, insecure wage labor and are

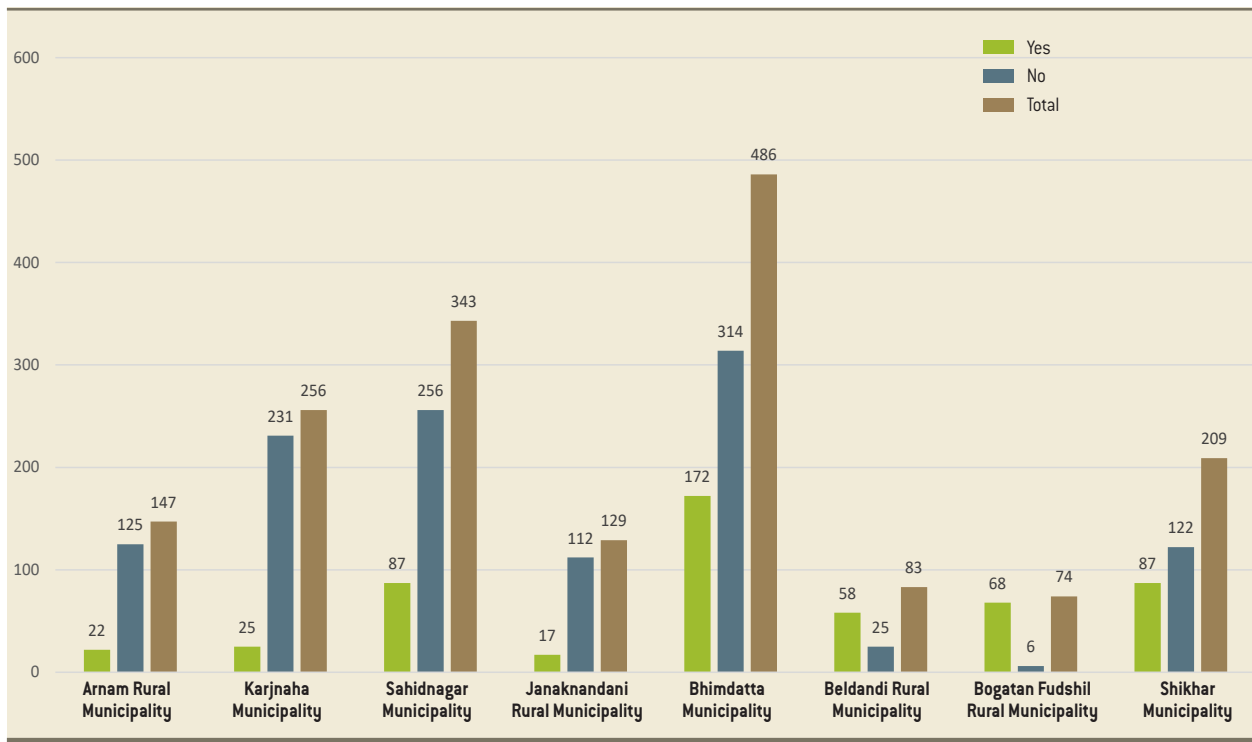


Figure 10: Household with Differential Access to Agricultural Land

highly vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity. Access to agricultural land is key to a stable source of livelihood, improves food self-sufficiency, and enables income generation, reducing reliance on exploitative labor arrangements. For landless Dalits, access to land is therefore not only an economic necessity but also a foundation for dignity, social inclusion, and long-term livelihood security.

An Illustrative Case from Garudi Tole, Doti⁴

Bune Damai, a 65-year-old resident of Garudi Tole in Doti, summed up the dilemma of his generation with a proverb he repeated more than once: “देश गरे खेत छैन, खेत गरे देश छैन” Figuratively, he explained, it means that if one goes to India for work, cultivation at home is abandoned; and if one stays back to farm, the chance for foreign employment is lost. For families like his, both options carry loss.

About ten years ago, another resident, Rumbha Damai, rented a relatively fertile piece of land. At the time, paying NPR 100,000 felt like an opportunity—land was productive, labour was available, and cultivation still made sense. Today, that same land lies uncultivated. No one is willing to take it even for NPR 10,000. Looking back, Rumbha reflects that had he invested that money in buying land in Kailali, its value would have increased many times over by now. Ironically, his Thakuri landlord did exactly that with the rent money he received and is now economically much better off.

One of the major reasons cultivation has declined is the increasing threat from wild animals. Wild boar and monkeys regularly destroy crops and fruit trees. After repeated losses, farmers like Rumbha found it impossible to continue farming. The risk became too high, and the returns too uncertain.



4 Conversation with Bune Damai-65, Tularam BK – 65, Rumbha Damai – 60, Chet Kaami – 45, Rumbha Damai, and others on Nov 13th in Garudi Tole, Shikhar Municipality-4, of Doti.

Garudi Tole is home to about 40 Dalit families—10 Damai and 30 BK households. Every family has at least one member working in India, mostly in Bangalore. The three participants in the discussion shared that their sons, daughters, and daughters-in-law are all in India, and they themselves had migrated there in the past. Out of these 40 families, around 12 have already shifted to Kailali. However, this shift is partial: they still retain their ancestral land in the village, but most of it has remained fallow for years.

Contrary to common assumptions, the problem here is not a lack of access to land. Almost all Dalit families own some land—enough to build a house and do small-scale farming. A few families who were previously landless managed to buy small plots in Kailali using income earned from India, mainly sufficient for housing. In addition to their own holdings, there is also land available for lease under *maat* or *kuut* arrangements.

Yet, even leased land is increasingly left uncultivated. The main reasons cited are the shortage of working manpower, as young people have migrated, and the persistent threat from wild animals. As fields remain empty year after year, forests and wildlife have slowly encroached into former cropping areas.

Chet Kaami, another resident, reflected on this cycle: if everyone cultivated, agriculture could still be viable. But when only a few households farm and the majority of land lies fallow, wild animals take over, making cultivation even harder for those who try. Over time, this has pushed more families away from farming and reinforced dependence on migration.

This story from Garudi Tole illustrates how migration, land abandonment, wildlife pressure, and uneven investment choices have together reshaped livelihoods—not because land is unavailable, but because farming has become increasingly unviable in practice.

4.5 Food Sufficiency of Households

Since, majority of Dalit families included in the survey were landless, only a few have land. Those who cultivate land cultivate smaller areas only; therefore, food insecurity is high among Dalit households. Survey revealed, 59 percent do not produce any food crops. Likewise, 20 percent can survive less than 3 months with their own production. 1.45 percent have reported that they can survive the entire year and have some surplus. See the table below (Table 12).

Table 12: Number of Households with Different Levels of Food Security

S.N	Municipalities	No Own production	0-3 Month from own production	3-6 Month	6-9 Month	9-12 Month	Enough for 12 month and saving	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	72	39	20	6	8	2	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	227	4	13	3	8	1	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	208	31	46	25	23	10	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	90	20	13	2	1	3	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	279	92	54	38	20	3	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	23	27	15	8	5	5	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	6	58	8	2	0	0	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	113	66	28	1	0	1	209	12.10
Total		1018	337	197	85	65	25	1727	100.00
In %		58.95	19.51	11.41	4.92	3.76	1.45	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

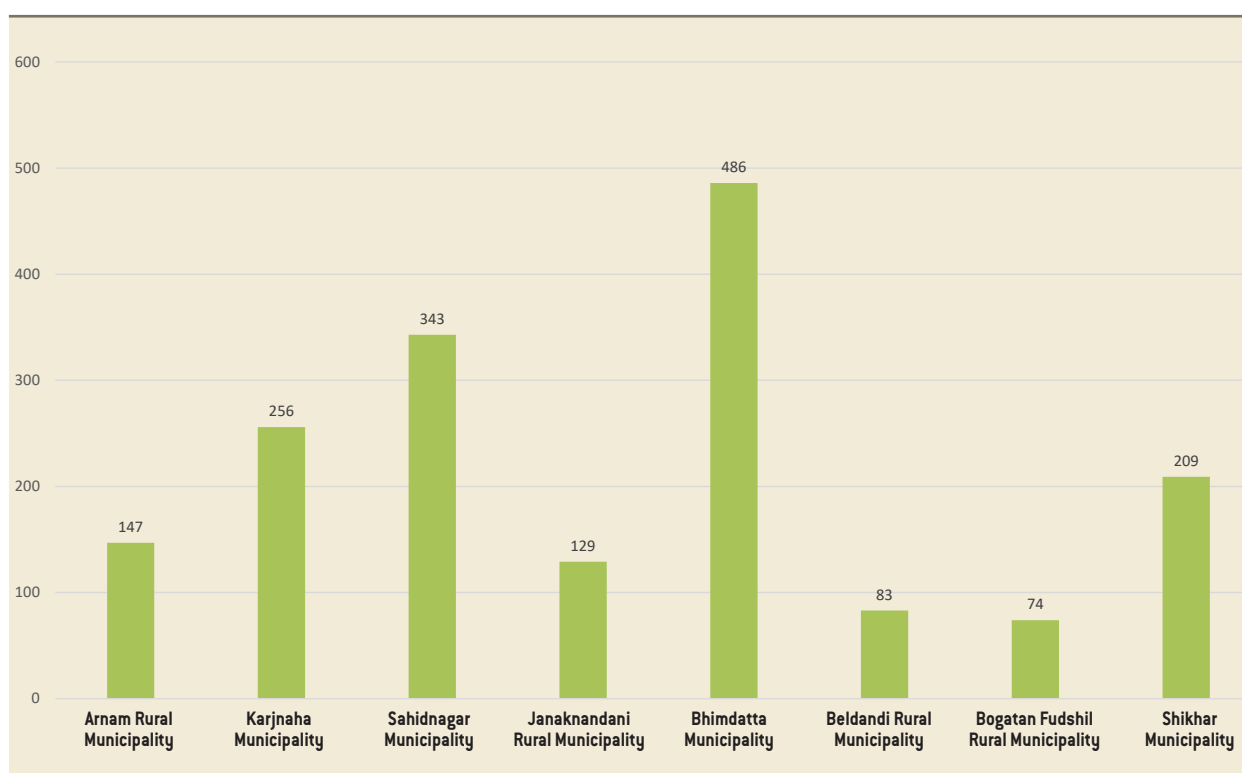


Figure 11: Number of Households with Different Levels of Food Security

In simple terms, this means that most Dalit households cannot grow their own food and must depend on buying food or working for others to survive. With about 60 percent having no production at all and fewer than 2 percent producing any surplus, very few Dalits can meet their food needs from their own land or production, showing high levels of food insecurity and economic vulnerability. This food insufficiency and insecurity lead them to a state where they cannot accumulate enough to save any and invest further, meaning they cannot move upward to get out of poverty.

Out of the total food-deficient households, 96 percent manage by buying food from the market. As the informal economy is dying out, buying from the market is common to all the study sites.

Table 13: Management of Food Deficiency

S.N	Municipalities	Buy from market	Borrow from neighbor	Buy from villagers	others	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	134	1	1	9	145	8.53
2	Karjnaha Municipality	247	0	0	8	255	15.00
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	333	0	0	0	333	19.59
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	126	0	0	0	126	7.41
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	443	3	7	28	481	28.29
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	69	2	1	6	78	4.59
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	70	2	1	1	74	4.35
8	Shikhar Municipality	208	0	0	0	208	12.24
	Total	1630	8	10	52	1700	100.00
	In %	95.88	0.47	0.59	3.06	100.00	

Source: HHs 2025

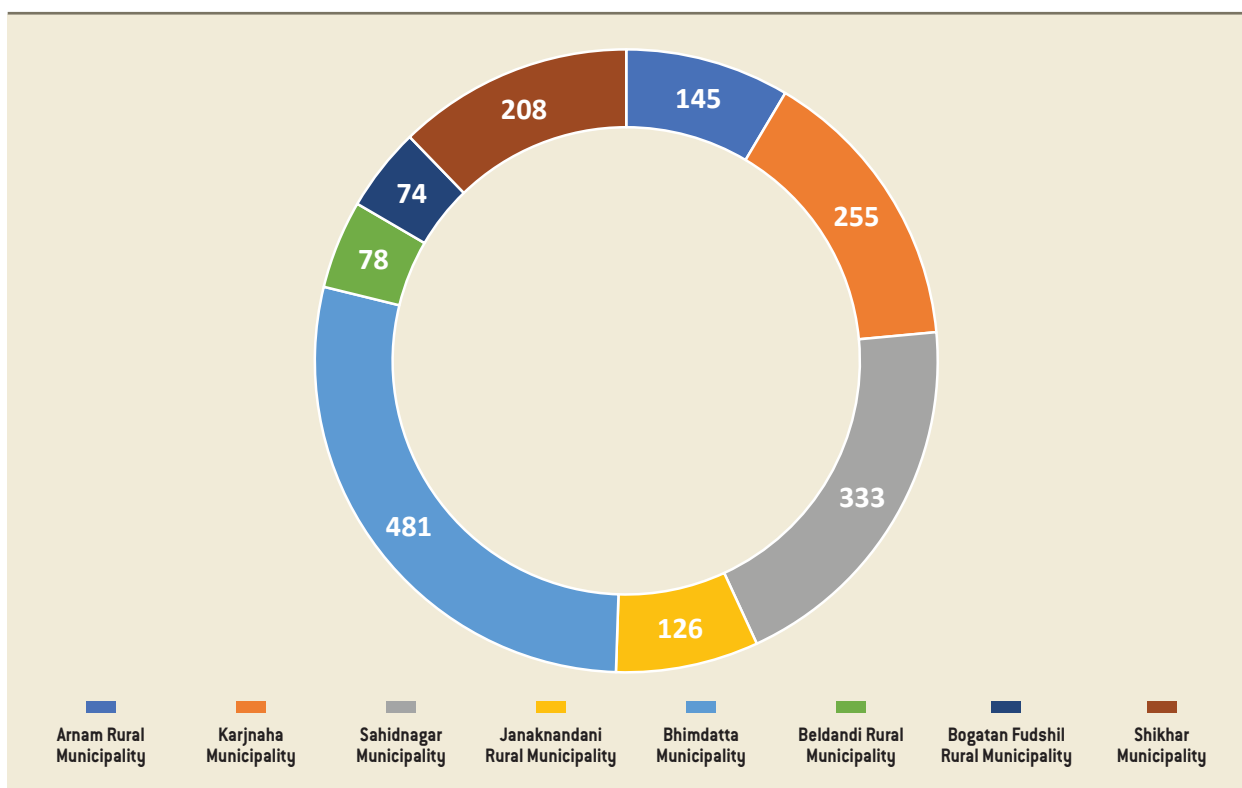


Figure 12: Management of Food Deficiency

This statistical information (Table 13) means that almost all Dalit households have to buy food from the market because they cannot produce enough food themselves. This makes it very hard to get out of poverty, because a large share of their limited income is spent just on food, leaving little or no money for education, health care, or saving. When food prices rise or jobs are unavailable, these families become even more vulnerable, keeping them trapped in a cycle of poverty and insecurity.

4.6 Employment and Income Generation

One-third of Dalit families (32.46) are involved in agricultural work as their major employment. An insignificant number of families are involved in government or non-governmental jobs on a permanent or salaried basis. 17 percent have reported foreign employment as their major employment; However, our field observations suggest that those who have migrated to third countries, other than India, have reported it as foreign employment, whereas, in the Far West have reported migrating to India also as foreign employment. See the table below (Table 14).

“We are Dalits, and we do not have enough land to farm. Even our traditional occupation can no longer sustain us. My family’s survival depends entirely on my earnings, which forces me to spend most of my life far from home in India, doing daily wage work. This separation and uncertainty weigh heavily on us, and it feels like we are slowly losing both our livelihood and our sense of belonging.”

-**Kalu Sing BK**, Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality, Ward No. 2, Kedarakhada, Doti

Table 14a: Households with Employment Opportunity in Different Sectors

S.N	Municipalities	Agricultural Work			Government Job			NGOs Job		
		M	F	Total	M	F	T	M	F	T
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	154	212	366	2	0	2	2	5	7
2	Karjnaha Municipality	102	130	232	2	1	3	5	1	6
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	26	60	86	10	1	11	0	2	2
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	11	22	33	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	39	144	183	16	11	27	24	15	39
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	7	37	44	1	4	5	0	1	1
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	125	132	257	4	1	5	2	1	3
8	Shikhar Municipality	197	233	430	6	2	8	1	1	2
Total		661	970	1631	41	20	61	34	26	60
In %		32.46			1.21			1.19		

Table 14b: Households with Employment Opportunity in Different Sectors

S.N	Municipalities	Foreign employment			Temporary tea 14her			Daily wages work			Total	%#
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T		
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	62	2	64	1	1	2	175	168	343	784	15.60
2	Karjnaha Municipality	63	2	65	0	0	0	228	230	458	764	15.20
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	268	0	268	1	0	1	219	252	471	839	16.70
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	87	1	88	0	0	0	104	89	193	314	6.25
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	206	42	248	2	23	25	221	276	497	1019	20.28
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	75	28	103	0	0	0	24	32	56	209	4.16
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	26	0	26	3	1	4	92	93	185	480	9.55
8	Shikhar Municipality	4	0	4	3	0	3	112	57	169	616	12.26
Total		791	75	866	10	25	35	1175	1197	2372	5025	100.00
In %		17.23			0.70			47.20			100	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

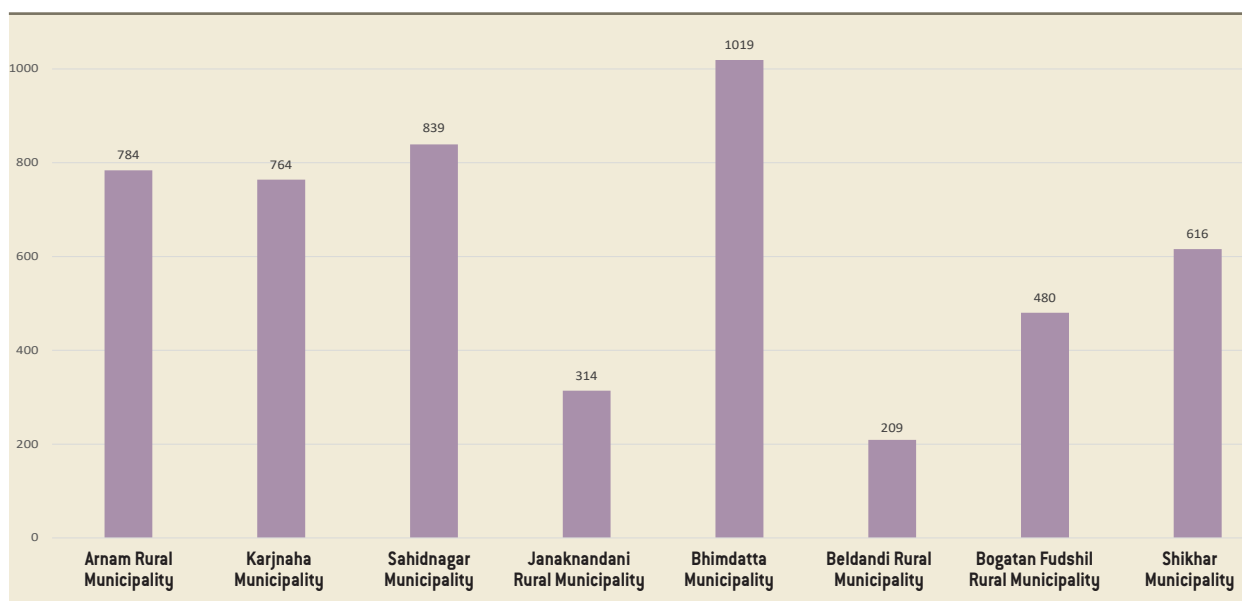


Figure 13: Households with Employment Opportunity in Different Sectors

Those who have been employed in different sectors other than agriculture mostly stay outside their home village. According to the survey, 71 percent of those who are employed stay outside the home village. See table below (Table 15).

Table 15: Household with Family Member Working Outside the Village

S.N	Municipalities	Working Outside the Village for Income			
		Yes	No HHs	Total	In %
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	133	14	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	147	109	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	235	108	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	72	57	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	332	154	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	69	14	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	58	16	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	172	37	209	12.10
Total		1218	509	1727	100.00
In %		70.53	29.47	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

Almost 71 percent of households send at least one family member outside the village for employment (Table 15) means that in most households, at least one family member, usually a man, has to leave the village to find work elsewhere because there are not enough livelihood opportunities locally. While this helps families earn some income, it also shows a lack of stable jobs in the community and places extra burdens on women and elderly members who stay behind. Dependence on outside employment reflects economic hardship and does not always lead to long-term security or escape from poverty.

Many of those who stay outside the home village go to India, followed by the Gulf Countries, and Malaysia. The Table below (Table 16) illustrates different destinations of out migrants.

Table 16: Different Destinations of Labour Migrants

S.N	Municipalities	Inside District	Outside the districts	India	Arab Gulf nations	Outside the Arab Gulf nations	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	158	97	56	58	3	372	16.32
2	Karjnaha Municipality	317	75	38	59	5	494	21.68
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	23	6	69	196	2	296	12.99
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	1	0	22	65	0	88	3.86
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	53	7	393	32	5	490	21.50
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	0	1	168	3	1	173	7.59
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	18	15	8	1	0	42	1.84
8	Shikhar Municipality	3	0	317	4	0	324	14.22
Total		573	201	1071	418	16	2279	100.00
In %		25.14	8.82	46.99	18.34	0.70	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

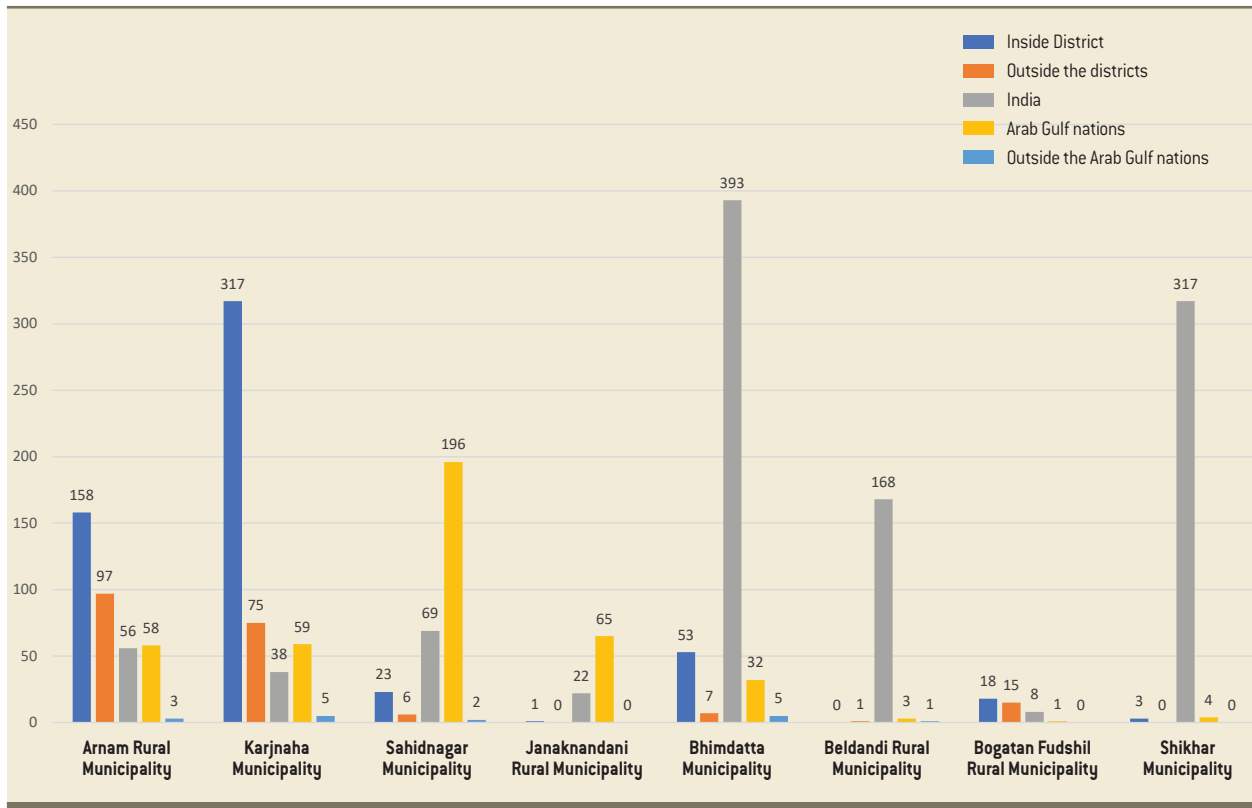


Figure 14: Different Destinations of Labour Migrants

Thus, most families (47%) have at least one member in India, and 18 percent of them have in the Gulf countries and Malaysia (Table 16). This number is growing day by day with the access to information and growing access to credit for going abroad. This is a paradox that cultivable land is increasingly lying fallow, whereas Dalits, for not having access to the cultivable land, in most cases, are going abroad, falling into a debt trap.

For landless Dalits, labour migration is the last resort. Here is an example,

“We are landless Dalits who have been living on public land for more than four decades, yet we are still treated as if we do not belong anywhere. I have five sons, and all of them have been forced to go to India for labor because farming here does not produce enough food to survive. Even the small space where we live is insecure. Without land rights, we are denied dignity, stability, and a future.”

-Janage Sarki, Shrilanka Tole of Bhimdutta Municipality–10, Kanchanpur

The table (Table 17) below presents the occupational diversity of Dalit households across different municipalities.

Table 17a: Occupational Diversity of Households

S.N	Municipalities	Agricultural production (Own)	Agricultural labors/Daily wages	Haliya/Harawa/Charawa (labor)	Labor for Industries	Labor for constructions site
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	16	142	0	1	1
2	Karjnaha Municipality	7	244	1	2	0
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	68	238	0	0	16
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	12	96	0	0	0
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	43	255	0	3	79
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	5	41	0	0	4
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	72	68	0	0	0
8	Shikhar Municipality	92	179	0	0	0
Total		315	1263	1	6	100
In %		10.69	42.84	0.03	0.20	3.39

Table 17: Occupational Diversity of Households

S.N	Municipalities	Job in Governments	Job in NGOs	Foreign Employment	Others	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	1	0	43	4	208	7.06
2	Karjnaha Municipality	1	0	53	96	404	13.70
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	9	0	221	7	559	18.96
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	0	0	96	1	205	6.95
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	15	4	149	173	721	24.46
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	1	1	37	30	119	4.04
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	4	0	48	60	252	8.55
8	Shikhar Municipality	2	0	7	200	480	16.28
Total		33	5	654	571	2948	100.00
In %		1.12	0.17	22.18	19.37	100	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

The table (Table 17) shows that only a few households are involved in different sectors of occupation. Not having access to various occupational opportunities means that Dalits are largely confined to low-paying, insecure, or traditional forms of work, for example, Haliya, Harawa-Charawa, often dictated by caste-based discrimination and social exclusion. This lack of access limits their ability to diversify income, acquire new skills, or engage in more productive and sustainable livelihoods. Critically, it reinforces cycles of poverty, dependency, and social marginalization, as individuals cannot improve their economic standing or challenge structural inequalities. Without meaningful opportunities in education, formal employment, or entrepreneurship, Dalits remain trapped in exploitative labour and are denied the economic agency necessary to achieve social mobility and dignity.

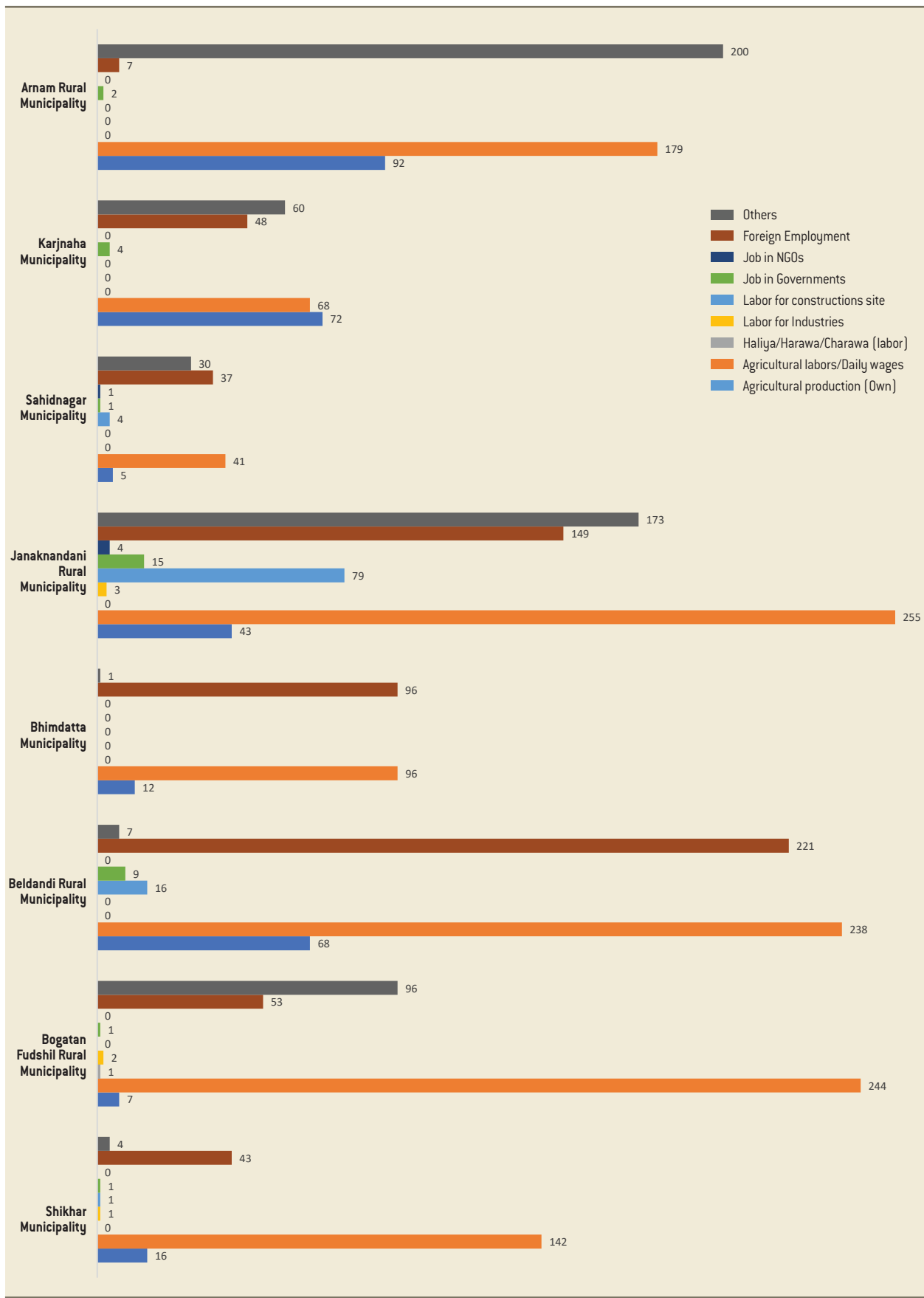


Figure 15: Occupational Diversity of Households

5. Access to and Ownership of Land

Access to and ownership of land are extremely critical to Dalits in Nepal because, as we discussed earlier, land represents economic security, social dignity, and a path out of historical oppression. Historically, Dalits were denied land ownership and confined to low-paying, menial jobs, which kept them economically dependent on higher-caste landlords. Owning land allows Dalits to sustain themselves through farming, gain financial independence, and provide for future generations. To repeat, beyond economics, land ownership gives them social status and a sense of belonging in communities that have traditionally excluded them. It also strengthens their political voice and empowerment, allowing them to challenge caste-based inequalities. Without land, Dalits remain trapped in cycles of poverty, discrimination, and marginalization. Hence, considering land as a basic asset that determines the well-being of households in the Nepali context, this study focused on different forms of land tenure and land holdings among Dalits of selected municipalities. This chapter presents the findings of the survey that reveal the access and ownership of land of Dalits in the study areas.

5.1 Land Tenure and Land Holdings

The following table (Table 18) presents the types of land households hold in the study areas.

Table 18: Ownership of House-Built Land

S.N	Municipalities	Personal Land	Tenant Land	Village Block	Other's name reg Land	Ailani Land (forest)	Government Land	Public land	Guthi (trust) land	Others	Total
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	37	0	23	6	79	1	0	1	0	147
2	Karjnaha Municipality	6	1	53	63	99	33	0	0	1	256
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	133	0	99	9	100	0	0	0	2	343
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	28	0	65	23	13	0	0	0	0	129
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	180	0	0	15	254	25	0	1	11	486
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	20	0	0	1	39	21	0	0	2	83
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	63	1	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	74
8	Shikhar Municipality	111	0	0	29	47	1	0	18	3	209
Total		578	2	240	156	631	81	0	20	19	1727
In %		33.47	0.12	13.90	9.03	36.54	4.69	0.00	1.16	1.10	100.00

Source: Household Survey, 2025

Almost 37 percent of them are living in the public land (*Ailani jagga*), that is, they are literally landless. Only 33 percent have reported having land in their own names. However, the area they hold is minimal, which we will discuss in the following paragraphs.

The above table (Table 18) illustrates that only 34 percent of houses are built on one's own land. Whereas, 41 percent of houses are built on Ailani and government land. It is worth noting that no house is built on public land.

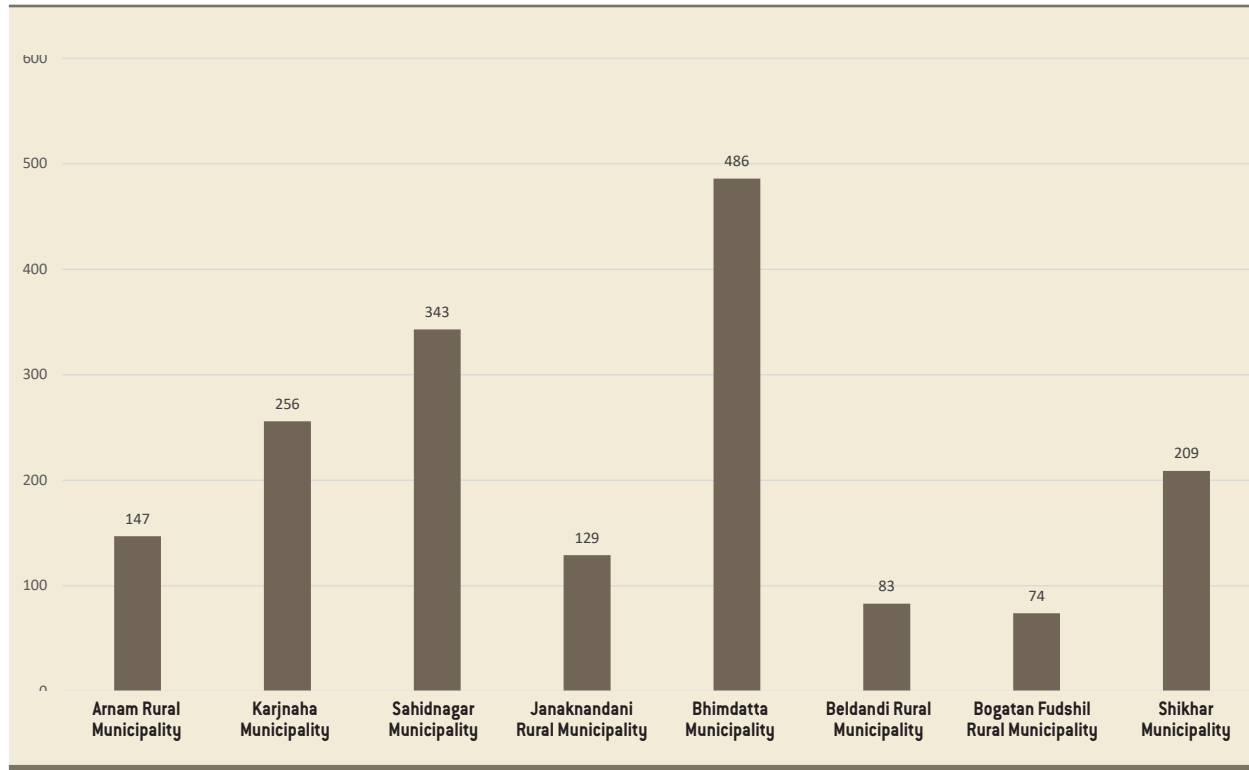


Figure 16: Ownership of House-Built Land

The fact that only one-third of Dalits have their house built on their own land underlines the severe landlessness and economic vulnerability among Dalit communities in Nepal. It means that the majority of Dalits, about two-thirds, either live on land they do not own, such as rented plots, borrowed land, or land provided by others, or on, Village Block, which makes them insecure and dependent. This lack of land ownership limits their ability to build permanent homes, invest in their property, or pass it on to future generations.

The pain of not having one's own land, displacement, deprivation and deception is expressed as, In some instances, the family knew that the land they were living on belonged to somebody else. For example,

Displacement, Deprivation and Deception

Khem Luhar is 52 years old, a father, a laborer, and a Dalit from Beladandi Rural Municipality, 1 in Kanchanpur. Like many Dalit families in Nepal's Far West, his life has been shaped not by choice, but by displacement, discrimination, and landlessness.

For years, Khem and his family lived on *Ailani* [unregistered] land near what is now Shuklaphanta National Park. They had no land certificate, but the land was their home and their source of survival.



They farmed small plots, raised their children, and built a fragile sense of stability. That stability ended when government authorities expanded the national park and reclaimed the land.

“We were told to leave,” Khem recalls. “The land was taken, and we had no power to resist.”

The family was forcibly displaced—without consultation, without compensation that ensured dignity, and without legal security. After the eviction, the government relocated Khem’s family to Beladandi. They were given only two kattha of land, once again classified as *Ailani*. It was not ownership, it was temporary permission to exist.

“At that time, government officials promised us that land certificates would be issued here,” Khem says. “We believed them. But years have passed, and we still have nothing.”

Today, Khem’s land remains unregistered. His family lives under constant uncertainty, unsure whether they will be displaced again. Many other Dalit families who were resettled alongside him face the same reality. The settlement lies dangerously close to the forest and national park boundary, exposing families to wildlife threats. Tigers, elephants, monkeys, and other animals frequently destroy crops, damage homes, and put lives at risk.

Yet the greatest danger is not wildlife, it is exclusion.

“When the Land Commission announced applications for land certificates, we were not even allowed to apply,” Khem explains. “They told us we are ‘resettlement people.’ But what does that mean? Are we not citizens?”

Khem had heard that Nepal’s constitution guarantees land for Dalits for housing and livelihoods. But for him, those rights exist only on paper.

“I ask myself: if the constitution protects us, why have we received nothing?”

Khem’s experience reflects the systemic discrimination faced by Dalit landless families across the region. Dalits encounter exclusion at every level—social, economic, and institutional. Even when laws and policies exist, weak implementation and discriminatory practices prevent them from

accessing land registration, government services, and social protection programs.

Without land ownership, Khem's family remains trapped in poverty. They cannot grow enough food to sustain themselves. They cannot build a permanent home. They cannot access loans to start even a small income-generating activity. Banks and cooperatives demand land certificates—documents they do not have and are repeatedly denied.

The impact on children is severe. Education becomes a luxury. School fees, uniforms, and transportation costs force many children from landless Dalit families to drop out early. Healthcare is another struggle. Health posts are far away, and without proper documentation, families are often excluded from government subsidies and health insurance schemes.

"We work hard every day," Khem says quietly. "But without land and government support, life only becomes harder. Even after being displaced once, we still live with fear. We don't know how long we will be allowed to stay here."

For families like Khem's, land is not just soil.

It is security against eviction.

It is a pathway out of poverty.

It is recognition as equal citizens.

Yet, due to discrimination and the failure to implement land and resettlement policies effectively, Dalit and landless families remain excluded from the very rights meant to protect them. Khem Luhar's story is not an exception; it is a warning. Without urgent action, displacement, landlessness, and injustice will continue to define the lives of Dalit communities in Nepal's Far West.

The promise of land rights must move from policy to practice—before another generation is forced to live without dignity, security, or hope.

"When we first settled here, the land was fallow and unused. We have lived on this land for 42 years, turning it into a place we could call home. Yet now we live under constant fear, facing the pressure of eviction and insecurity from the landlord. We have no land anywhere else and no alternative place to go. Recently, we learned that this land has been registered in someone else's name. We occupy only a very small plot, just enough to build our modest homes, but we have no legal certificate and no land for farming. All we ask is for the government to provide us with safe and secure land, wherever it may be available, so we can live without fear."

- **Jurani Devi Sada**, Manhaur, Musahari Tole, Arnama Rural Municipality–1, Siraha.

Even if one-third of households have their houses built on their own land, the area covered by them is smaller. For example, the table below (Table 19) presents the area covered by houses.

Table 19: House-Built Area Across Different Study Sites

S.N	Municipalities	Total Household	Area of Land in Hector	Per Family
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	147	8.69	0.06
2	Karjnaha Municipality	256	6.01	0.02
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	343	11.65	0.03
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	129	3.66	0.03
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	486	22.88	0.05
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	83	6.2	0.07
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	74	6.61	0.09
8	Shikhar Municipality	209	9.95	0.05
Total		1727	75.65	0.40

Source: Household Survey, 2025

Hence, according to the table (Table 19), the average house-built area is 0.40 ha. This means their house area is narrow and they live in smaller shelters, hardly enough for a family to live in.

5.2 Access to Agricultural Land

The majority of Dalit households reported that their main strategy of survival is agriculture. However, the majority (69%) of them do not have access to agricultural land. This data reveals the paradox of Nepali agriculture: the land fallow and the underproduction. (See the table below, Table 20).

However, we observed that the majority of them depend on remittances they receive from India for living.

Table 20: Household with Access to Agricultural Land

S.N	Municipalities	Yes	No	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	22	125	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	25	231	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	87	256	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	17	112	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	172	314	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	58	25	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	68	6	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	87	122	209	12.10
Total		536	1191	1727	100.00
In %		31.04	68.96	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

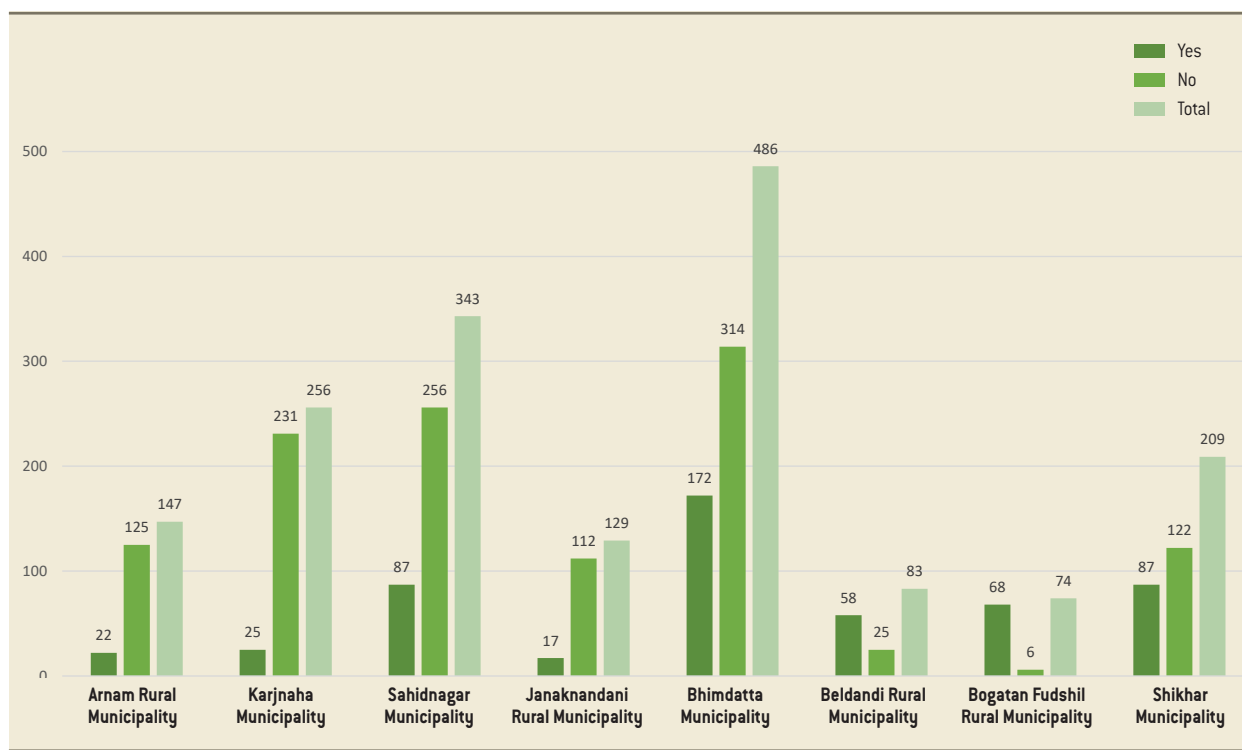


Figure 17: Household with Access to Agricultural Land

These statistical findings are also critical because for landless Dalits in Nepal, agricultural land is essential as it serves as a foundation for **economic security, food self-sufficiency, and social dignity**, allowing them to break free from historical oppression and exploitative labour arrangements. For Dalit women specifically, land ownership is a critical tool to combat **“double discrimination”** based on both caste and gender, providing them with the **economic autonomy** and bargaining power necessary to participate in decision-making and reduce their vulnerability to gender-based violence.

“We have been living on Ailani [forest] land for more than 40 years, and our struggle is not just mine—it is shared by 25 Dalit households in our community. Because there are no job opportunities here in Nepal, my husband works in India, like many others who are forced to migrate for hard labor. If we had enough land, we could farm and sustain our livelihoods, but we do not. Despite decades of living here, the government continues to ignore our voices and has taken no action to resolve our land problems.”

- **Bhaganiya Sada**, Arnarn Rural Municipality Ward No. 1, Manaur Musahari Tole, Siraha.

Ultimately, access to land is more than just a financial asset; it is a vital source of **identity, stability, and citizenship** that empowers marginalized communities to secure long-term livelihood security and challenge entrenched social hierarchies.



Fulbahari Tells Story of Her Village and Untiring Struggle

Fulbahari Pari grew up along the restless banks of the Mahakali River, in Bijaya Tol–13 of Bhimdutta Municipality. A Dalit woman and now a ward member, she passed her SLC with determination, knowing education was her only shield in a world that rarely protected women like her. Today, she uses that education not for herself alone, but for her neighbors—landless, poor, and often forgotten.

When the government announced provisional land registration, Fulbahari worked door to door. With the ward office and the support of the district chair of the Land Commission, she helped 275 families secure *seto poorja*, the white paper that gave them at least a temporary sense of belonging. People began calling them *nissa wala*, holders of hope written on fragile sheets. Yet Fulbahari knew hope was uneven. Some families missed

the chance. Their land remains unsurveyed, their futures uncertain.

Most households own too little land to feed themselves even for three months. Half survive through sharecropping or *thekka* farming. Nearly 70 percent of families have at least one member working in India for part of the year. Others dig sand from the Mahakali River, earning just 300 to 500 rupees a day—enough to buy grain, never enough to save.

Fulbahari's own life mirrors these struggles. Her husband is in Cambodia, sent through an agent who took seven lakh rupees. Now, she hears troubling news and waits anxiously. Her two sons, only nine and six, attend a boarding school, their future her quiet resistance against poverty. Around her, many neighbors take loans at crushing interest rates—36 to 48 percent—to reach Gulf countries, only to return deeper in debt.

Her father-in-law arrived here in 1967 from Bajura, clearing shrubs and trees to build a life. Many families share that story, migration repeating itself across generations. Each year, floods wash away parts of the settlement, undoing months of labor. Whatever work people do, savings remain impossible. What little they earn goes into rebuilding homes again and again.

Still, Fulbahari does not give up. She speaks for those without papers, without land, without safety. In a place where the river takes more than it gives, she stands firm, believing that dignity, like land, must be claimed, protected, and never surrendered.

Hence, the story of Fulbahari illustrates that, education and determined leadership can empower even the most marginalized to claim dignity and rights for their community. True change begins when those who have struggled themselves stand up to ensure others are no longer invisible

5.3 Contract Land

One-fourth of families have leased land under a contract arrangement. The highest percentage of families leasing land under contract is in the Doti, a hill district of Far West. The land-owning families preferred to move down to Madhesh to escape the hardship of the hills, and the land was available for leasing. Paradoxically, the land that was leased under the Maat contract was left fallow as a growing number of Dalits who leased the land earlier under such a contract. Under such a contract, only the landowner who has taken the money can break the contract. Therefore, many Dalit families have even left the land barren and have gone to India for employment.

Table 21: Household Leasing Land Under Contract

S.N	Municipalities	Yes	No	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	53	94	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	16	240	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	72	271	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	36	93	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	56	430	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	7	76	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	56	18	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	132	77	209	12.10
Total		428	1299	1727	100.00
In %		24.78	75.22	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

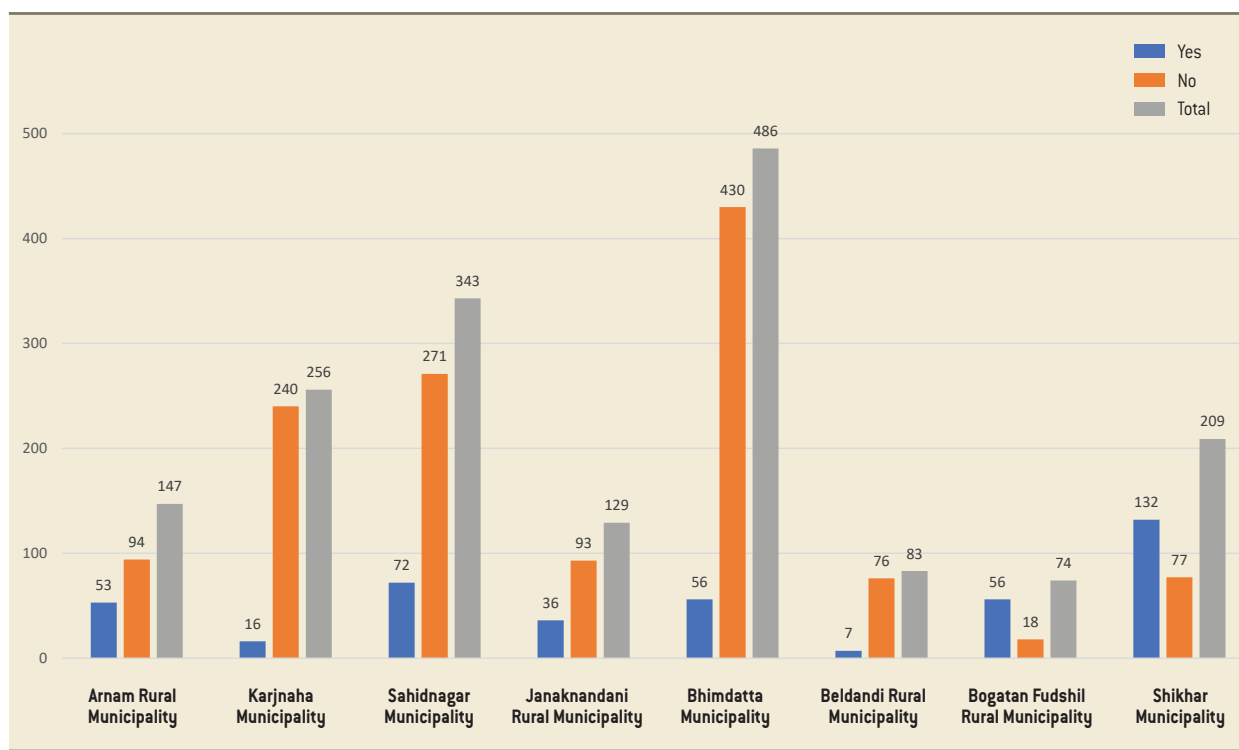


Figure 18: Household Leasing Land Under Contract

Many of the families who have been doing agriculture under contract have a smaller amount of land, which is 0.08 hectares per family. The highest average per family is in Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality of Doti District, which is 0.18 hectares, and lowest in Beldandi Rural Municipality of Kanchanpur District, which is only 0.02 percent. See Table below (Table 22).

Table 22: Area of Leased-in Land Under Contract Farming

S.N	Municipalities	Total Household	Area of Land in Ha	Average
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	147	11.23	0.08
2	Karjnaha Municipality	256	6.63	0.03
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	343	24.63	0.07
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	129	9.92	0.08
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	486	27.63	0.06
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	83	2.03	0.02
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	74	12.98	0.18
8	Shikhar Municipality	209	16.91	0.08
Total		1727	111.96	0.06

Source: Household Survey, 2025

According to the table (Table 22), current individual contract farming provides Dalit families with tiny plots averaging just **0.06 hectares**, which is insufficient to escape food insecurity. Shifting to **group-managed contract farming** on larger, consolidated areas, potentially utilizing the **17 percent of agricultural land currently lying unused (Table 23)**, would provide the scale necessary for genuine food self-sufficiency. By moving away from minuscule individual plots toward **community-managed arrangements**, Dalits can leverage collective social capital to break cycles of debt and achieve the economic dignity promised by the Constitution.



Land Security for Agriculture

Dalits are often portrayed as unwilling to engage in agriculture, but the reality is very different. Most landless Dalit families do not farm because they **do not have secure access to land**, they live on someone else's property or on public land without legal rights, making long-term agricultural investment impossible. If the municipality chose to act, there is public land that could be managed and allocated to landless Dalit families, allowing them to farm with dignity and security.

Agriculture also carries high risks: floods, droughts, crop failure, and delayed returns. For families living hand-to-mouth, this risk is unaffordable. Daily wage labor, though poorly paid, provides immediate cash. This is not a lack

of interest in agriculture, but a survival strategy shaped by insecurity, poverty, and exclusion from land and state support systems.

- **Pratap Bishwakarma** [38], Ward Chair of Ward-4, Karjahana Municipality

Hence, Pratap Bishwakarma, the ward chair, explained that Dalits are not avoiding agriculture by choice, but by necessity; without land security and safety nets, survival comes before long-term farming. Real inclusion requires addressing structural barriers, not blaming the poor for the risks they cannot afford to take.

In terms of contract farming, one of the way forward to establish Dalit's access to land can be contract farming. There have already been some examples of policy and practice of contract farming in other studies¹.

5.4 Enhancing Access of Landless Dalits to Fallow Land

Enhancing access of landless Dalits to fallow land in Nepal is a critical step toward promoting social justice, reducing poverty, and strengthening inclusive development. Dalit communities, historically marginalized and deprived of secure land rights, continue to face economic vulnerability due to limited control over productive resources. Transforming underutilized or fallow land into cultivable, community-managed spaces can create meaningful livelihood opportunities, improve food security, and empower Dalits to participate more fully in local development processes. By addressing structural barriers and fostering equitable land governance, Nepal can move closer to realizing its constitutional commitment to dignity, equality, and social transformation.

Land Rights is Citizenship Rights²

Ram Bahadur Bohara, the ward chair of Chait, Ward No. 13, often says that citizenship begins with land. He briefed, 'Some families have been living there since 1965, yet their lives remain invisible on paper. Out of 650 plots where people have built homes, only 59 land certificates have been prepared. The rest remain unsurveyed, unmeasured, and unregistered.'

Mr. Bohara is trying to establish a Namuna Basti, the so-called Model Village, where landless and marginalized families will be settled. And, every time a donor visits the ward office, he asks for support to complete the mission of Namuna Basti. He believes development cannot exist when people are denied their basic identity.

Most families live on Ailani, public land. Because they have no land certificates, they cannot obtain citizenship cards. Without citizenship, they cannot open bank accounts, enrol their children in higher education, access government services, or claim social security. Their lives are rooted in the soil, yet officially, they belong nowhere.

"These people are citizens in reality, but not in records," Ram Bahadur says with concern. Until land is recognized, their rights remain out of reach—trapped between the ground they stand on and the documents they do not have.

Hence, Mr. Bohara reiterated the fact that secure land ownership is the foundation of citizenship and access to rights, services, and dignity. Without land recognition, entire communities remain invisible to the state, regardless of how long they have lived and contributed there.

The following paragraphs discuss the availability of fallow land that can be turned into cultivable land.

¹ <https://lamahimun.gov.np/sites/lamahimun.gov.np/files/documents/karar%20kheti.pdf>

² Based on the conversation with Ram B Bohahar, Ward Chair of Ward No. 13 of BhimDatta Municipality at his office, on November 16th, 2025.

5.5 Availability of Fallow Land

The survey recorded 17 percent of agricultural land as fallow land. The field visit of the research team found that the presence of fallow land might be higher than what is reported. 17 percent of respondents during the survey have reported of fallow land availability.

Table 23: Availability of Fallow Land

S.N	Municipalities	Yes	No	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	38	109	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	43	213	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	68	275	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	0	129	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	0	486	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	22	61	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	47	27	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	77	132	209	12.10
Total		295	1432	1727	100.00
In %		17.08	82.92	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

In addition to private fallow land, there is government fallow land, as well, which can also be utilized for contract farming. The existing government policy also allowed it³. However, the field observation suggested that the availability of fallow land may be larger, almost matching to the national average (i.e., 40%).

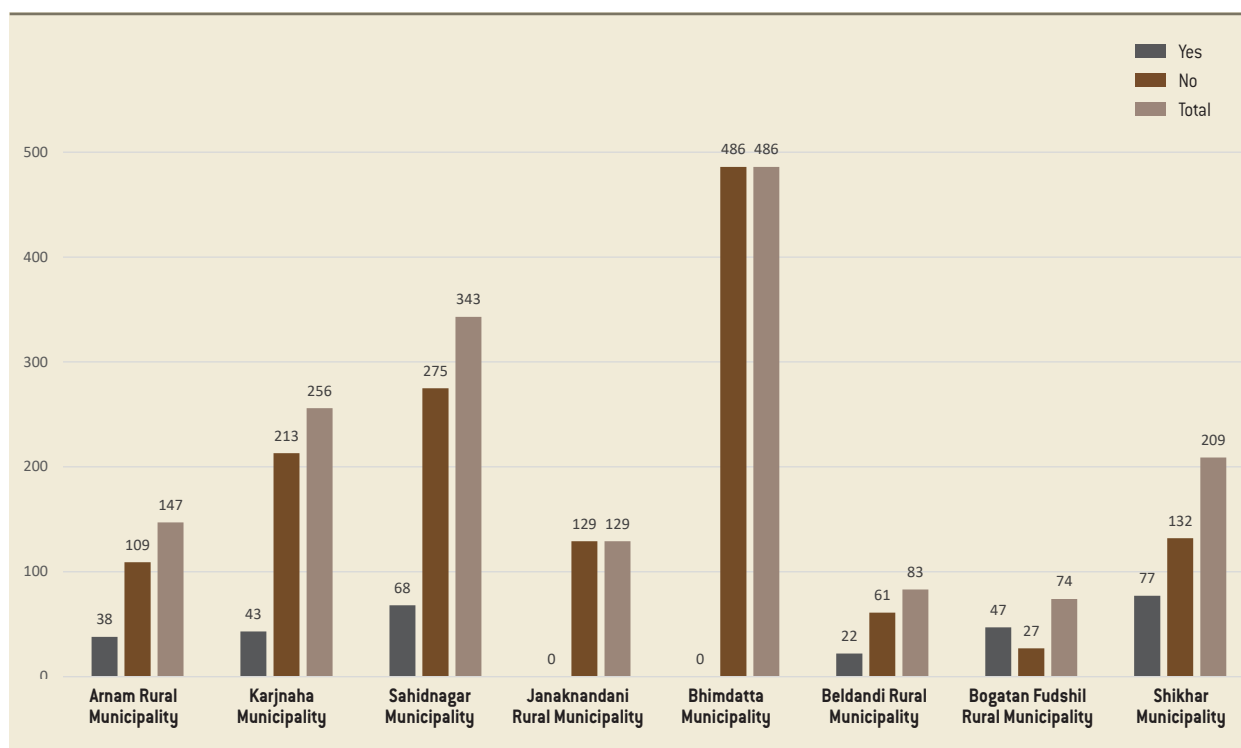


Figure 19: Availability of Fallow Land

³ <https://lamahimun.gov.np/sites/lamahimun.gov.np/files/documents/karar%20kheti.pdf>

Agriculture would once again become viable⁴

In the village, agriculture remains the lifeline, but land access for Dalits is complicated. Half cultivate under *Bataiya* or *Maate*, agreements with Thakuri landlords, while many have limited land and barely produce enough food for three months. With most Thakuri landlords migrating to Tarai, access to *Maate* was easier in the past—but now, as more Dalit youth migrate to India for work, fewer are available to farm, and land under *Maate* often lies fallow.

Kalu Singh, 40, knows this struggle well. With his father and brothers in India, he manages just one ropani of paddy, producing barely enough to feed his family. Like many, he has also invested in small plots in Kailali and Madhesh, planning for future security, while seasonal migration ensures cash for survival today.

Yet hope remains. The village now has road access, fertile soil, and conditions ideal for citrus, ginger, turmeric, timur (Sichuan Pepper), and chili. Goat farming is already practiced, and fallow lands could be turned into fodder farms. Agricultural Technician, Mr. Khadga opined, 'with technical support, group farming, climate-smart practices, and marketing strategies, agriculture could once again become viable.'

Prakash, a local advocate, believes that if the ward invests even 15% of its budget into agriculture development and supports Dalits with technical guidance, the village can rebuild its agricultural potential. Even amid migration and labor pressures, the land, if managed well, still holds the promise of a sustainable future.

These findings of group discussion were further attested by Chandra Bahadur Sunuwar, the ward chair of Ward-7 of Bogatan Fudshil, of Doti.⁵

Many Dalit households have already migrated, leaving their homes padlocked and creating uncertainty about how to design effective Dalit-centered programs. Challenges such as low education levels, lack of crop diversification, and limited prospects in agriculture make farming less attractive. With widespread out-migration, few are willing to cultivate land, even for free. Yet, there remains potential: certain fruits and crops could support land leasing or collective cultivation, and cooperatives can play a key role in connecting farmers to markets, offering a pathway to revitalize agricultural livelihoods for the remaining community members.

Hence, despite challenges from migration and limited land access, the village holds real agricultural potential. With proper support, technical guidance, and strategic investment, Dalits can transform fallow land into a source of sustainable livelihood and food security.

4 Conversation with Dil Bahadur Sarki (58), Mani Raj Joshi (56), Dinesh Nepali, Kalu Singh BK, Lokendra Khadka (Agricultural Technician at Municipality), & Prakash Sunar (39), UML leader, in Kedhar Akhada-2, Doti, on 12th November 2025.

5 Interview with the ward chair recorded at his office on the 13th November 2025.

The table below (Table 24) presents the types of fallow land that can potentially be utilized under collective and contract farming.

Table 24: Types of Fallow Land Reported

S.N	Municipalities	Private Land	Government Land	Institutional land	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	0	38	0	38	12.88
2	Karjnaha Municipality	0	43	0	43	14.58
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	0	68	0	68	23.05
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	0	0	0	0	0.00
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	0	0	0	0	0.00
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	0	22	0	22	7.46
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	47	0	0	47	15.93
8	Shikhar Municipality	71	6	0	77	26.10
Total		118	177	0	295	100.00
In %		40.00	60.00	0.00	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

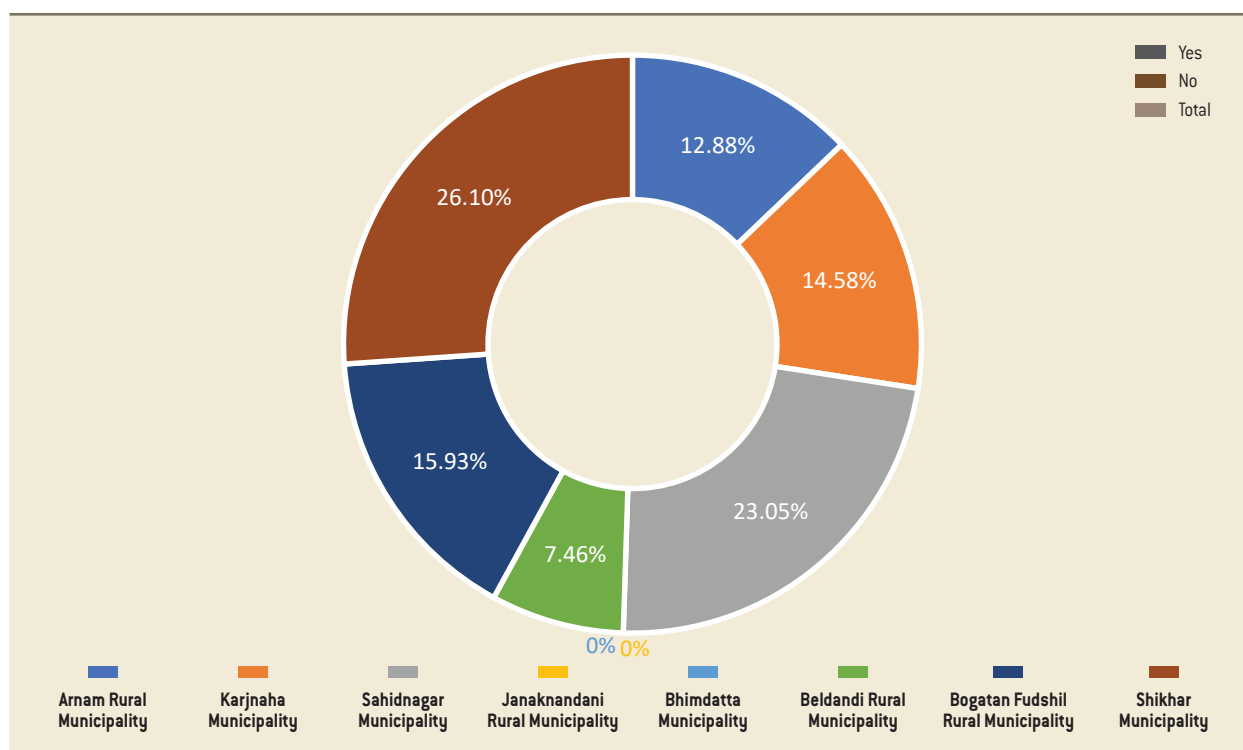


Figure 20: Types of Fallow Land Reported

The fallow land that can be brought under cultivation comprises government land (60%) and private land (40%). Following the contemporary practice elsewhere the government land, which is left fallow, can be utilized under contract farming or community farming.

Out of the total fallow lands, as has been reported, only 16 percent of the land is available for contract farming. See the table below (Table 25).

Table 25: Availability of Fallow Land for Contract Farming

S.N	Municipalities	Yes, Available	No, not available	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	29	118	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	27	229	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	142	201	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	46	83	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	22	464	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	0	83	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	10	64	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	2	207	209	12.10
Total		278	1449	1727	100.00
In %		16.10	83.90	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

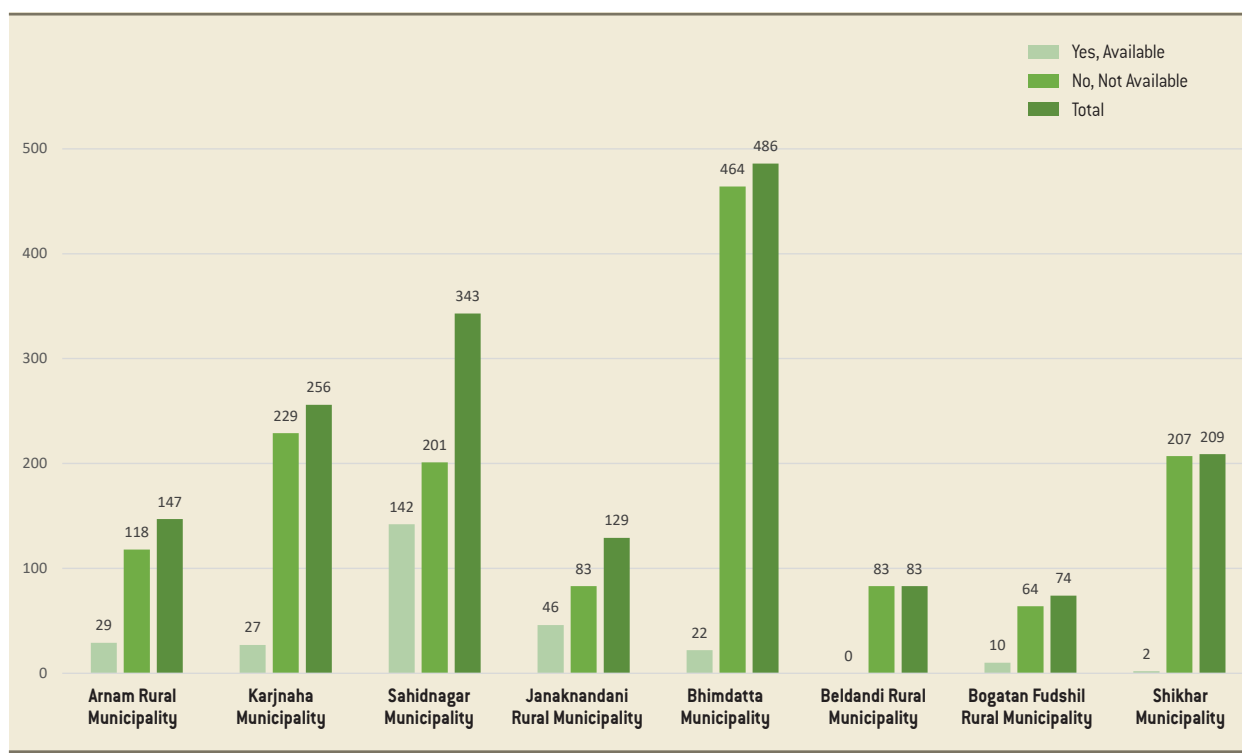


Figure 21: Availability of Fallow Land for Contract Farming

In addition to readily available fallow land for cultivation, the areas can be negotiated through the local government or other community mechanisms. However, Dalits are gradually becoming less interested in such farming, for example, in Doti.

In the study sites, a smaller percentage (41%) of Dalits have been associated with some sorts of collective forums.

Table 26: Affiliation with the Collective Forums

S.N	Municipalities	Yes	No	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	24	123	147	8.51
2	Karjnaha Municipality	35	221	256	14.82
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	38	305	343	19.86
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	0	129	129	7.47
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	338	148	486	28.14
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	68	15	83	4.81
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	68	6	74	4.28
8	Shikhar Municipality	143	66	209	12.10
Total		714	1013	1727	100.00
In %		41.34	58.66	100.00	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

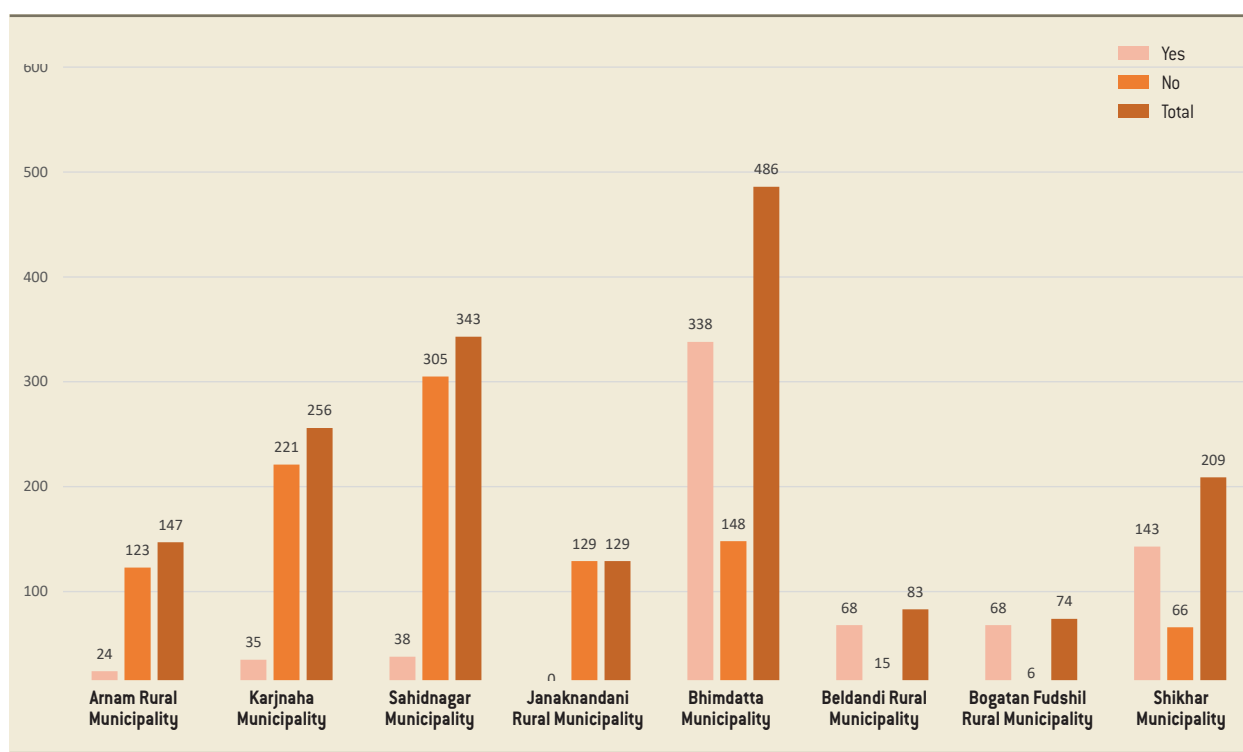


Figure 22: Affiliation with the Collective Forums

Even though, for landless Dalits in Nepal, social capital, comprising community networks, relationships, and collective ties, is crucial for survival and empowerment, there have been inadequate concerns from all corners. Evidential fact is it enables access to informal resources and livelihood opportunities, facilitates collective action to claim land rights and government support, and provides social and emotional protection against poverty, discrimination, and marginalization, thereby strengthening resilience, dignity, and community identity.

The following table (Table 27) presents the description of different collectives, where Dalits have been members in.

Table 27: Households Participating in Different Community Organizations

S.N	Municipalities	Land Rights Forum	Community Forest User Group	Trade Union/ labors groups	Farmers' Federation	Mothers Group	Others	Total	%#
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	0	0	0	8	12	4	24	2.14
2	Karjnaha Municipality	0	0	0	19	5	11	35	3.13
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	0	0	0	0	0	38	38	3.39
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	1	79	14	69	51	294	508	45.36
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	27	0	0	13	18	68	126	11.25
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	0	2	0	20	62	44	128	11.43
8	Shikhar Municipality	3	3	3	24	99	129	261	23.30
Total		31	84	17	153	247	588	1120	100.00
In %		2.77	7.50	1.52	13.66	22.05	52.50	100	

Source: Household Survey, 2025

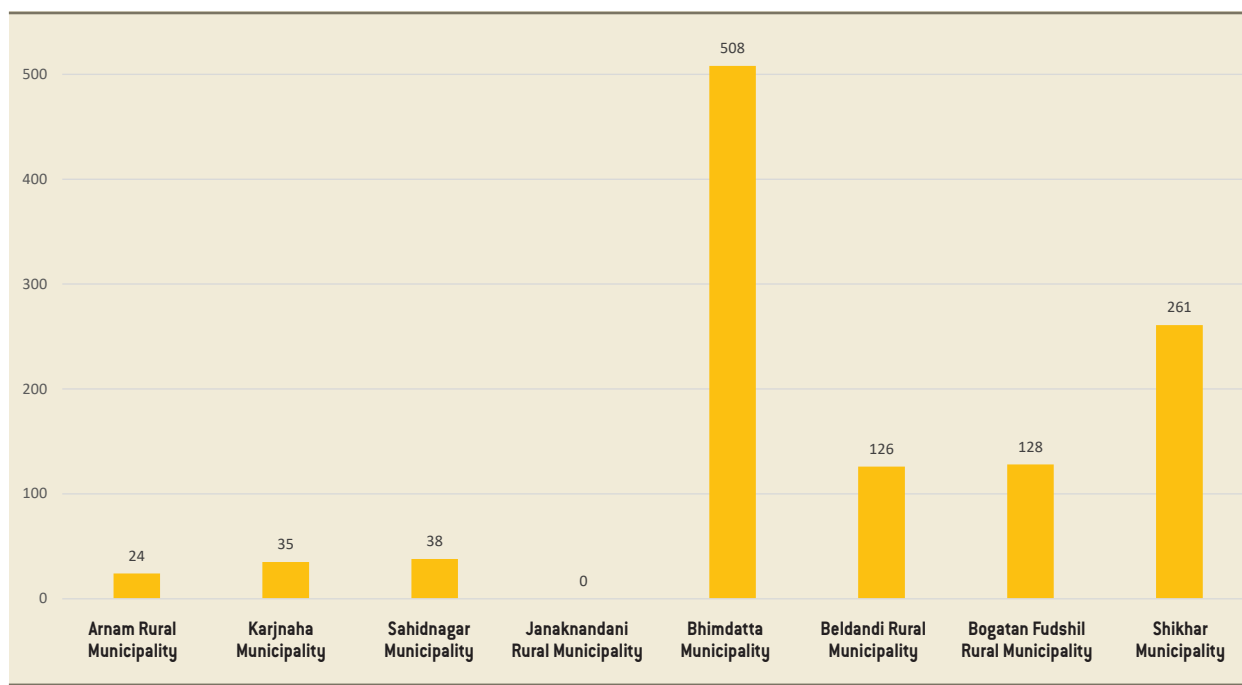


Figure 23: Households Participating in Different Community Organizations

The table (Table 27) reveals that fewer households are participating in the community-based organizations and other collectives.

The low participation of Dalits in collective forums, with only **41 percent of surveyed households** involved, reflects a significant deficit in **social capital**, as persistent landlessness and historical marginalization limit their ability to build the networks needed to challenge entrenched power hierarchies. This exclusion is reinforced by **discriminatory social norms, a lack of political representation, and systemic barriers** that prevent Dalits from collectively demanding the land rights promised by the constitution. Ultimately, this lack of engagement weakens their **bargaining power** against local elites and traps the community in a cycle of dependency, making legal protections ineffective in practice.

5.6 Land Commission, the Last Hope

Nepal's Land Issues Resolving Commission (LIRC) - the Land Commission, a body tasked with addressing longstanding land issues such as landlessness, unresolved ownership claims, and settlement rights, was a last hope of the landless families, and the landless Dalits, in particular, to obtain rights to the land they were living on or cultivating. The interim government formed following the Gen-Z movement of September 2025 attempted to dissolve the commission in late September 2025, but the Supreme Court ruled that decision unconstitutional and restored the commission, allowing it to continue its work.

The Land Commission was mandated to **resolve land-related disputes and problems** — especially those involving landless people, squatters, and unplanned settlers; **Provide land ownership certificates** to eligible landless Dalits and other landless citizens through systematic verification and allocation; and **Plan and manage relocation** of landless and unauthorized settlements in risk-prone or prohibited areas to safe, lawful sites.

Likewise, the Commission was also mandated to **Complete unfinished works of past land commissions** by creating proper procedures and legal frameworks. And, **coordinate with federal, provincial, and local governments** to ensure integrated and sustainable solutions to land issues.

According to the official data, the Land Commission, between the period of 2019 to 2025, a total of 8848 land certificates have already been distributed. Out of which, 863 were landless Dalits, 1002 were squatter households, 3421 were informal settlers, and 3571 were carried over from certified by the previous commissions.⁶

Hence, the Land Commission was seen as the last hope for many landless people, especially landless Dalits and informal settlers, to secure land ownership. However, this study found that only a limited number of landless Dalit families were able to submit applications to the Commission. Most of these applications were submitted with the support and facilitation of local governments, indicating limited access and outreach of the Commission among the most vulnerable group. Evidence showed that in those municipalities where local governments' representatives were less concerned with the issues, the performance of the Commission appeared to be less effective.

The following table (Table 28) presents the number of households that submitted the application to the Commission.

Table 28: Number of Household Submitted Applications to the Land Commission

S.N	Municipalities	Yes	No	Total
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	30	117	147
2	Karjnaha Municipality	137	119	256
3	Shahidnagar Municipality	0	0	0
4	Janaknandini Municipality	0	0	0
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	210	276	486
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	56	27	83
7	Bogtan Fushil Rural Municipality	0	0	0
8	Shikhar Municipality	1	208	209
Total		434	747	1181
In %		36.75	63.25	100

6 <https://lirc.gov.np/pages/purja/>

Source: Household Survey, 2025

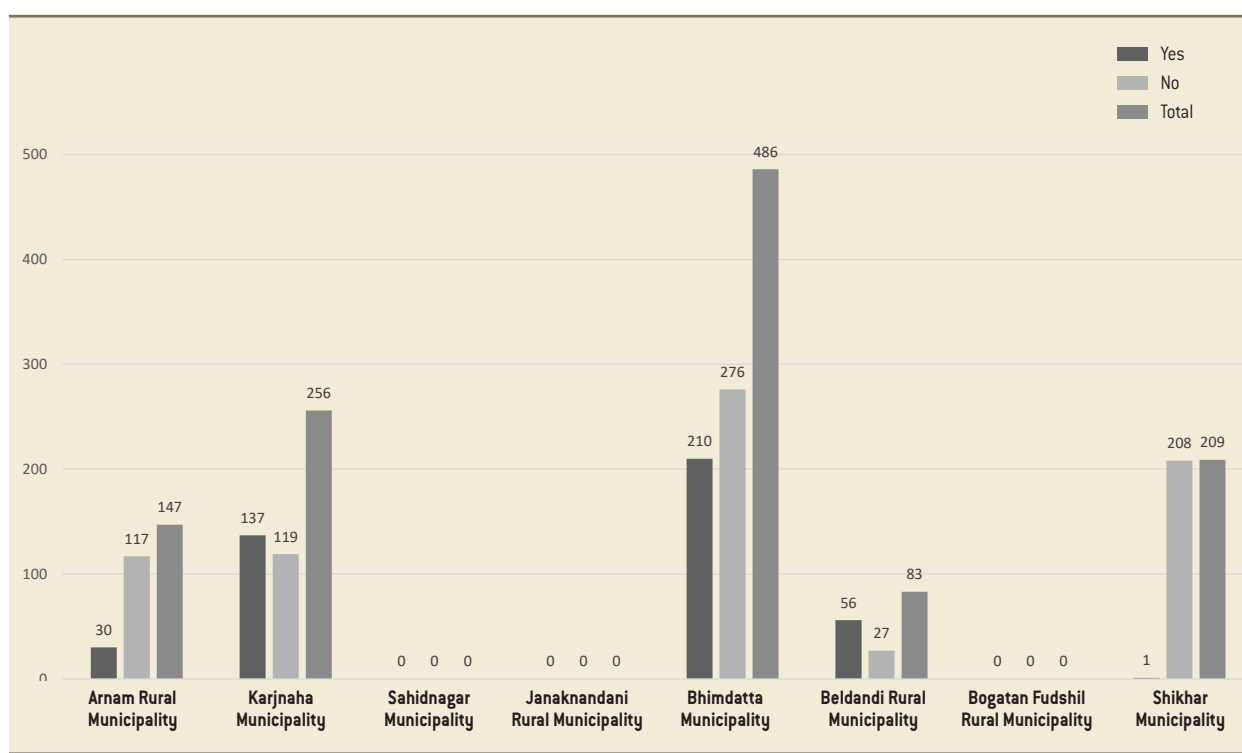


Figure 24: Number of Household Submitted Applications to the Land Commission

The low number of applicants reflects a significant policy failure, if not the efficiency of the Commission, particularly as application collection was suspended in several municipalities for unclear or avoidable reasons. For example, there were no such applications collected in Shahidnaar Municipaliteis and Janaknandini of Madhesh Province and Bogtan Fudhil rural municipality. However, the follow-up field visits found that in Janak Nandini, have filled up the forms. For example, all 56 families of ward-3, Mahuwa Mahara Tole have submitted the applications. Sita Devi Mahara (45), Ward Member, Ward No.3 said that, even if they have filled up the form, they have not received any further information, including confirmation of registration of the application.

In the meantime, even the Land Issues Resolving Commission (ILRC) has not updated the forms filled up in Janak Nandidi. See the table below (Table 29).

Table 29: Application submission record in LIRC of Study Area

Name of Local Government	Landless Dalits Hhs	Squatters	Informal Settlers	Total Application
Arnam Rural Municipality	0	0	0	0
Karjnaha Municipality	159	278	733	1170
Shahidnagar Municipality	0	0	0	0
Janaknandani Rural Municipality	0	0	0	0
Bhimdata Municipality	924	1002	6307	8233
Beldandi Rural Municipality	163	203	4449	4816
Shikhar Municipality	0	2	19	21
Bogatan Fudshil Municipality	21	10	253	284
Total	1268	1495	11761	14522

Source: Yearly Report, LIRC, FY 2081/082

Even if officials claim the process will resume, and applicant numbers may increase marginally, such delays have already undermined trust and access. Even if resumed, the limited reach of the program is likely to persist, making this a serious and ongoing policy concern requiring

immediate corrective action. It was also reported of deception by the representative of the local government. For example,

“After learning that the Land Commission had been formed, we made repeated requests to the ward chairperson to help us complete and submit the required application form. However, despite assuring us that he would inform and assist us, the ward chairperson failed to take any follow-up action. As a result of this negligence, we were denied the opportunity to submit our application and were effectively excluded from the Land Commission process”.

- **Indra Nepali**, Titalai Village, Ward No. 8, Shikhar Municipality, Doti

Among those who have applied at the office of the commission include landless Dalits (32%), Landless squatters (24%), and Informal settlers (44%). The following table (Table 30) presents the different categories of right-holders and the number of applicants.

Table 30: Total Household Types of application submission

S.N	Municipalities	Landless Dalit	Landless Squatters	Informal Settlers	Total
1	Arnam Rural Municipality	24	6	0	30
2	Karjnaha Municipality	102	34	1	137
3	Sahidnagar Municipality	0	0	0	0
4	Janaknandani Rural Municipality	0	0	0	0
5	Bhimdatta Municipality	8	36	166	210
6	Beldandi Rural Municipality	2	30	24	56
7	Bogatan Fudshil Rural Municipality	0	0	0	0
8	Shikhar Municipality	1	0	0	1
Total		137	106	191	434
In%		31.57	24.42	44.01	100

Source: Household Survey, 2025

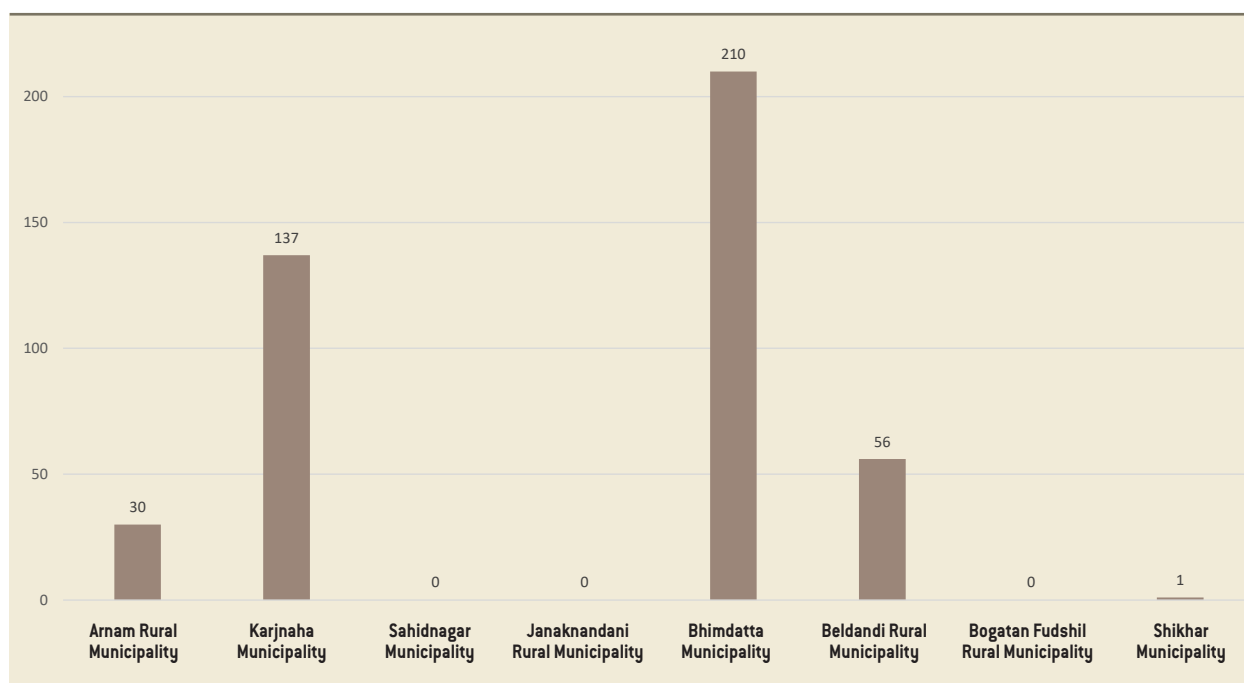


Figure 25: Total Household Types of application submission



A Small Piece of Land, A Lifetime of Waiting: Laxmi Sarki's Story

Every morning, Laxmi Sarki wakes up before sunrise in Shrilanka Tole of Bhimdutta Municipality—10, Kanchanpur. At 37, she has spent her entire life on the same small piece of land, about six kattha of *Ailani* (unregistered) land. It is where her children were born, where her home stands, and where her dreams quietly wait. Yet, despite decades of living here, the land is still not legally hers.

Laxmi's family holds a *Nissa*, a receipt issued by the Land Commission after submitting all required application documents. On paper, it suggests hope. In reality, it has brought only waiting.

“We have submitted applications many times,” Laxmi says, her voice steady but tired. “But we have never received a land certificate.”

Laxmi is not alone. Shrilanka village is home to 65 landless families, most of them Dalit. Not a single family holds a land ownership certificate. Without legal land rights, their lives remain suspended, uncertain, insecure, and excluded.

For families like Laxmi's, landlessness is not just a legal issue. It defines every part of daily life. Most households survive on daily wage labor, seasonal farm work, or migration to India. Many young people leave their families behind, crossing the border in search of work, often under unsafe and exploitative conditions. Entire households now depend on remittances sent from India just to survive.

Without land certificates, these families are systematically denied government services, agricultural support, housing grants, and even basic loans from cooperatives. Left with no other option, they turn to microfinance companies that charge very high interest rates, trapping them in debt. These loans are used not for progress, but for survival: repairing fragile homes, buying food, paying school fees, or financing the journey to India in search of work.

“Every time the government changes, they come again,” Laxmi explains. “They measure the land, take our photos, and ask us to fill out new forms. We do everything they ask. But nothing changes. We are still without land, without security.”

Life in Shrilanka village reflects the deep-rooted inequality faced by Dalit landless communities across Nepal's Far West. Homes are made of mud walls and tin sheets, easily damaged by storms. Clean drinking water is scarce. Most households lack proper toilets. During the monsoon, floodwater sweeps through the low-lying fields, destroying the small crops that families struggle to grow.

Elderly members of the community remember a painful past. Their parents and grandparents lived as Haliya, the bonded laborers, under powerful landlords. Many families migrated from the hill areas generations ago, carrying the burden of caste-based exploitation with them. Though the Haliya system has been abolished on paper, its legacy lives on through landlessness and poverty.

That cycle continues today. Children drop out of school because families cannot afford uniforms or books. Young people are forced into migration instead of education. Poverty passes quietly from one generation to the next.

Yet, despite everything, Laxmi does not ask for charity.

“We are poor, but we work hard,” she says. “We only want a small piece of land that is legally ours—so our children can live with dignity. How long do we have to wait?”

Still, hope survives in Shrilanka village. Families meet, organize, and raise their voices together. They continue to campaign for their rights, believing that one day the government will finally recognize what has long been true: this land is their home.

For Laxmi and 65 other families, a land certificate is not just a document.

It is safety.

It is dignity.

It is freedom from generations of injustice

Hence, the finding suggests that, among those who submitted the applications, Landless Dalits are in the Landless squatters are in smaller numbers compared to informal settlers. The case might be, there are fewer numbers of landless Dalits and squatters, but it could also be the reasons that they were not informed, alerted, or facilitated to submit the applications.

In some cases, although they submitted the application, they have little hope that they will get land rights this time. Here is an illustrative story of Laxmi Sarki and a settlement of landless;

To conclude, even today, Dalits in Nepal struggle to gain land ownership despite legal protections due to persistent social discrimination, bureaucratic hurdles, and lack of access to resources. Many Dalits lack official documents or land titles, making it difficult to claim rights, while powerful landlords and local elites often resist redistribution. Deep-rooted caste biases also discourage fair enforcement of laws, leaving Dalits economically vulnerable and socially marginalized. As a result, legal provisions exist on paper but are often ineffective in practice.

5.7 The Role of Local Governments in Advancing Land Access for Landless Dalits

Fulbahari Pari, ward member, Bhimdatta Municipality-13, told, “With the ward office and the support of the district chair of the Land Commission, she helped 275 families secure *seto poorja*, the white paper that gave them at least a temporary sense of belonging. People began calling them *nissa wala*, holders of hope written on fragile sheets”.

Pratap Bishwakarma, Warch Chair of Ward-4, Karjahana Municipality, explained, “Dalits are not avoiding agriculture by choice, but by necessity, without land security and safety nets, survival comes before long-term farming. Real inclusion requires addressing structural barriers, not blaming the poor for the risks they cannot afford to take. The contract farming can be one of the way forward to establish Dalit’s access to land can be contract farming. If the municipality chose to act, there is public land that could be managed and allocated to landless Dalit families, allowing them to farm with dignity and security. If the local authority receives any collaborative support, as the resources and support within the municipality are limited, many Dalits can access land for their livelihood”.

In addition to several such anecdotes, the engagements with local government representatives show that municipalities can play a frontline role in addressing Dalit landlessness. They are the closest state institutions to landless Dalit communities. As such, they are best positioned to translate constitutional guarantees of equality and land rights into everyday reality.

Ward chairs and members from the study sites emphasized that Dalit landlessness is not only a legal issue. It is a lived condition shaped by bureaucratic exclusion, undocumented residency, and generations of caste-based marginalization. Despite long-term occupation of Ailani (unregistered), Guthi (trust), or government/public land, these families remain invisible to formal land administration systems. This gap between policy and practice indicates the need for proactive municipal action rather than reliance on centralized, paperwork-driven processes.

Field evidence points to several practical actions local governments can take. Ward-level Dalit Land Coordination Committees, composed of elected officials and Dalit community members, can monitor land identification and ensure transparency in distribution. Participatory mapping exercises have also proven effective. Through these processes, Dalit residents document settlements and land use themselves, helping legitimize long-term occupancy and enabling pathways to ownership or lease arrangements. These efforts improve data accuracy and build trust between communities and local authorities.

Administrative complexity remains a major barrier. Many Dalit families lack citizenship certificates or ancestral land documents, excluding them from land registration. Ward representatives stressed the need to simplify documentation requirements and deploy mobile registration camps in marginalized settlements. Local governments also have a critical role in facilitating applications to the Land Issues Resolving Commission (LIRC). Currently, only 37 percent of eligible Dalit households have applied, largely due to a lack of guidance and follow-up. This low rate reflects structural barriers, not a lack of interest.

The study also highlights the strategic use of municipal land, that is, unused land within the municipal authorities. Ward officials identified unused government land and privately owned fallow land as potential resources for community-managed leases or contract farming schemes. However, these initiatives require dedicated municipal funding for land identification, verification, and distribution, which is currently lacking. Local leaders across all study sites noted that municipalities are unable to commit sufficient financial resources at present. As a result, external financial and technical support would be highly welcomed. All local government representatives consulted—particularly at the ward level—expressed strong commitment to improving Dalit access to land and land-based livelihoods and affirmed their openness to collaboration with government and non-government partners.

6. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This final chapter synthesizes the findings of the study, drawing together empirical evidence, analytical insights, and interpretive reflections to provide a comprehensive understanding of landlessness among Dalit communities in Nepal. It begins with a concise summary of the socio-economic, demographic, and land tenure patterns revealed by the household survey and qualitative research, highlighting the intersecting dimensions of caste- and gender-based exclusion. The chapter then presents conclusions that situate these findings within broader structural and institutional contexts, emphasizing the historical, social, and legal mechanisms that perpetuate marginalization. Finally, it offers a set of targeted recommendations, organized under policy, programmatic, and advocacy domains, designed to advance land rights, enhance livelihoods, and promote social justice for Dalits, particularly women, in a manner that is both context-sensitive and theoretically informed.

6.1 Summary of Findings

This study has examined the socio-economic conditions, land tenure patterns, and policy landscape affecting landless Dalit communities in eight municipalities across Madhesh and Far-West Provinces in Nepal. Drawing upon a mixed-methods approach—incorporating a household survey of 1,727 Dalit households, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies—the research identifies persistent structural inequalities in land access and ownership. These inequalities are closely linked to historical caste hierarchies, intersectional gender discrimination, and deficiencies in the legal and institutional frameworks intended to safeguard land rights.

6.1.1 Socio-Economic Profile and Vulnerabilities

The households surveyed exhibit profound socio-economic vulnerabilities. Demographically, the Dalit population in the study area is young, with 43 percent under the age of 19, yet exhibits significantly poorer health outcomes than the national average: life expectancy is 61 years, compared to 68.7 years nationally, and under-five mortality stands at 90 per 1,000 live births. These indicators reflect deep-seated structural disadvantage, with long-term implications for human capital formation.

Educational attainment is strongly correlated with poverty and landlessness. Only 32 percent of individuals are literate, while merely 1 percent have attained a bachelor's degree. Of 5,918 individuals tracked for formal education, only 17 have completed a master's degree, highlighting intergenerational barriers to upward mobility. Housing and basic facilities further illustrate inequality: 70 percent of households reside in Kachhi (temporary) houses constructed from mud and bamboo, and 29 percent lack access to toilets, often citing insufficient space due to insecure tenure.

6.1.2 Land Ownership and Tenure Status

The study finds that landlessness is both a cause and consequence of persistent socio-economic disadvantage. Only 34 percent of households own the land on which they reside, leaving the remainder dependent on Ailani (unregistered) or government land, with limited security of tenure. Access to agricultural land is even more constrained: 69 percent of households report no access at all. Where contract farming is possible, plots average merely 0.06 hectares per family. Fallow land, while present, is rarely available for cultivation due to absentee ownership or inadequate infrastructure, reflecting systemic inefficiencies in land allocation.

This profound land scarcity directly limits household livelihoods. Food insecurity is acute: 59 percent of households produce no food crops, and 96 percent rely entirely on market purchases, trapping them in cycles of consumption-based vulnerability. To cope, 71 percent of households send at least one family member abroad for work, predominantly to India (47 percent) or the Gulf (18 percent), revealing a paradox in which cultivable land remains unused while the landless engage in precarious labor migration.

6.1.3 Policy Landscape and Institutional Performance

Nepal's constitutional framework, particularly Article 40(5) of the 2015 Constitution, enshrines the right to land for landless Dalits. Yet, the research demonstrates significant gaps between legal guarantees and implementation. No enforceable statutory definitions exist for "landless Dalit," and administrative processes under the Land Commission are uneven. Only 37 percent of surveyed households have submitted applications for land allocation, while several municipalities have failed to initiate the process entirely. Among applicants, 44 percent are informal settlers, 32 percent landless Dalits, and 24 percent landless squatters, illustrating both procedural bottlenecks and information deficits.

6.1.4 Gendered and Intersectional Dimensions

Dalit women face "double discrimination," marginalized simultaneously by caste and gender. Patriarchal inheritance norms systematically exclude them from land ownership, even within their own families. Existing legal frameworks inadequately address this intersectionality, leaving Dalit women with minimal economic autonomy and heightened vulnerability. This pattern of exclusion underscores the necessity of gender-sensitive land reform as a critical component of social justice.

6.2 Conclusions

The findings of this study underscore that landlessness among Dalits in Nepal is a **structurally produced phenomenon**, rooted in historical caste hierarchies, entrenched social norms, and intersectional gender inequities. Legal provisions, while progressive in intent, are insufficient in the absence of coherent institutional mechanisms and effective enforcement. The persistence of landlessness sustains cycles of poverty, food insecurity, migration, and social marginalization.

The analysis demonstrates that land is more than an economic asset for Dalits; it constitutes a vital source of social recognition, political participation, and human dignity. Lack of land correlates with inferior health outcomes, poor education, and inadequate housing, perpetuating intergenerational disadvantage. Food insecurity and reliance on migrant labor reveal the material consequences of systemic land exclusion.

Dalit women emerge as a particularly marginalized group, experiencing compounded vulnerabilities due to intersecting caste- and gender-based discrimination. Their exclusion from ownership constrains both economic independence and broader social participation, highlighting the necessity of deliberate, gender-inclusive policy interventions.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings affirm the utility of structural inequality and intersectionality frameworks in understanding Dalit landlessness. Land functions simultaneously as material, social, and symbolic capital; its systematic denial reproduces caste- and gender-based hierarchies. Rights-based legislation alone cannot redress entrenched inequities; effective reform requires the simultaneous transformation of social norms, institutional practices, and property regimes.

6.3 Recommendations

Given the structural and intersectional nature of Dalit landlessness, interventions must combine **legal reform, policy innovation, and programmatic implementation**. Recommendations are framed across three interrelated domains: policy, programmatic, and advocacy.

6.3.1 Policy Recommendations

- 1. Operationalize Constitutional Guarantees:** Enact enforceable legislation to implement Articles 40(5) and 40(6), including explicit definitions of “landless Dalit” and clear timelines for allocation.
- 2. Mandatory Quotas in Land Allocation:** Integrate Dalit inclusion as a non-negotiable criterion in all state-led land distribution programs.
- 3. Mandatory Joint Land Ownership:** Expand the current Joint Land Ownership policy to ensure all land transfers to Dalit beneficiaries include spousal co-ownership, thereby addressing gendered exclusion.
- 4. Define Minimum Standards:** Establish quantitative and qualitative thresholds for land allocation to ensure plots are sufficient for housing and agricultural livelihoods:
 - Urban housing: $\geq 130 \text{ m}^2$
 - Rural housing (Hills): $\geq 1 \text{ ropani (508 m}^2\text{)}$; Terai: $\geq 1 \text{ katha (340 m}^2\text{)}$
 - Agricultural land: Hills $\geq 5 \text{ ropani (2,540 m}^2\text{)}$; Terai $\geq 5 \text{ katha (1,700 m}^2\text{)}$

5. Integrated Land Planning: Residential and agricultural land should be allocated systematically to maximize productivity and long-term sustainability.

6.3.2 Programmatic Recommendations

Empower Local Governments: Establish Dalit Land Coordination Committees at municipal and ward levels to identify landless households and monitor allocation fairness.

Regularize Informal Settlements: Employ participatory mapping to formalize tenure on Ailani, Guthi, or government land.

Link Land Access with Livelihoods: Support agricultural cooperatives, provide technical training, credit, and subsidies once tenure is secured.

Mobile Registration and Paralegal Support: Deploy mobile camps and community paralegals to navigate bureaucratic hurdles, particularly in remote settlements.

Utilize Fallow Land for Community Cultivation: Facilitate lease-based access to idle public or private land for Dalit farming initiatives.

6.3.3 Advocacy and Accountability

Caste-Disaggregated Data: Advocate for national and provincial publication of landholding data by caste and gender to ensure transparency.

Strengthen Civil Society Coalitions: Support Dalit-led organizations to monitor allocation processes and represent landless households.

Leverage International Mechanisms: Use UPR, CERD, and other forums to hold the Nepalese state accountable for constitutional and international commitments.

Expand Legal Literacy: Conduct community-based awareness campaigns on land rights and anti-discrimination legislation.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

In sum, achieving equitable land access for Dalits in Nepal demands more than redistributive policy; it requires **transformative institutional reform, social mobilization, and targeted empowerment of the most marginalized**, particularly Dalit women. Land allocation is a pivotal lever for enhancing food security, livelihoods, education, and social participation, while simultaneously challenging entrenched hierarchies of caste and gender. Only through integrated, inclusive, and accountable approaches can landlessness cease to function as a structural mechanism of marginalization, enabling Dalits to exercise their constitutional rights and secure sustainable socio-economic futures.

This study contributes to broader debates in South Asian development, land reform, and social justice scholarship by linking empirical evidence with theoretical insights on structural inequality, intersectionality, and rights-based approaches. It demonstrates that land reform must be conceptualized not merely as asset redistribution, but as a **strategic instrument for dismantling historically embedded hierarchies of exclusion**, advancing both social justice and human dignity.

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Annex

Survey Questionnaire¹

Study on Land Ownership and Access of Landless Dalits

1. Household level information collection form

Date of Interview:.....

Time:.....

A. Introduction

Name of Respondent:..... Case:.....

Name of household owner:..... (if different, respondent)

Contact Number:.....

Name of Rural/Municipality:..... Ward:....., Tole:.....

B. Family Details:

Population

0-5 Year		6-19		20-39		40-59		60-80		80+	
Female	Male	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M

C. Education

Literate		up to 5 class		up to 10 class		SEE/SLC		+2		Bachler's Degree		Master's degree	
Female	Male	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M

¹ This Survey Questionnaire was design to make it compatible with Kobo Toolbox

D. Property Status

C.1 Conditions of Home and facilities:

Types of Home: (i) Permanent (ii) Semi-Permanent (iii) Temporary (iv) Others

Sources of Drinking Water: (i) Tubule (personal) (ii) Tubule (Neighbors) (iii) Pipe-Tap (iv) Neighbor's- Tubule/Pipe Tap (v) Digging Water/Pound (vi) Others

Main Fuel use for cooking: (i) Firewood, (ii) Dung Cakes, (iii) Kerosine Oil (iv) LPG Gyas (v) Bio Gyes, (vi) Electricity (viii) Others

Source of Light: , (i) Kerosine Oil (ii) Electricity (iii) Bio Gyes, (iv) Solar (v) Others

Toilets facilities: (i) Yes, (ii) No (iii) Under construction

Types of Toilets: (i) Pit Toilet (ii) Flush toilet

C.2 Types of Housing and agricultural Land

Types	Personal Land	Tenancy land	Village Block	Other Land	Public/ Forest (Ailani)	Government Land	Public Land	Guthi (Trust)	Others
Area (Hosing land)									
Area (Agricultural land)									

1. If you have acquired or given land to others for acquisition: (mention in bigha, katta, dhur in the Terai and in ropani, anna and paisa in the hills)

Using Types	Tenant	Adhiya/Bataiya land	Contract Land	Landlord (Owners)	Others
Please indicate with this Symbol (√)					
Years of using					
Area of using land					
Condition for using					
For how many years have you land for others to use					
Which practice is most useful for you					

2. If you take land as a contract basis, how much rent do you need to paying for year?

Per Kattha in a year.....

Per Ropnani in a year.....

3. How many months does your own production (own farming, sharecropping, tenant farming, contract work, or leased land) last for food? (√)

No, Own production	up to 3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12 Months + Saving

4. If your own food production is not enough, how do you obtain additional food

Buy from market (ii) Borrow from Neighbors (iii) Others

E. Status of Employment/Income Sources

Employment	Farmers		Jobs in Government		Jobs in I/NGOs		Foreign Employment		Temporary Teacher		Wages labourers	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M

1. Has any member of the household gone outside the village for work?

(i) Inside district (ii) Urban area, (iii) India, (iv) Arab country
(v) Other country, that Arab country

2. Income Sources

Income Sources	Number of family members involved		Remarks
	Female	Male	
Family Farming			
Agricultural Laborers/ Daily Wages			
Harawa/Charawa/Haliya			
Industrial laborers			
Laborers for constricton sites			
Jobs in Government office/Corporation			
Teacher			
Jobs in I/NGOs			
Foreign Employment			
Others			

3. Is there uncultivated/fallow land near your household or in the village?

Yes ... (ii) No...

A. If Yes, Types of Land,

Personal ... (ii) Government.... (iii) Institutional.....

B. If there is fallow land, what are the reasons for it?

- (i) Absent Landowners
- (ii) Lack of agricultural laborers in landowner's home
- (iii) Impact from wild animals
- (iv) Lack of irrigation facilities
- (v) Others

C. If you need to lease/rent land, is it easily available?

Yes ... (ii) No...

D. Are you affiliated with any groups or forums?

Yes ... (ii) No...

If Yes,

If yes (✓)	Land Rights Forum	Community Forest User Groups	labors groups/Trade Union
	Farmers Groups Association	Mothers Group	Others...

E. Have you applied to the Land Commission for land acquisition?

Yes ... (ii) No...

If yes,

Types	✓	Ara of land
Landless Dalit		
Squatters		
Informal Settlers		

F. Our questions are now complete. Thank you very much for your cooperation in filling out this survey form. Finally, do you have anything you would like to ask us?

Name of Enumerator Signature.....	Signature of verifier.....
Verified date:	

2. KII Questionnaire

A. Questionnaire for Local Government Representatives:

1. Name:
2. Name of Local Government:
3. Ward No:
4. Position:
5. Contact Number
6. How many landless Dalits are there in your municipality/ward ?
7. What kinds of activities are being carried out by the municipality to distribute land to landless Dalits?
8. Why do you think landless Dalit families living within your municipality have been unable to access land?
9. If any Dalit families do have land ownership, how and for what reasons do you think they were able to obtain it?
10. What is the current condition of fallow (unused) land in your village, settlement, ward, or municipality?
11. Is land easily available for farming under sharecropping (*adhiya*), tenancy (*bataiya*), or lease arrangements, or are there obstacles?
12. In this municipality, who is primarily using government and institutional land
13. Is there sufficient government land in your ward/municipality to distribute to landless Dalit families who have already applied or may apply in the future?
14. The Constitution guarantees that the state will provide land to landless Dalits at least once. What efforts has your municipality made toward this?
15. How much budget has the municipality allocated in the current fiscal year for distributing land to landless Dalits?

B. Questionnaire for stakeholders' organization/NGOs/ CSOs and land rights activists representatives:

1. Name:
2. Name of Organization:
3. Ward No:
4. Position:
5. Contact Number
6. What is the current situation regarding land access and ownership for the Dalit community living in this area?
7. In your opinion, what are the reasons for limited or no land access and ownership among landless Dalits in this area?
8. What programs or campaigns is your institution/organization currently conducting for landless Dalits?
9. What do you think are the main obstacles and challenges to ensuring land rights for Dalits?
10. What is the current condition of fallow (unused) land in your village, settlement, ward, or municipality?
11. Is land easily available for farming under sharecropping (*adhiya*), tenancy (*bataiya*), or lease arrangements, or are there obstacles?

12. In this municipality, who primarily uses government and institutional land?
13. Do you think the current land policies/programs are sufficient for registering and distributing land to the Dalit community?
14. If not, what kind of improvements do you think are necessary?
15. In your opinion, what should be the roles and support of different levels of government and cooperating/stakeholder agencies to ensure the land rights of landless Dalits?

3. FGD Questionnaire

A. Questionnaire for groups discussion

1. Name of Village:
2. Name of Municipality:
3. Number of of total household:
4. Name of the participants in the discussion
5. How long have you're been living in this settlement?
6. From which places did you come to settle here, and how many years ago?
7. What is the current housing situation here—on your own land or on someone else's land, or how is it?
8. How many of you have your own land?
9. What kinds of problems this communities have faced due to not having land? (For example: building a house, taking loans, accessing government services, etc.)
10. What are the main sources of livelihood of this community?
11. This community do they practice farming? If yes, what kind of land they use?
12. Has the government or any agency conducted any programs for ensuring the land rights in this village?
13. What about the coordination with the Land Commission or local government?
14. What are the legal bases for Dalit families to secure land rights?
15. From this community do they submitted their applications to the municipality or Land Commission? If not, why?
16. After submitting applications, what information have you and your community received regarding actions taken?
17. How many families received *nissya* card? How many families had land surveyed? How many families have already received land ownership certificates?
18. As a representatives from the community in your experience, what is the biggest obstacle in obtaining land rights?
19. Are community members affiliated with any land rights forum or organization working on land issues? If yes, which organization?
20. What kind of support from the government or institutions would ensure that you're receive land quickly?
21. What is the current condition of fallow (unused) land in your village, settlement, ward, or municipality?
22. Is land easily available for farming under sharecropping (*adhiya*), tenancy (*bataiya*), or lease arrangements, or are there obstacles?
23. In this municipality, who primarily uses government and institutional land?
24. Finally, is there anything you would like to share regarding this issue?

