LIVING ON THE MARGINS

Context Analysis REPORT 2025

Community Context Mapping & Analysis of Bahuarwa (Mahara Community)

FORUM-ASIA

CSIC
आत्मनिर्भर केन्द्र

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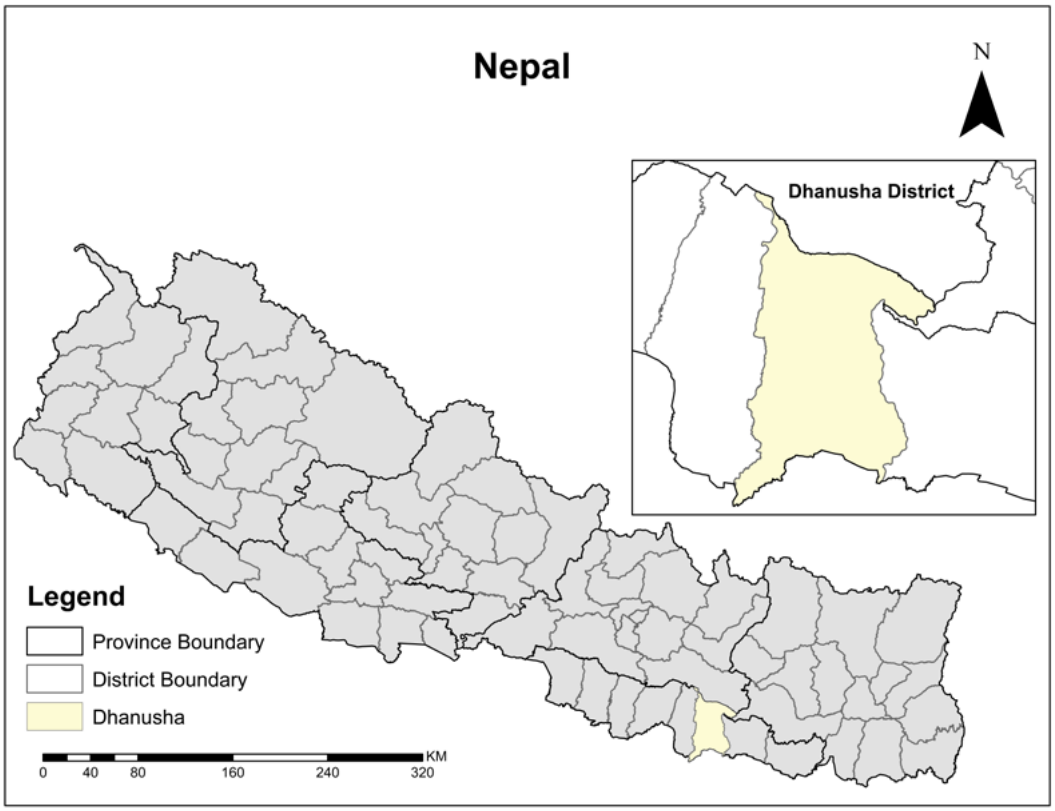

Figure 1: Map of Nepal highlighting Dhanusha District, the program site: Source: CSRC

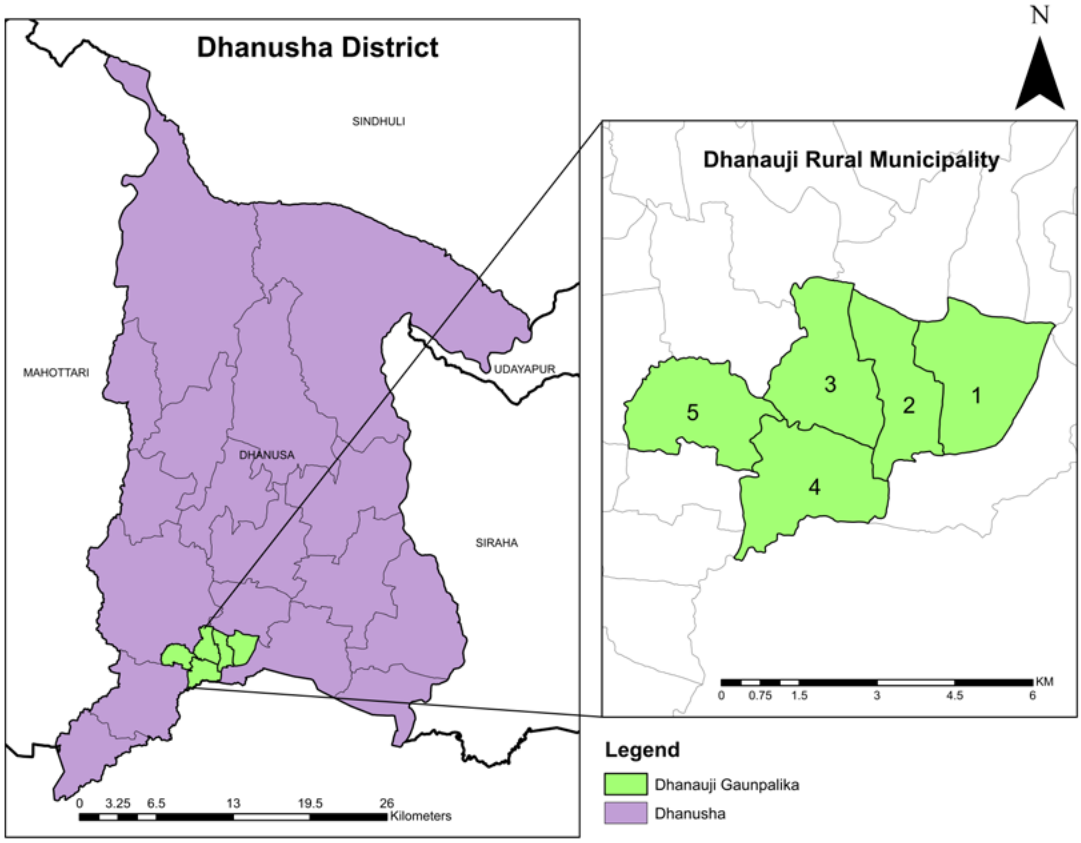

Figure 2: Ward-level Map of Dhanauji Rural Municipality, Dhanusha district: Source: CSRC

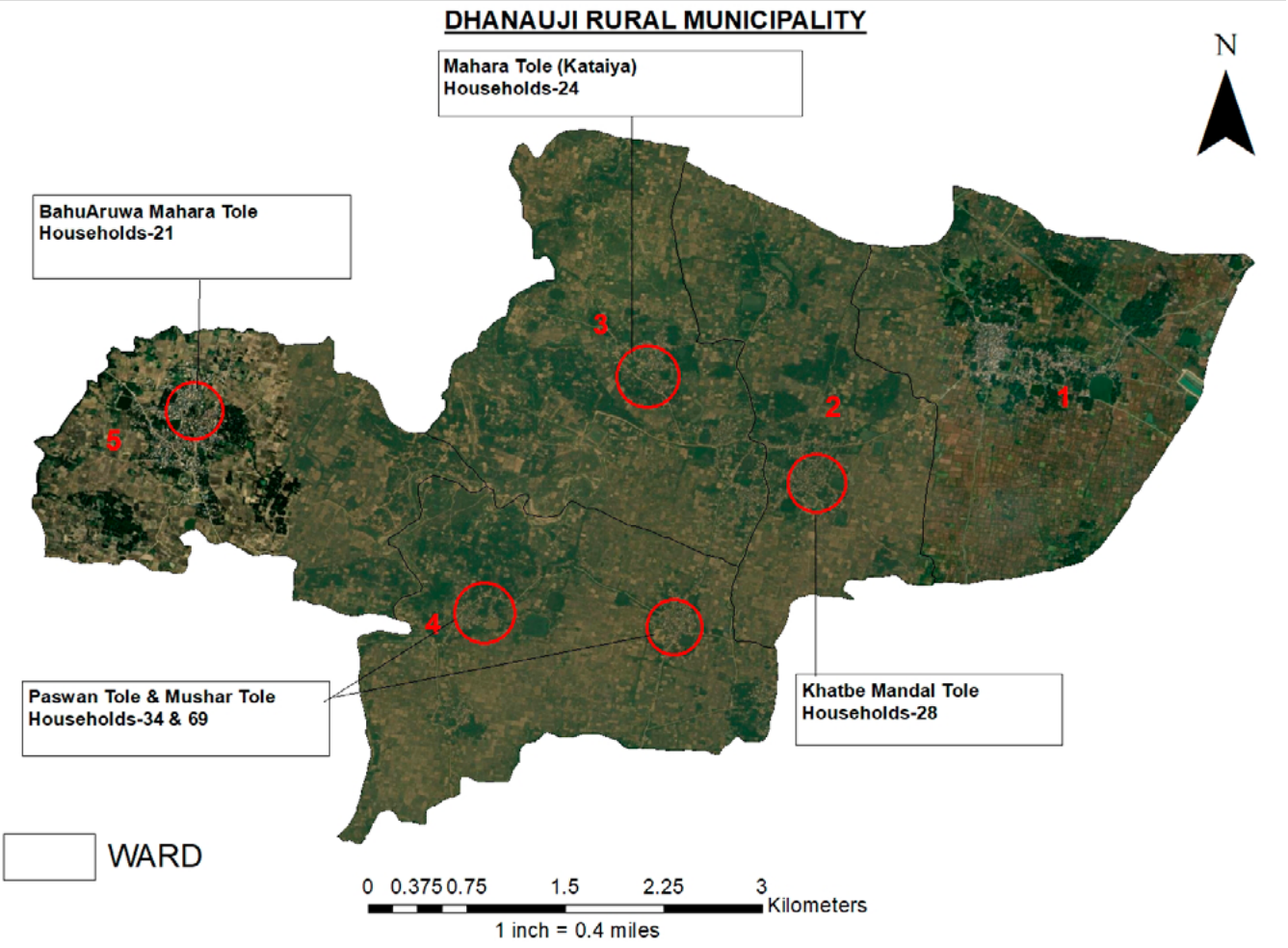

Figure 3: Satellite image showing total wards, households, and working communities: Source: CSRC

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1. Introduction

Dhanauji Rural Municipality is located in the south-eastern part of Dhanusha District in Madhesh Province. Situated approximately 10 kilometers from Janakpurdham Sub-metropolitan City, the municipality covers an area of 22 square kilometers. According to the 2021 National Census, it is home to 29,278 residents living in 5,907 households across five wards. Dhanauji is known for its fertile land, agriculture-based livelihoods, and rich ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity.

The municipality is also home to one of the most vulnerable population groups in Nepal -Terai Dalits, including landless tillers and the Harawa-Charawa community. Despite relying heavily on agriculture for survival, most households do not own cultivable land. They depend on informal arrangements such as sharecropping or daily agricultural labor, making their livelihoods insecure and exposing them to exploitation under the rules set by landowners. This structural inequality perpetuates chronic poverty and deepens socioeconomic vulnerability.

In 2021, CSRC and FORUM-ASIA conducted a study in Dhanauji Rural Municipality to examine the intersection of poverty, debt, climate change, and human rights within the Harawa-Charawa community. The study revealed how landlessness, high-interest informal loans, caste-based discrimination, and low wages trap families in multidimensional poverty and systems of bondage. It also highlighted the clear link between climate change impacts and structural marginalization.

Building on the 2021 study, the current advocacy initiative seeks to extend research and convert key findings into practical actions jointly developed with local governments and communities. The five communities selected for this phase were identified as having a particularly high concentration of Harawa-Charawa and other highly vulnerable Dalit households.

1.1. Dalit Communities in Madhesh

Dalit communities in Nepal have faced systemic exclusion for centuries and continue to struggle for rights, dignity, and recognition. In the Madhesh region, Dalits - particularly Terai Dalits - are among the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Their fragile status stems from entrenched caste-based discrimination, cultural practices, and limited access to land, resources, and state services.

Terai Dalits experience economic deprivation, social ostracization, and persistent discrimination in public spaces, education, employment, and political participation[1]. Historically marginalized under Nepal's monarchy and subsequent political systems, they continue to face barriers in exercising fundamental rights guaranteed by the state.

Scholars have documented the restrictions imposed on Dalits, including denial of access to public amenities, limited economic opportunities, and state neglect[2]. The challenges faced include:

- Caste-based discrimination and exclusion
- Dependence on exploitative traditional occupations
- Limited access to education and social mobility
- Exclusion from political processes
- High levels of landlessness
- Wage exploitation and forced labor practices

Madhesi Dalits face additional disadvantages due to a history of denial of citizenship, limited documentation, and significantly high landlessness[3]. These intersecting vulnerabilities contribute to chronic poverty and structural inequality.

1.2. Constitutional and Legal Provisions

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) grants all persons with the right against exploitation, and prohibits slavery, serfdom, and forced labour in any form[4]. Economic, Social and Cultural

1 Dol Raj Kafle, Dhakaram Sapkota, and Tej Bahadur KC, "Social Dynamics of Dalits in Nepal: Historical Development of Untouchability and Exploitation," Social Science and Humanities Journal 9, no. 1 (2025), https://doi.org/10.18535/sshj.v9i01.1587.

2 Nandan Shrestha, "Discrimination and Inequality among Dalits in Nepal," International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research 7, no. 1 (2023): 38–43, https://www.ijriar.com.

3 Yash Ghai and Jill Cottrell, "Constitution-making in Nepal," Asian Journal of Comparative Law 3, no. 1 (2008): 1–45

4 Article 29, Constitution of Nepal (2015)

Rights (ESCR) enjoy special protection in the constitution. As guaranteed under the social justice clause in the 2015 Constitution of Nepal[5], every peasant has the right to have access to land for agricultural activities. Article 40(5) and (6) of the Constitution specifically requires the state to provide land as well as housing to landless Dalits.

Linked to the stated fundamental rights, the "policies relating to social justice and inclusion" under Part 4 (Directive Principles, Policies and Obligations of the State) categorically directs the State "to identify the liberated bonded labour[er]s, Kamalari, Harawa, Charawa, tillers, landless, squatters" and rehabilitate them by providing "housing, housing plot for residence and cultivable land or employment for their livelihoods"[6].

The Constitution also protects the right to food, freedom from hunger and right to food sovereignty more comprehensively. Guarantees under Article 36 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. Other ESCR related guarantees relate to housing, health, sanitation, employment, social security and protection. Under Article 16(1) of the Constitution, every person is entitled to the right to live with dignity. Article 18 of the Constitution has recognized both Dalits and Madhesi - under which most of the Harawa-Charawa households are classified - as population groups eligible for affirmative actions for protection, empowerment and development of such groups.

Major Legal policy provisions

Land Reform Act (8th amendment) 2019	Land reform rules (18th and 19th amendment) 2020-2021	Land Use Act 2019
• The 8th amendment was published in the Gazette on 11th February 2020. • Defined landless and informal settlers. • Provide land to all landless for housing and agriculture.	• The 18th amendment was published in Gazette on 21 December 2020; and 19th amendment was published in Gazette on 24 May 2021. • Land distribution and registration.	• The Land Use Act was published in the Gazette on 23 August 2019. • Formation of the land council at federal, provincial and local level.

5 Ibid, Article 43 (3)
6 Article 51 (J)(6), Constitution of Nepal (2015)

• Registered land of informal settlers, those living or tilling at least for 10 years. For illustration, an informal settler who has been tilling government land for more than 10 years prior to the act being promulgated would be registered. • Commission formation to resolve the land issues.	• Exemption fees for vulnerable families in case of informal settlers. • Data collection, validation and approval by the local government.	• Land use plan implementation committee at the local level. • Land use planning based on the land use map and vision paper. • Protection and best use of agricultural land.

Land allocation for landless and informal settlers, area in hectares maximum, as per the laws (Land Act 1964, 8th Amendment)[7]:

Geographical Areas	Landless		Informal Settlers	
	Housing	Agriculture	Housing	Agriculture
Kathmandu Valley, Metropolitan and sub metro politician city and urban area of Municipality	0.013	0	0.013	0
Other areas than described above	0.034	0.2 in Terai and inner Terai 0.3 in Hills and Mountains	0.1	1

7 UN-Habitat, "Celebrating accelerated land reforms in Nepal: Implementing new legislation to improve land rights for the landless and tenure security for all Nepali," https://unhabitat.org.np/featured_news_detail/celebrating-accelerated-land-reforms-in-nepal-implementing-new-legislation-to-improve-land-rights-for-the-landless-and-tenure-security-for-all-nepali

2. Purpose of the Study

This Context Mapping and Analysis aims to:

- Strengthen community understanding of their local context through participatory engagement
- Generate evidence to support community-led advocacy
- Enable community members to present their issues, needs, and priorities to local governments
- Provide a foundation for developing practical community action plans
- Serve as a baseline for monitoring progress and measuring improvements over time

The study particularly focuses on highly vulnerable Dalit clusters within Dhanauji Rural Municipality to ensure that community voices directly inform development and policy processes.

3. Structure of the Report

The report is organized into three major sections:

1. Introduction and Background – General context, constitutional provisions, objectives, and purpose of the study.
2. Study Findings – Detailed analysis for each of the five selected communities, covering:
    - Land access and use, Employment and livelihoods, Education, Economic conditions, Access to media and markets, Crop production and climate impacts, Support from government and other institutions
3. Summary and Recommendations – Consolidated findings and strategic recommendations for community action and policy improvements.

4. Methodology

The study followed the Community Context Mapping and Analysis, a participatory tool that enables communities to identify hidden issues, analyze social and economic conditions, and generate locally grounded solutions.

4.1 Study Design and Community Selection

The research was designed as a household survey targeting vulnerable Dalit communities across Dhanauji Rural Municipality. Following initial discussions with local facilitators and stakeholders, five communities across different wards were selected based on their high concentration of Dalit households and historical vulnerability.

4.2 Participatory Data Collection Tools

Fieldwork included several participatory tools:

- Community Orientation: Meetings were held in each community to explain objectives and methods.
- Process Facilitator Nomination: One community member from each cluster was trained to guide the mapping process.
- Social and Resource Mapping: Inclusive sessions involving men, women, youth, and elders to map natural and physical resources.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Collective analysis of issues, challenges, and community priorities.
- Household Surveys: Structured questionnaires capturing themes such as land ownership, livelihoods, access to natural resources, education, financial status, and socio-political participation.

Valuation and visioning exercises helped communities reflect on their past and present realities and envision future goals.

4.3 Data Analysis and Reporting

Data from surveys and FGDs were compiled, digitized, and analyzed. Draft findings were reviewed by the CSRC team, community members, and stakeholders before final documentation. Each community received a copy of the final report for use in future planning and meetings.

5. Limitations of the Report

5.1. Geographical Specificity

The study focuses exclusively on Bahuarwa (Mahara Tole). Although the findings provide deep insight into this community, they may not fully represent the conditions of Dalit communities across other wards or municipalities.

5.2. Data Collection Constraints

The study relies on household surveys and FGDs, which may be influenced by:

- Recall bias
- Social desirability bias
- Incomplete or approximate responses

Some quantitative elements were inferred rather than fully enumerated due to limitations in respondent recall.

5.3. Time-Bound Snapshot

The findings reflect conditions at the time of data collection. Given dynamic socio-economic changes, certain aspects - such as climate vulnerability, job migration trends, or market prices - may evolve rapidly.

5.4. Limited Quantitative Depth

While the study provides several important statistics, some areas (e.g., household composition, land ownership patterns) include primarily qualitative interpretation rather than detailed numerical breakdowns. Precise metrics such as dependency ratios, average household sizes, or detailed landholding categories were not explicitly quantified.

5.5. External Factors Beyond Study Scope

Issues such as political instability, migration trends, market shocks, or evolving climate impacts fall outside the immediate scope but significantly influence household well-being.

6. Community Context Mapping and Analysis of Bahuarwa (Mahara Tole)

6.1. Dhanauji Rural Municipality

Dhanauji Rural Municipality is located in the south-eastern part of Dhanusha district in Madhesh Province. This rural municipality is about 10 kilometers from the center of Janakpurdham sub-metropolitan city. Its total area is 22 square kilometers. According to the 2021 (2078 BS)[8] census, the rural municipality has a total population of 29,278 in 5,907 households. This rural municipality has 5 wards. Dhanauji Rural Municipality is considered to have the fertile land where natural environment, agriculture-based livelihood, and ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity are found.

This community context analysis covers various aspects of Bahuarwa (Mahara Tole)[9], including its history, social, economic, cultural conditions, social structure, access to services, and land ownership. Community Self Reliance Center (CSRC) has been actively engaged in Madhesh Province with different studies including initiatives to understand and support the Harawa-Charawa[10] community, which was an opportunity for the organization to have a closer look at the challenges faced by Dalit communities in the province. Since Dhanauji Rural Municipality was the center of observation for previous initiatives undertaken by CSRC, the organization was more familiar with the environment and relevant issues of this Municipality. With this initiative, five different communities of the Municipality were selected as the base of this study.

The main purpose of the study is to generate evidence to support community-led advocacy through strengthening community understanding of their local context through participatory engagement. Further, this study helps to provide a foundation for developing action plans and serves as a baseline for monitoring progress and measuring improvements over time.

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8 Bikram Sambat is the national calendar followed in Nepal. Nepal Sambat, available at: https://www.nepalsambat.com/nepal-sambat/

9 Tole (a terminology commonly used in Nepal which refers to a neighborhood/community)

10 CSRC, 'Harwa Charwa: The community waiting for Freedom,' https://csrcnepal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/HarwaCharwa_brochure_Eng.pdf

6.2. Introduction of Mahara Tole

Bahuarwa (Mahara Tole) of Dhanauji Rural Municipality–5, is a settlement located at the closest proximity from Janakpur Sub-Metropolitan City. The settlement is home to Muslims, Dalits, and Janajatis (Indigenous people of Nepal); however, its core identity is strongly associated with the Mahara community who belongs to one of the most vulnerable Dalit communities in Nepal. Despite the fact that most of the neighboring communities share the same livelihood hardships, this study solely focuses on the study of Dalit (Mahara) communities.

Living alongside a few Muslim families near the edge of a community pond, the Mahara community is locally referred to as 'Mahara Tole.' Thus, the settlement derives its name based on caste identity.

Geographically, even though it is situated close to the urban center, most Mahara families are still compelled to live a landless life. Without their land ownership, they continue to bear the burden of insecurity, an uncertain future, and poverty. For this reason, Mahara Tole is not just a settlement, but also a representation of the pain of landlessness - an overlooked community living close to the metropolitan city yet persistently marginalized.

6.2.1 Household Information

0-5 Years		6-18 Years		19-40 Years		41-60 Years		61-80 Years		Single		Disabled	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
3	9	13	10	17	16	10	8	3	5		2	1	1

The settlement currently consists of 21 households with a total population of 98 people. Among them, 12 are children under the age of five, 8 are elderly above 60 years, 2 are persons with disabilities (1 woman and 1 man), and 2 are single women.

The main sources of livelihood for this community are farming and daily wage labor, particularly in agriculture. However, the residents do not own land of their own. Some families cultivate on others' land. Due to frequent crop failures caused by droughts, unseasonal rainfall, and natural disasters, the families are forced to live an insecure and difficult life.

There are two temples in the settlement: one within the tole itself and another along the exit road. These temples not only represent religious faith but also unify community life. Various activities, such as weddings, baby weaning ceremonies, worship rituals, and even community discussions, are organized at the Durga (a Goddess) temple located at the edge of the settlement. However, since most families have to take loans to conduct such events, they remain burdened by long-term debt.

A small pond behind the Durga temple fills with water during the monsoon. This pond serves as both a water source for irrigation and a symbol of hope for the community. Likewise, the

large playground and the Durga temple near the settlement provide the residents with moments of peace and refuge amid their daily hardships.

Thus, Mahara Tole is not merely a place of residence, but also a reflection of landless life, social struggle, and communal faith.

6.2.2. Historical Analysis of Bahuarwa (Mahara Tole)

The settlement of the Mahara community in this area began around 200 years ago. According to them, their ancestors (fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers) came from nearby areas within Nepal to settle here.

Currently, there are 98 households around their community. In the past, land was cheap, and they survived by cultivating on leased plots. But over time, due to borrowing for weddings, medical expenses, and daily needs, coupled with a lack of income sources, they lost much of the ancestral land they owned. They now say that the majority of the land they live on is not in their name; they live in village block land (common village land managed locally). Initially, there were very few households and a small population, and life was extremely difficult due to poverty and landlessness.

The village is divided by caste: Musahar Tole, Yadav Tole, Mahara Tole, Paswan Tole, etc. Around them, the landlords own large areas of land, while Mahara people are completely landless. They have been living on village block land, which covers only 2 dhur (0.0003 Hectares).

In the past, the entire Mahara community lived under landlords as bonded laborers (under the Harawa-Charawa[11] system). Their families survived by working for the landlords. At present, however, this system has almost disappeared. Today, the Mahara work mainly as daily wage laborers. Some of them cultivate 2-5 kathhas (0.06-0.16 Hectares) of land as sharecroppers (locally termed as adhiya - bataiya) on the fields of nearby landlords. Their daily wages vary based on their nature of work. For rice planting, they were paid NPR 500-600 (3.53-4.24 USD) per day, for weeding NPR 300 (2.12 USD) per day and for harvesting, they receive 1 out of 16 bundles (locally referred to as Bojhas) of paddy. In many cases, they do not receive cash payment.

In terms of food, their main crops are rice, potatoes, brinjal, soybeans, and pulses, and they eat meat only once or twice a month. Since they have almost no production of their own, they are fully dependent on the market for food.

11 Definition of Harawa-Charawa: Harawa is a person who ploughs the field or simply a 'ploughman'. And Charawa is defined as a person who grazes cattle or simply a 'Cattle Herder'. Although the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 has officially abolished the bonded labour system in the country, Harawa -Charawa still prevails as a pure form of bondage labour in many communities. Available at: https://csrcnepal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/HarwaCharwa_brochure_Eng.pdfhttps://csrc-nepal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/HarwaCharwa_brochure_Eng.pdf

The community has limited access to basic services. The market is about 15-30 minutes walking distance, and it takes about the same time to reach the rural municipality office. The nearest school is also about 20-30 minutes' walk. For grass, firewood, and dried leaves, they go to the nearby forest, which is 15-20 minutes away from the community.

Traditional resources like firewood, water, berries, and fodder remain important in community life. But in recent years, climate change has worsened floods, heavy rain, drought, and heat. Water sources are drying up, and agricultural yield is declining, intensifying their vulnerability.

Social practices like child marriage are still common. Daughters are married off when they are around 16-17 years of age, and boys by around 20-22 years. This causes not only physical and psychological challenges related to early pregnancy and childbirth, but also problems in continuing education. Additionally, it also creates legal complications, since early marriage and childbirth before reaching adulthood creates difficulties in obtaining birth registration of their child and their own marriage registration.

Overall, in the developmental journey of the Mahara Tole community, economic hardships, landlessness, limited infrastructure, historical lack of citizenship, and the impact of climate change stand out as the main challenges. All adults in this settlement have citizenship. Although the number of houses has increased and general infrastructure such as roads, schools, temples and shops have gradually improved, social, legal, and environmental challenges still remain unresolved.

6.3. Social and Political Access

6.3.1. Relationship with the Local Government

The community's access to the nearby ward office and the rural municipality office is limited as they rarely visit these offices. Even when they go to these offices to access basic government services, they experience discrimination from the employees. According to the community, the employees do not prioritize their work and most of the time demand a bribe to do their work. The community does not receive information on whether there are programs targeted for the Mahara community from the ward or rural municipality, what type of programs they are, or how they operate - and hence they remain excluded from them.

6.3.2. Role of Political Parties

The people of the Mahara community remain distant from the political process. They are not organized in any political party committees. During election periods, party representatives come to ask for votes and promise support. However, once the election is over, they do not return.

6.3.3. Relationship with Social Organizations

None of the residents are organized into any type of social organizations. As a result, the collective voice of the community remains weak. Although a bonded labor (Harawa-Charawa) organization exists, it is inactive.

6.3.4. Relationship with Other Communities

People of this community are often looked at with contempt by other communities. For many years, they have faced social exclusion by those classified as upper caste people. The exclusion of Dalit communities is rooted in the resistance of affluent landlords and upper-caste groups to Dalits' upward mobility, as such progress would disrupt caste hierarchies and undermine their social dominance. As a result, members of the community lack the confidence to integrate into mainstream society.

6.4. Analysis of Livelihoods and Access to Basic Services

6.4.1. Condition of Houses and Available Facilities

This study is based on the details of 21 households, all of whom live in temporary huts or shacks. None of the families have permanent housing structures.

Access to drinking water is not equal for everyone. Out of the 21 households, 9 have their own tubewell, 6 depend on neighbors' tubewells, and 6 rely on a communal tubewell.

Only 3 households have toilets. The remaining 18 households use open spaces or nearby bushes as toilets. Due to the lack of toilets, sanitation and hygiene conditions in the settlement are very poor. Having to go to open spaces and bushes creates insecurity and poses greater problems, especially for women and girls. Despite expressing fear of being seen by men, the women and girls from the community are compelled to use open spaces as toilets.

Type of Houses

Permanent	Semi-permanent	Temporary	Others
0	0	21	0

Sources of Drinking Water

Own Tubewell	Neighbor's Tubewell	Community Tubewell/Tap	Well	Others
9	6	6	0	0

Main Cooking Fuel

Firewood	Cow Dung Cakes	Kerosene	Gas	Biogas	Electricity
19	2	0	0	0	0

Source of Light

Kerosene	Electricity	Biogas	Solar Energy	Others
0	21	0	0	0

Toilets

Available	Not Available
3	18

6.5 Land Ownership Status

The following tables represent the households' areas of the community which are primarily divided on the basis of their land ownership details. Registered land area means the total households with land ownership certificate. Village block land refers to a defined cluster or unit of land within a village area used for planning, settlement, or development purposes. Other's land refers to the households residing on land registered under someone else's name. Informal land is defined as land occupied and used by landless squatters without any formal documents. Government land refers to any land which is registered in the name of Government of Nepal. Similarly, public land refers to the land allocated for public uses like roads, schools, forests, temples, and other public infrastructure. Guthi/Trust land refers to land donated for religious purposes, cultural or social purposes which is registered under an institution/Guthi.

6.5.1 Status and Ownership of Residential Land

Type of Land	Registered in own/Family's name	Land in women's name	Village block	Land Owned by Others
House-holds	5	3	14	2
Area	37 dhur (0.062 Hectares)	Are of land: 24 Dhur (0.04 Hectare)	45 dhur (0.076 Hectares)	10.5 dhur (0.017 Hectares)

In this settlement, 14 families are living on land belonging to the Village Block. 5 families have a small plot registered in their own names for housing, while 2 families are living on land owned by others (landlords). Even these small plots of land some families own are not ancestral property but were purchased later.

The total area occupied by the settlement is about 4 katthas and 12 dhurs (0.155 Hectares). On average, each family uses only about 2 dhurs (0.003 Hectares). Among the five families who own land, three plots are registered under women's names. Most of the men of the families with land work abroad which is why the land is registered under women's names.

6.5.2 Status and Ownership of Agricultural Land

Mode of Tenure / Type	Bataiya (Sharecropping)
Families	2
Years of Tenure	Since 5-15 years ago
Area	1 bigha 5 kathha (0.846 Hectares)

People here have no land of their own for farming/agriculture. Only 2 families are engaged in sharecropping (locally referred to as bataiya). Securing food for the family is a major challenge. Those farming on sharecropping basis (locally referred to as adhiya, bataiya), or on lease also face severe difficulties as production has declined due to frequent droughts compared to earlier years. In recent years, the community has been suffering losses of crops and livestock due to droughts, floods, and other natural disasters.

7. Root Causes of Extreme Poverty in the Mahara Community: An Analysis

The extreme poverty observed in Mahara Tole is not the outcome of a single cause. It is the result of a complex and interconnected structure made up of multiple factors: discrimination, social structure, historical injustices, deprivation, risks, and marginalization. Together, these factors trap the community in a cycle of chronic poverty. These causes reinforce each other, further embedding poverty into their lives.

7.1. Landlessness

The most significant cause of poverty in the Mahara community is landlessness. Apart from 5 households with their own land for housing, the rest of the community have no access to any land. Because they lack land, they are unable to engage in productive activities. They also do not have the resources or capacity to invest in other occupations, businesses, or education. When analyzing issues such as poverty, illiteracy, food insecurity, homelessness, and inequality, landlessness is found to be closely linked to all of them. Due to landlessness, they are deprived of resources, opportunities, and basic needs, which automatically closes the doors to other forms of progress and development.

7.2. Low Educational Level

Educational Status

Education Level	Up to Grade 5	Up to Grade 8	SEE Passed	Up to Grade 12 (+2)	Bachelor's
Female	5	1	1	1	0
Male	3	2	2	0	0

In the settlement, there are only three individuals who have passed the SEE (Secondary Education Examination) Level. Out of which, one woman has passed the SEE level. Even now, some of the school-age children are deprived of school education. Out of 23 school aged children, only 15 attend school where 8 are female and 7 are male students. This keeps the community limited to low-paying, risky, and unstable jobs.

7.3. Risky Agriculture and Livelihood

Even those engaged in sharecropping (locally referred to as bataiya) and leasing (locally referred to as thekka) face many problems in farming. There is no proper irrigation facility, and farming depends entirely on rainfall. Due to lack of proper irrigation, production has been decreasing yearly. Irregular rainfall, rising temperatures, pests, and diseases are increasing risks. For those who survive solely by working as agricultural laborers, even finding work has become difficult, as limited irrigation has led to low cultivation of crops eventually leading to lower need for agricultural labor.

7.4. Food Insecurity and Market Dependence

Food Production and Availability

Production Status	No Production	Less than 3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	Surplus (12+ Months)
Number of Families	19	0	1	0	1	0

Coping with Food Shortage

Source of Food	Families
Market Purchase	21
Borrowing from neighbors	0
Others	0

Out of the families engaged in farming, only 1 family produces food for up to 9-12 months, while the rest have no food production. Families with no access to farmland are fully dependent on daily wage labor and seasonal agricultural work.

Thus, the community is almost entirely dependent on the market for food. On average, a household spends more than NPR 5,000 (35.34 USD) per month on food. In difficult circumstances, they are compelled to take loans with high interest rates just to fill their stomachs. Pregnant women, new mothers, sick women, and elderly people are also deprived of nutritious and balanced diets. As women and elderly people need more balanced nutrition during disasters and financial scarcity, they are the most vulnerable ones who have to suffer.

7.5. Community Occupation, Labor, Employment, and Foreign Employment

7.5.1. Occupation and Employment Status

Employment Type	Farmers		Foreign Employment		Wage Labor	
Number of People	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
	1	1	0	4	11	20

The people of this settlement are entirely dependent on daily wage labor (agricultural and construction work). Although 2 people are engaged in farming, it is not sufficient to sustain their families. 4 individuals are in foreign employment. Among them, 4 people from 4 families have gone to India for general work in hotels and building sites, while none of the families have gone to Gulf countries.

7.5.2. Exploitative and Informal Loans with High Interest Rates

Loan Purpose	Families Taking Loan	Loan Amount (NPR)	Interest Rate	Source
Foreign Employment	0	0	0	0
Household Expenses	15 families	49,20,000 (347,871.94 USD)	36%	Private Moneylender
	3 Families	13,00,000 (9,187.71 USD)	12%	Banks, cooperatives, microfinance institutions

Three households are affiliated with banks, cooperatives, or microfinance institutions. Most families borrow money from moneylenders or private individuals for household expenses. The household expenses include food, health, clothes and rituals. The interest rate is usually 36%, which is much higher compared to banks. Loan amounts range from NPR 100,000 to 800,000 (704-5,654 USD).

Although loans from banks and financial institutions are cheaper, the community has no or limited access to them as the banks demand collateral and credibility to give out loans. Financial literacy is low, and a significant portion of their small earnings from wage labor or foreign employment

goes toward paying high-interest loans. As a result, savings are impossible, and it is difficult to invest in food security, education, or health.

7.5.3. Child Labor and the Pressure of Dependent Population

The children in the settlement are compelled to engage in both household and external labor. Due to poverty, lack of education and awareness, and the absence of opportunities, they are forced to work in agricultural labor during the age when they should be studying. When parents struggle to manage household livelihoods, even the children are involved in labor.

7.5.4. Unequal Impact During Disasters

Due to lack of capacity, skills, resources, secure housing, strong infrastructure, and awareness, poor and marginalized communities are more vulnerable to disasters. Within these communities, women, pregnant and postpartum mothers, children, persons with disabilities, and elderly people are particularly affected. It becomes impossible to continue daily wage labor during disasters, and they have to rely on food stocks they already have which do not last long. Therefore, they cut out their regular food, which eventually leads to nutritional deficiency among women, postpartum mothers, new born babies and elderly sick people.

Moreover, since the houses in the settlement are not safe or permanent, the community remains at high risk during natural disasters, floods, or other emergencies.

7.5.5 Health and Nutrition Issues

The direct impact of disasters is first seen in food consumption. Women and children suffer from malnutrition due to the lack of nutritious food. Irregular access to sufficient and nutritious meals has hindered their physical development.

Likewise, due to poor sanitation, lack of safe drinking water, and limited access to medical facilities, the community faces a high risk of infections. Unhealthy lifestyles and a lack of basic health awareness also make the spread of diseases easier.

When illness occurs, seeking treatment becomes extremely difficult. Although there is a nearby health facility, the services are limited as they only provide some medicines and general check-ups for fever and aches. During a discussion with community members, some stated that while they go for medication, the hospital often does not provide a basic medicine for headache and fever saying the hospital doesn't have such medicines. In addition, lack of money, limited information, and lack of awareness prevent timely treatment. As a result, even minor illnesses tend to become serious.

7.5.6 Caste-based Untouchability and Discrimination

Untouchability and discrimination still exist in society. The Mahara community is regarded as a socially constructed 'lower caste' and faces caste-based discrimination in public spaces as they are considered 'untouchables'. Those belonging to the socially constructed 'upper caste' do not want Mahara people near them. Such practices have deeply affected the daily lives of the settlement's people.

Even today, members of the Mahara community are often denied access to temples, public water taps, and tea shops by upper caste people. Inequality in inter-community relations remains persistent. People from this settlement are completely excluded from opportunities such as inter-caste marriages or participating in social events with other communities. This has restricted their social access and integration.

8. Power Analysis

During the power analysis exercise, key stakeholders were identified, especially in relation to solving land issues. The community recognized the following as their stakeholders: ward office, police post, school, landlords/moneylenders, health post, district administration office, Community Self Reliance Center (CSRC), rural municipality, land survey office, land commission, political parties, provincial government, and federal parliament.

The table below represents the power level and relationships of the stakeholders with the community. High, medium and low indicates the level of decision-making power the stakeholders have, and their ability to influence (both positively or negatively) the lives of the community. The scale of 'fully negative' to 'fully positive' indicates the type of relationship that the stakeholder has with the community. For example, while the District Administration Office has high power to influence decisions, they are viewed by the community very negatively, since they are not allies.

8.1 Power Ranking of Stakeholders

High	District Administration Office, Rural Municipality, Political Parties, Federal Parliament Members, Provincial Government	Survey Department, Land Commission	Landlords		Police Station Ward Office
Medium			Health Post		School
Low				CSRC	
Power Scale:	Fully Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Fully Positive

Among these stakeholders, the community has the closest relations with the ward office, police post, and school. However, despite the positive relationship, the expected level of support has not

been received as they demand more efforts from local governing bodies (ward, municipality) to conduct training and programs targeted to their community. The relationships gradually become weaker with more distant stakeholders.

The landlords, health post, and CSRC have neutral to positive relationships with the community, and their power is also moderate. In particular, the District Administration Office, Rural Municipality, Police Post, Land Survey Office, Land Commission, Political Parties, Provincial Government, and Federal Parliament are powerful but have negative associations with the community. According to them, those stakeholders hold strong positions on addressing poverty, landlessness and employment but none of those stakeholders pay any attention to their situation.

Thus, those stakeholders who hold more power remain unhelpful to the community, while those who have positive relationships with the community tend to have weaker power.

9. Tree Analysis (Causes and Effects of Landlessness)

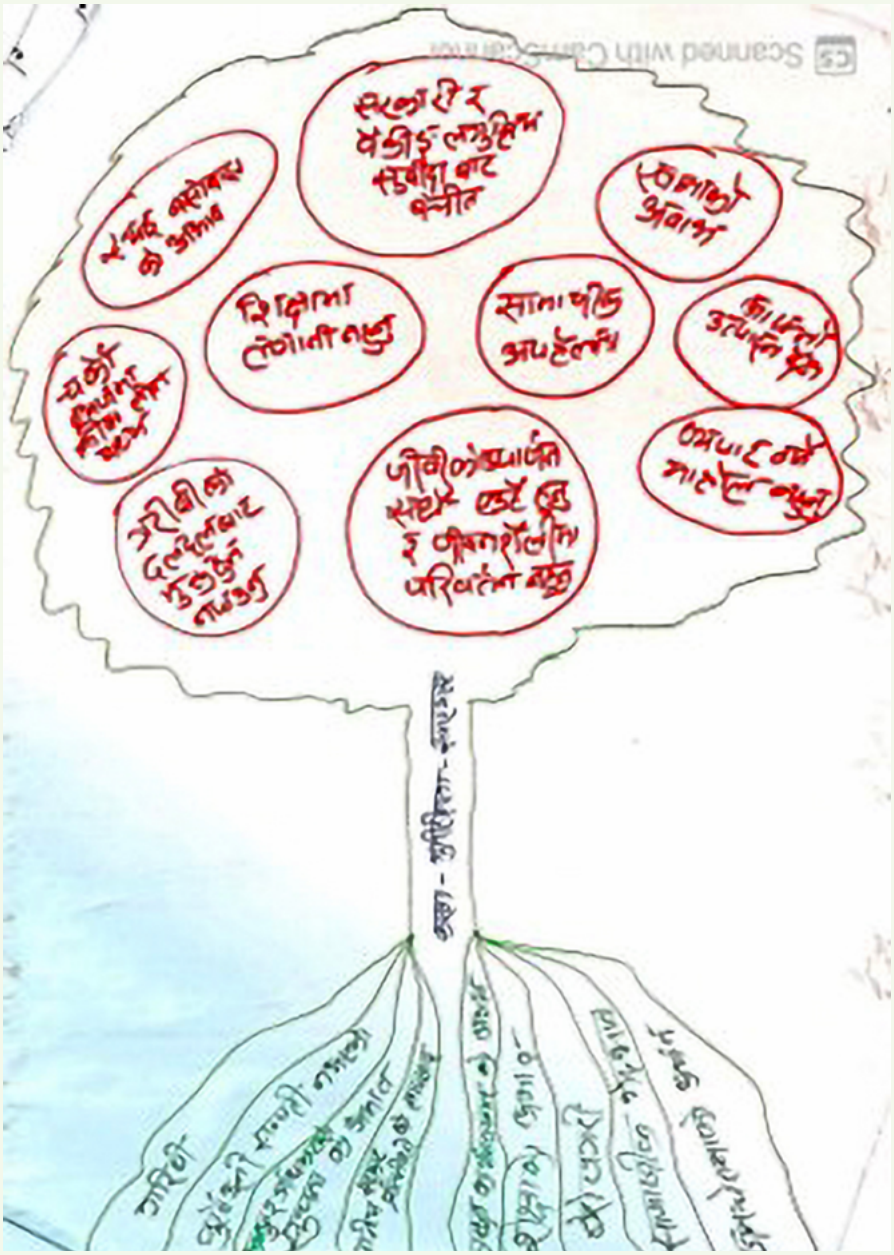

Figure 4: A drawing of tree analysis to explore the cause and effect relationship of landlessness

Cause	Effect
• Lack of awareness of their rights • Migration	• Acceptance of social disrespect/ maltreatment • Unmanaged settlement and shortage of food and basic resources
• Lack of education access • Lack of information and access to public budgets and plans	• Illiteracy • Drug abuse and addiction in youth • Inability to access community upliftment programs
• Historical social discrimination and exploitation	• Problem in establishing inter-caste marriages • Caste based identity insecurities
• Limited employment opportunities and financial sources	• Inability to pay debt, temporary housing, unemployment
• High interest loans • Lack of law enforcement • No access to governmental services	• Lack of access to government services/ financial facilities • Prolonged discrimination and mental stress • No involvement in decision making

10. Mobility Analysis of Mahara Tole

10.1. Employment and Economic Dynamics

- **Local employment/occupation:** Most people are engaged in agricultural labor, small trade, and daily wage labor within their own village/settlement (Bahuarwa, Janakpur).
- **Employment in neighboring countries:** In recent years, going to different states of India (Gujarat, Surat, Chennai) for work has become a common practice. They usually work at hotels, construction sites and apartments.
- **Foreign employment:** The cost for foreign employment in Gulf countries is relatively high which is unaffordable for the community. Therefore, people only go to India for work.

10.2. Market Access

- **Nearest market:** For local food and daily necessities, people go to Chowk Bazaar (1km); for festivals, they go to Janakpur Bazaar (7km).
- **Access to cheap household goods across the border:** Since goods are cheaper in Harne (8km), a border town in India, community members go there for shopping.
- **Impact:** Although markets are nearby, there is inequality in prices and access. Especially for cheaper food grains and consumables, they are compelled to travel far.

10.3. Access to Health Services

- **Local health post:** Bahuarwa Health Post exists, but medicines and services are insufficient. Members of the Mahara community report that they are often turned away without medicines as they cannot afford to pay high amounts and are often looked down upon due to their caste identity. Due to the lack of qualified doctors, they also avoid going there. Limited resources prevent them from traveling far, so most of their treatment is left to "God's will."
- **Distant health centers:** For treatment and specialized services, they must go to Janakpur (7km), Dharan (189 km), Kathmandu (225 km), or even to Patna (188 km) and Darbhanga (193 km) in India. However, due to financial constraints, only a few manage to seek treatment outside.
- **Impact:** Inequality in health services, delays in treatment, and worsening health conditions.

10.4. Access to Government Services and Administration

- **Local administration:** The ward office and police post are located at Bahuarwa Chowk (1km). Dhanauji Rural Municipality is around 4.3 Km.
- **Other administrative services:** The District Court, land survey office, land revenue office, electricity office, and other government offices are in Janakpur (7km).
- **Impact:** Administrative work requires going to Janakpur. Although not geographically very far, weak relations with these offices discourages people from approaching them.

10.5. Access to Education

- **Primary/secondary education:**
    - Schools: There is one government school up to 12th grade and two private secondary schools in Bahuarwa.
    - The community cannot afford private schools. Most school-aged children attend school but some children are deprived of education due to financial hardships.
- **Limitations:** For higher and quality education, people have to go to Janakpur or other cities, but access so far is very low as the community cannot afford to pay daily vehicle fare to Janakpur or even rent a place to stay and study at Janakpur.
- **Impact:** Inequality in access to education.

10.6 Access to Natural Resources

The tradition of collecting natural resources such as firewood (daura), grass, mangoes, jamun (black plums), and other seasonal fruits from surrounding land and orchards still exists.

Although the community uses resources like straw, grass, or fruits, they do not have equal access to them. The cultivable land and orchards around the settlement are entirely owned by other castes and communities (e.g., Yadav or Mandal). Since the Mahara community has no land of their own for agriculture and even for housing except 5 households, they can only use others' land either by seeking permission and providing labor as wages or secretly. Nearby forests and open land are minimal, further limiting their access.

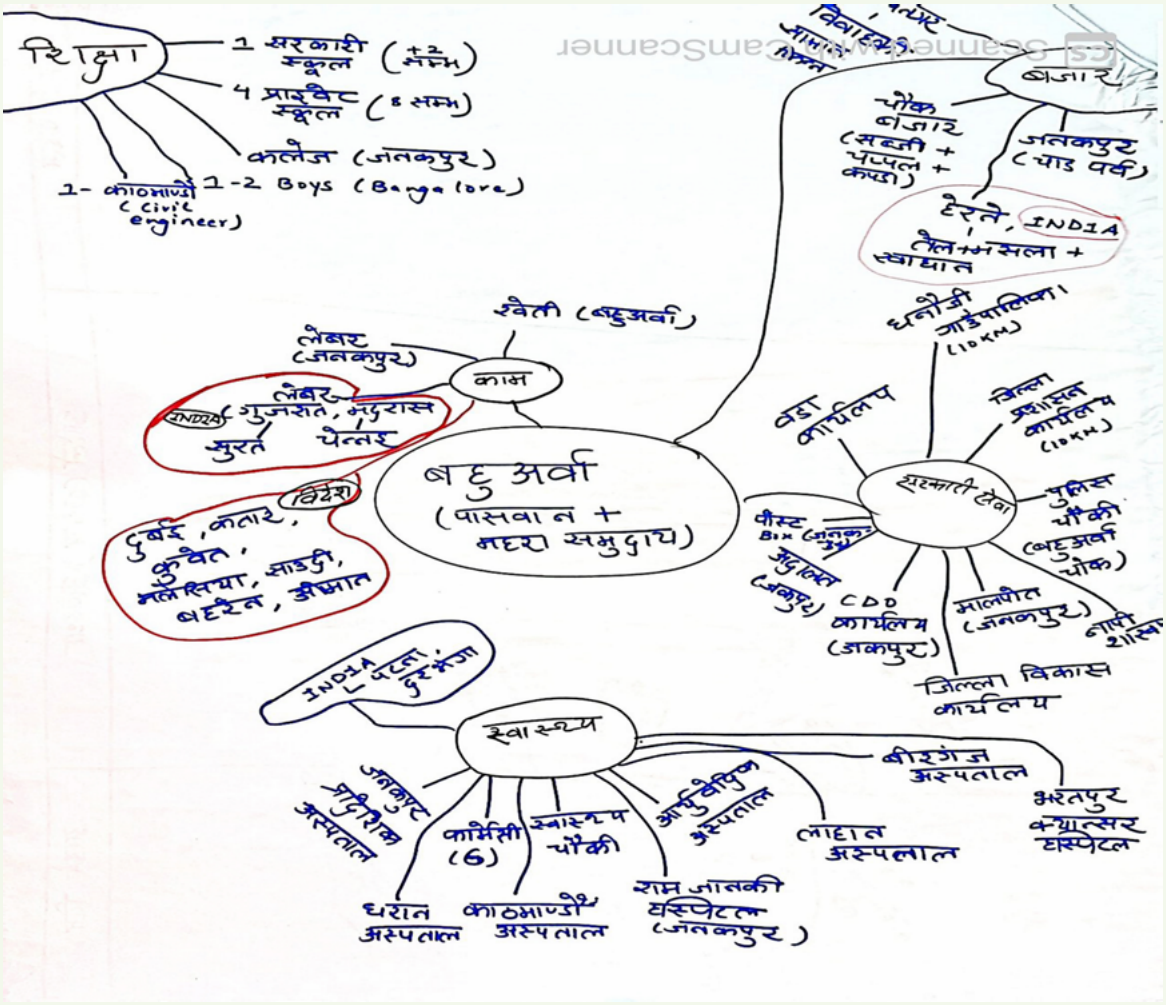

Figure 5: Access to resources

10.7. Access to Government Programs and Budgets

In the past five years, Mahara Tole has received various development and infrastructure support from the government. However, the scale and impact of this support are limited. Although community buildings, tube wells, temples, and road paving projects were implemented, the available budget and resources did not match the real needs and problems of the settlement. Even though some resources were allocated for constructing water tube wells, community buildings, and religious structures, they were insufficient. Not all households or members could benefit equally.

The limited resources that were received were often focused on physical structures like temples and roads, rather than on education, health, or livelihoods. While the social security allowance system provides some relief, it is insufficient to meet the actual needs of the elderly, disabled, or children. Moreover, the average life expectancy of people in this community is lower than in other communities, so many do not even live long enough to receive social security benefits - a harsh reality of the living conditions of the community.

11. Visioning Exercise (Past, Present, and Future)

The visioning exercise was conducted through the community-led approach, ensuring that the insights gathered are rooted in the lived experiences and collective voice of the people. This report analyzes the state of the community over the past 20 years, their current situation, and future projections. It examines the community's social, economic, cultural, health, education, infrastructure, and rights status based on historical development trends.

11.1 Past Scenario (Around 20 Years Ago)

Twenty years ago, the Mahara community (Bahuarwa) was extremely impoverished and insecure. Discrimination, oppression, and lack of awareness of their rights forced them to work under landlords' control, and as they moved from one place to another, no family-owned land. There were no land ownership certificates (locally referred to as lalpurja) for the village block land.

Their houses were minimal and the structures were makeshift. Most had small huts with thatched roofs; some had no bamboo framework at all.

For daily labor, each family received only about 2 kg of rice. Paid labor earned NPR 70-80 (0.49-0.57 USD) a day. Being Dalits, many were denied work in higher caste households. Men had to go to distant areas to earn, while women and children worked in others' fields to harvest rice, wheat, and potatoes, or pound rice. Even if they worked hard, they were paid only 3 kgs of rice for the pounded yield.

Food scarcity was severe. Adults would eat only what was left after feeding children. Since the rice they received from landlords was insufficient, they would mix a little rice with a lot of water to make thin porridge or drinkable gruel. They also collected leftover grains discarded by others, pounded them, and made bread or gruel. On some days, they ate rice with just salt and chili. During different seasons, they relied on naturally available fruits like mangoes and jamun or leftover grains from others' fields to survive.

Community infrastructure was extremely limited. There was only one well, located inside the forest. Collecting water from there involved the fear of snakes, and superstition led people to believe that spirits might harm them. There were no roads or electricity. Fuel was obtained from India in the form of kerosene.

Due to a lack of clothing, people had to patch and reuse old clothes provided by landlords. Most did not remember wearing newly bought clothes. Many children were half-clothed or naked. In winter, mats were the only protection, and the absence of warm clothing sometimes led to deaths from cold.

From a health perspective, diseases such as diarrhea, leprosy, and elephantiasis were common. Most people did not have citizenship, yet for some reason, they were compelled to vote in elections. No one had received higher education, employment, or gone abroad. Very few families even started sending children to school, and only boys were prioritized.

11.2 Present Scenario

Compared to the past, some improvements are visible in the Mahara community. Currently, a total of 21 families has temporary houses, and the feudal 'Harawa-Charawa' practice has been abolished. People now have opportunities to seek work outside the land of the landlord (locally referred to as sahumahajan). Daily wages have increased to the equivalent of approximately 11 kg of rice per day, with cash wages ranging from NPR 500–600 (3.53-4.24 USD).

The housing condition has also changed. All houses now have tin roofs with bamboo and mud walls. Twenty-one families still live in temporary shelters. Despite these improvements, the Mahara community still does not have legal ownership of the village block land and wastelands where they reside. Although there are legal provisions for land allocation to landless Dalits for housing and agriculture, they remain excluded from these opportunities. All households have submitted applications to the ward office to receive land.

Although the Harawa-Charawa system has partially transformed, and some degree of independence has been gained, modern forms of exploitation and discrimination against this community persist. Labor exploitation continues under the conditions of providing 2 kattha (0.067 Hectares) of land per year and 11 kg of rice per day. While slightly more flexible than before, invisible restrictions—such as not being able to freely leave the landlord's work, go abroad, or engage in other employment—still exist.

Regarding infrastructure, 2–3 households generally share one tap, but there is access to water in the courtyard. Roads and electricity are available, but electricity is mostly unauthorized and used after depositing NPR 7,500 (53.01 USD). No household has its own meter box.

Some improvement has occurred in social and political access. Engagement with various organizations and political parties have increased. Food security has improved slightly, with most households able to obtain basic staples like rice, flatbreads, lentils, and vegetables. Clothing availability has improved; everyone now can afford appropriate clothing from their daily wage labor income.

Employment opportunities have increased slightly. Some people who engage in agriculture, transplanting, plowing, harvesting, and short-term wage labor have gone abroad. However, cases of fraud have been reported as many individuals have been scammed by agents who promise them foreign

employment in Gulf countries, take some amount in advance and disappear. Whether working inside or outside the country, many still do not receive fair wages.

Many households are forced to take loans at high interest rates to manage household expenses or foreign employment costs, consuming most of their earnings in debt repayment.

Health issues persist, including tuberculosis. Natural disasters continue to cause damage to property and reduced agricultural production. The community is also experiencing the effects of climate change, including extreme heat and cold, irregular rainfall, and drought.

Education has seen some progress, though limited. Currently, around 65% of school-aged children attend school.

11.3 Future Scenario

The community expects that their basic rights will be ensured in the future. They aspire to have secure housing with their own land and house, legal land ownership documents (land title), and permanent homes with all facilities, as well as the complete eradication of bonded labor practices, allowing them to work independently on their own fields.

In terms of education, the community envisions that all school-age children will have access to schooling, skilled human resources will be produced, and both schools and markets will be easily accessible.

In terms of political rights, the community aims to actively participate in elections and have representatives elected from their own community.

For health and sanitation, priorities include access to health posts, toilets in every household, and clean drinking water.

Regarding employment, the future vision includes local skill-based training for women, the creation of local workshops and employment opportunities, fair wages, and the elimination of unjust practices against women and children.

The community also expresses a long-term desire to end child marriage and receive awareness and training on climate change and disaster management.

Ensuring a rights-based and dignified life for the community in the future will require long-term strategic planning and responsible implementation by the state, local bodies, and relevant stakeholders in order to have basic rights, including the land rights.

12. Conclusion and Recommendations

12.1. Analytical Review of Conclusions and Suggestions

The extreme poverty and marginalization observed in the Mahara community is not the result of a single cause but a complex cycle of multi-dimensional problems. These include interconnected factors such as education, health, livelihoods, financial access, landlessness, social discrimination, and caste identity. Addressing only one area of intervention is insufficient; rather, integrated and multi-faceted efforts are required.

12.2. Immediate and Long-term Actions for Bahuarwa (Mahara Tole)

12.2.1. Ensuring Land Rights for the Landless

- Provide land for housing and agriculture to all landless families in accordance with constitutional provisions of Article 40 (5) . Coordinate with the Land Issues Resolving Commission (LIRC) and local government to ensure a fast and transparent process for distributing land ownership certificates.
- Expedite pending processes such as distribution of surplus land to ensure landless Dalits receive land within the maximum allowed limits for agriculture and housing.

12.2.2. Access to Social Security

- Prioritize skill development training, grant programs, livelihood support, and employment opportunities for Bahuarwa (Mahara Tole).

12.2.3. Participation in Planning and Budget Allocation

- Ensure meaningful participation of the community in local-level (community and ward) budget and planning processes.
- Allocate mandatory budgets for women's capacity building, skill enhancement, livelihood support, and community development projects.

12.2.4. Access to Information and Public Services

- Ensure that information on government services, programs, and plans reaches the community (via notice boards, mobile services, local radio).
- Provide respectful, simple, and efficient delivery of services at government offices.

12.2.5. Awareness and Punishment to Stop Discrimination and Harmful Practices

- Conduct awareness campaigns to end child marriage, caste-based discrimination, and violence against women.
- Establish strict penalties for those who violate these norms.

12.2.6. Free and Quality Education and Awareness

- Implement programs to encourage free and quality education for children in the community.
- Provide free educational materials, uniforms, and scholarships to increase school enrollment, and ensure continuous education through various programs.
- Provide employment opportunities to the community members; access to land for cultivating; livelihood support through agriculture and livestock, etc. These initiatives would mitigate child labor and encourage education.
- Provide awareness and counseling for youth involved in addiction or delinquent behavior.

12.2.7. Transparency and Accountability

- Make all local-level plans, expenditures, and public service delivery transparent.
- Guarantee all citizens have experienced having access to basic rights, opportunities in political and economic sphere, ensuring enhanced livelihoods.

12.2.8. Right to Food

- Ensure livelihood support until every citizen's right to food is secured, and provide ration cards where necessary.
- Identify food-insecure families and guarantee their right to food.
- Provide emergency food relief during disasters.
- Identify fallow or unused land (private, government, or institutional) and make it available to the Mahara community for at least five years at low rent.

12.2.9. Health Services

- Provide mandatory health insurance targeting the Mahara community.
- Conduct health camps and nutrition programs focused on women and children.
- Arrange mobile health services for those unable to access health posts.

12.2.10. Debt Relief Programs

- Identify families trapped in high-interest debt and provide debt relief and financial counseling.
- Offer interest exemptions for long-term debt-ridden families, and provide affordable loans for entrepreneurial or business activities.

12.2.11. Livelihood Support

- Provide skill development training for women (e.g., sewing, handicrafts, basket-making) to encourage small enterprise creation.

12.2.12. Financial Literacy and Access

- Collaborate with microfinance institutions to form savings and loan groups, and make accessible loans available to the community.

12.2.13. Infrastructure Development

- Ensure clean drinking water, sanitation, safe and disaster-resilient housing, and toilets in the community.
- Construct and manage community buildings and open spaces.
- Ensure that schools and health facilities are located nearby for easy access.

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