



AsCAP
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Transforming gender relations in the trail bridge programme in Nepal: an analysis of policies and practices

Inception Report



HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Nepal

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HELVETAS
Swiss Intercooperation

Celebrating 60 years towards a better **NEPAL**

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Cover Photo: crossing rivers with pack loads has become easy now, women crossing a trail bridge in hills of Nepal

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Abstract

The construction of trail bridges in Nepal dates back over more than five decades. Trail bridges provide rural women and men, girls and boys, with access to basic services and economic opportunities, thus contributing significantly to changing the lives of rural people. However, whether trail bridges play any role in changing the roles of women and men, and actually transforming gender relations, has until now been given little thought. This research represents a pioneer investigation into this topic. It considers the policies governing trail bridges, their implementation on the ground, and the impact of trail bridge construction on the lives of women. This is compared against the State's obligation and commitment to promote gender equality and uphold women's rights, mainstreaming this across all State provisions. The research combines a policy review with field investigations covering key informant interviews, focus group discussions and in-depth case studies. The findings are intended as a contribution to government policy discussions, providing insights into how, through trail bridge interventions, women's rights can be upheld and gender relations influenced in a transformative manner within a sector-wide approach.

Key words

Trail bridge, gender roles, transformative gender relations, Nepal

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Acronyms, Units and Currencies

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFDB	African Development Bank
AFDBG	Asian development Bank Group
BW	Bridge Warden
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
COMAT	Communication and Management Institute
DDC	District Development Committee
DoLIDAR	Department of Local Development and Agricultural Roads
DTO	District Technical Office
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAD	Gender and Development
GBP	Great Britain Pound (1 GBP = 129 NPR)
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GoN	Government of Nepal
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LBS	Local Bridge Section
LSTB	Long Span Trail Bridge
MoFALD	Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPC	National Planning Commission
NPR	Nepalese Rupee (1 GBP = 129 NPR)
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBBA	Post Bridge Building Assessment
ReCAP	Research for Community Access Partnership
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SOS	Social Organizational Support
SSTB	Short Span Trail Bridge
TB SWAP	Trail Bridge Sector Wide Approach
TBS	Trail Bridge Strategy
TBSU	Trail Bridge Support Unit
VDC	Village Development Committee
WB	World Bank
WID	Women in Development

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1 Executive summary

Trails and trail bridges have been traditionally regarded as the lifeline of rural Nepal, due to the lack of road networks – this being integrally linked to the rugged terrain and numerous rivers and streams crisscrossing the landscape, creating natural barriers to mobility. Despite recent improvements in the rural road network, much of rural Nepal remains inaccessible to vehicles; rural Nepalese thus commonly travel by foot. The more than 6,000 trail bridges in place around the country are crossed every day by some 1.2 million people. This figure speaks for itself regarding the importance of trail bridges for rural Nepalese women, men, girls and boys. As a development intervention, the construction of trail bridges should not be seen purely in terms of the provision of a safe and easy means of crossing rivers. Ideally, trail bridge construction should impact positively on other aspects of people's lives – in improved livelihoods and progressive social change, including with regard to gender relations. This research considers whether and how the trail bridge programme, through its various interventions during the planning, implementation, operation and maintenance of bridges, has had a transforming effect on gender relations in local communities. The research will first consider the various relevant policies and provisions therein, and then assess their implementation on the ground and the impact that they have in changing gender relations.

A research team of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation staff was contracted by ReCAP to undertake this research. As outlined in this inception report, the team first reviewed pertinent policies of the Government of Nepal, assessment reports, academic papers and development articles in order to better understand the policy environment. The review found that the policy framework in Nepal as related to infrastructure development and the rights of women and disadvantaged groups provides considerable scope for both participation in trail bridge construction, and the enjoyment of benefits from them. At the same time, there is scope for further policy improvements towards a more gender transformative agenda. The team consulted with a number of key stakeholders to further understand the policy gaps. Based on these findings, the team has proposed an in-depth case study to provide field-based, practical insights. The research methodology includes:

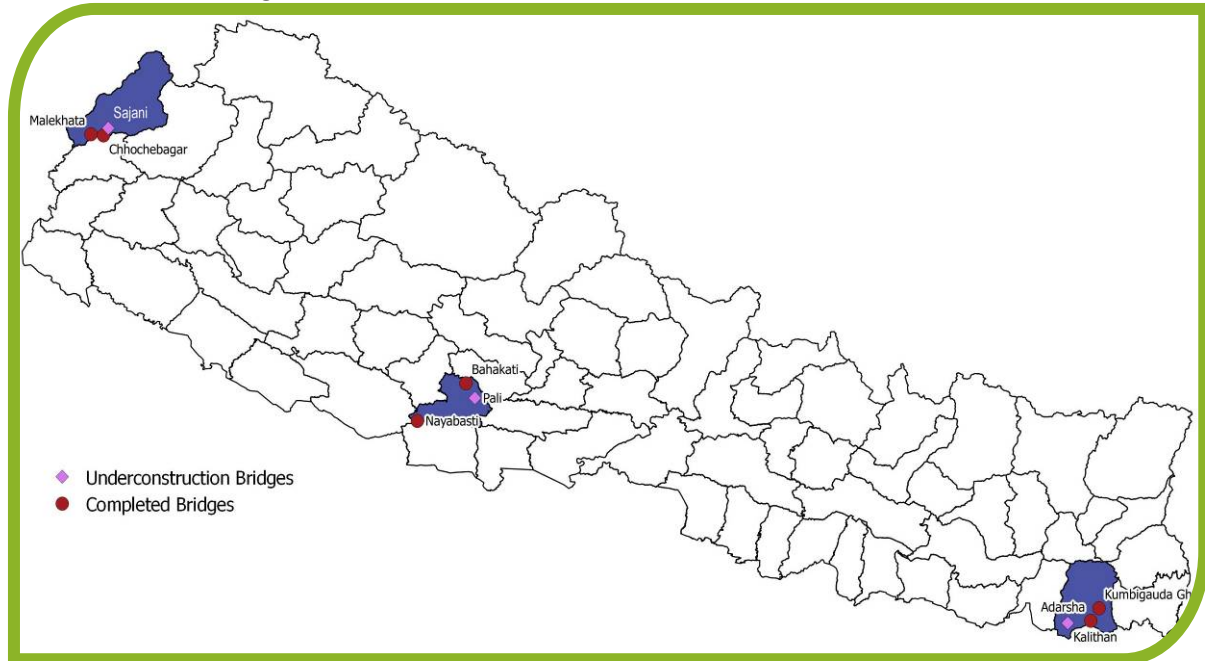
- Key informant interviews with district level government authorities e.g. District Development Committee (DDC), District Technical Office (DTO), District Women Development Office (DWO), regional local technical assistance providers, local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), etc.
- Focus group discussions with Users' Committee Members and Bridge Maintenance Committee members
- Semi-structured interviews with women members of Users' Committees, women labourers (employed during bridge construction) and women beneficiaries of trail bridges and their family members – especially men. A maximum of 36 such cases will be prepared.

Nine short span trail bridges have been selected from Darchula, Argakhanchi and Morang districts i.e. from all three ecological zones. In addition, a long span trail bridge will be selected in each of the nearby districts. The information from these sources, as well as that from the desk review and consultations, will be analysed critically.

This inception report presents, in addition to the review of the policy environment, the proposed methodology for the field research: the selected bridges, the method for selecting key informants and analysis, the issues to be covered, and the overall timetable for implementation.

2 Introduction

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation is contracted by ReCAP to conduct 'Transforming gender relations in the trail bridge programme in Nepal: an analysis of policies and practices'. This research initiative will be operationalised in three different districts of Nepal. The following map shows the districts and the selected bridges for the research.



The research lasts for nine months starting from August 2016 to April 2017. The approved budget of the research is GBP 47,550.00.

3 Background

3.1 Trail Bridge Construction in Nepal

Trails and trail bridges are an essential feature of rural access in the rugged terrain of Nepal's middle hills and mountains, but also in the plains in the South of the country (the Terai), where large rivers can pose major barriers, especially during the monsoon when rivers are in spate. Where there are no bridges, whole communities can get cut-off from road networks, markets, food supplies, service centres, education institutions and employment opportunities. Although there has been a significant increase in rural road networks over recent years, foot remains the most commonly used form of mobility for the majority of rural Nepalese women, men, girls and boys. The heavy dependence upon trail bridges for river crossings and overall mobility in the country explains why they have been accorded Priority-1 programme status by the government of Nepal. According to the Trail Bridge Strategy (TBS) 2006, the Government of Nepal's goal is *'...construction and operation of trail bridges to promote access for local people (particularly Women, Dalits, Ethnic communities, disadvantaged groups, discriminated and marginalised classes) to social and basic services, economic resources and opportunities, thereby contributing towards poverty alleviation'* (TBS, 2006).

To date, over 6,000 trail bridges have been built across the country, mostly in the middle hills and mountainous regions. On average, a further 350 bridges are added annually to this total (DoLIDAR, 2015). Post Bridge Building Assessments (PBBA) record that the Average Daily Traffic Counts are 208 people per bridge, which indicates that throughout the country over 1.2 million people use the bridges daily, predominantly for accessing markets (28%) and performing household chores (27%), followed by going to school (14%), health facilities (11%) and social functions (10%) (COMAT, 2013). Geographic locations were also found to be significant in terms of perceived benefits. Thus people in the hills give more importance to the 'safer access' provided by the bridges compared to people in the Terai, who regard 'easier crossings' to be more significant (COMAT, 2013).

Over 90% of the bridges in Nepal are Short Span Trail Bridges (SSTBs), defined as having a length of less than 120 meters. As per the Trail Bridge Strategy 2006, these bridges are built through the 'community approach', which focuses on optimising local skills and materials through Users' Committees, who are supported by bridge technicians and social mobilisers to ensure engineering requirements in terms of quality, serviceability and durability. In addition, Long Span Trail Bridges (LSTBs), defined as having spans of over 120 meters, are also built across larger rivers and along strategic locations. These bridges are complex in design, and as per the Strategy are built by contractors.

Since the implementation of the Sector Wide Approach in 2009, the trail bridge sub-sector has been led by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD) through the Department of Local Infrastructural Development and Agricultural Roads (DoLIDAR). The department oversees planning, implementation and monitoring as per the strategy and policy documents. The Local Bridge Section (LBS)/DoLIDAR is primarily responsible for SSTBs, whilst the Suspension Bridge Division of DoLIDAR is responsible for LSTBs built along international borders and at strategic locations. Meanwhile, the individual District Development Committees and District Technical Offices implement and maintain the bridges through Users' Committees for SSTBs and through private contractors for LSTBs. HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Nepal (henceforward HELVETAS), with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), provides technical assistance to the entire sub-sector.

3.2 Mainstreaming Gender within Trail Bridge construction

Mainstreaming gender within the trail bridge sub-sector is outlined in the Trail Bridge Strategy 2006 and the corresponding policy documents: the Trail Bridge Sector Wide Approach Framework-I (2009-

2014) and the Trail Bridge Sector Wide Approach Framework-II (2014-2019). These policy documents are in line with the Local Self Governance Act 1999 and focus primarily on Short Span Trail Bridges with the engagement of women and disadvantaged groups through participation in Users' Committees and employment opportunities during bridge construction.

Users' Committees usually consist of 7 or 11 members, and are made up of representatives of the beneficiary communities. As per the working principles, they must be socially inclusive. The primary objective is to lessen the dominance of the traditional elites and at the same time to empower others as 'rights holders' to have control over resources and benefit equally from the trail bridge building process.

It is mandated that users' committees must have a minimum 40% women members. The members should be proportionately representative of the beneficiary population, and a key position (Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer) should be held by an individual from a socially discriminated

Who are the elites, who are marginalised? Social diversity in Nepal

The last national census of Nepal (2011) recognised 125 separate social groups within the population of 26.6 million people. Within this huge diversity, there is a complex social hierarchy based on the Hindu caste system, superimposed on an indigenous population. Broadly, the elites are drawn from three main groups: Brahmins (traditionally the priest caste), Chhetris (traditionally the warrior but also landlord caste) and the Newars (the indigenous inhabitants of Kathmandu valley with more hold on business). The most socially marginalised are the occupational castes or Dalits – traditionally smiths, leatherworkers, tailors, musicians, cleaners and similar assigned occupations. In between are a range of indigenous groups or Janajatis including Sherpa, Tamang, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, and Tharu, whose populations tend to be concentrated in different parts of the country. Religion is a further feature of social diversity; Hindus make up the majority of the population (roughly 81%) followed by Buddhists (9%), with small numbers of Muslims, animists and Christians making up the rest. In all groups, women tend to be more marginalised than men in community decision-making, although there are marked differences in gender relations between different groups.

group, defined as being women, Dalits, Janajatis (ethnic groups) and minorities (TB SWAP Framework-II, 2014). Besides these conditions for physical participation, Women Community Leadership Trainings for women members of the UC are also conducted yearly to capacitate them to have more meaningful engagement in the users' committees.

Latest figures from the fiscal year 2015/16 record that most of the users' committees adhere to the social inclusion criteria. On average, UC membership comprises 45% women, with some 83% of users' committees being proportionately representative of the beneficiary communities. This is a notable improvement compared to a decade ago, when women representation was just 21% and only 50% of the users' committees were proportionately representative in fiscal year 2005/06 (Singh, 2009). According to an external review of the sub-sector, the provisions and efforts have been "...pivotal (mechanisms) for mainstreaming gender into the sub-sector", but it is also noted that additional complementary provisions (that is, various forms of capacity building) were required to support and sustain women to "express themselves" and make their "voices heard" (COMAT, 2014).

Meanwhile, annual figures record that during bridge construction, 29% of the employment generated was taken up by women, with provisions such as equal pay for equal work being enforced and monitored throughout the trail bridge building cycle.

Post Bridge Building Assessments further show that once the bridges have been built, men and women tend to use the bridges differently. Women were recorded as primarily using the bridges for performing household chores (58% compared to 42% of men) while men were found to be crossing the bridges to gain employment (63% compared to 37% women) and to go to markets (65% compared to 35% women) (Chhetry, 2015).

3.3 Study Rationale

Gender equality and social inclusion have been major components of the trail bridge building process for some time, arguably dating back over more than 10 years. Past studies indicate that trail bridges play an essential role in reducing poverty, as their construction creates jobs, improves access to education, health, markets and also reduces women's workloads, eventually contributing towards an overall benefit to the local and national economy through the creation of employment and opportunities for both women and men. However, the correlation between trail bridges and some of its benefits are indirect and are not always clear and attributable, particularly with regard to those that take a gendered lens. This is one reason why an intersectional analysis of provisions in policy, planning, budgeting and implementation is required to assess whether the trail bridge programme has led to transformations in gender relations within the programme, and also beyond it at the household and community levels. This is important, as gender inequality is a huge challenge in Nepal.

Women experience widespread discrimination, which is further compounded by caste and ethnic differences. Dalit women are doubly discriminated, and tend to have low self-esteem and belief in their ability to change their lives. Furthermore, their experience of discrimination can have the effect of reinforcing hierarchical distinctions amongst themselves – thus for example a woman of the Vishwakarma (blacksmith) caste may insist on upholding her perceived superiority to a woman of the Sarki (leatherworkers) caste. In contrast to the often fatalistic perceptions of Dalit women, Brahmin, Chhetry and Thakuri women tend to have greater self-confidence and belief in the possibility of changing their lives. Yet these women may also be particularly constrained by strict patriarchal structures and societal expectations of appropriate 'feminine' behaviour. Amongst the different Janajati groups, gender relations are generally more egalitarian, although none can be cited as examples of gender equality. All these observations are of course generalisations: individual women and men can and do provide examples that break gender stereotypical roles. It may also be noted that gender roles are to some extent undergoing a forced change in rural Nepal due to the high prevalence of male out-migration, leaving many women to shoulder the burden of tasks otherwise performed by men. However, this has not yet had any significant influence on gendered power relations.

Despite the significant gender differences described, all too often it is assumed that women and men automatically benefit equally from new infrastructure. The full range of social and economic impacts that such programmes will have on local communities is often not acknowledged. Furthermore, while gender mainstreaming has long been a government priority, action to this effect has been limited due to a lack of commitment on the part of government officials, inadequate funds, insufficient human resources, and the unresponsive design of development initiatives.

Even within the trail bridge programme, which does have various provisions for promoting gender equality, the focus has mostly been on ensuring women's participation. Most provisions are 'accommodative' of the existing power dynamics within society, and the different social relations. For example, the demands of unpaid care work (particularly child care) represent a serious constraint for many women, limiting their ability to participate in or influence decision-making in users' committees, or to benefit from paid labour in construction work. Yet child care provision is not explicitly addressed by any of the policy documents. In addition, there remains the stereotypical understanding amongst both men and women that infrastructure construction is a 'man's job'. This again limits women's involvement, as does the lack of opportunity for women to learn relevant skills.

Essentially, most gender-related provisions do not challenge existing norms. They stop short of providing a transformative framework towards women's empowerment and agency building, at the same time as raising awareness amongst men, with the final objective of changed power relations. This is why a further sharpening of gender analysis is needed, to catalyse a change in attitudes and behaviour with regard to the gendered division of labour, with a reduction and redistribution of women's workload of unpaid care work. This "levelling of the playing field" is needed if the many rights of women accorded by the Constitution of Nepal and other national and international commitments are ever to be ensured.

This research investigates the underlying factors that hinder changes in gender relations. It will focus on identifying the gaps in both the policies and practices aimed at reducing gender differences, and will consider how the specific needs and interests of women are best addressed. It will further identify progressive gender measures that will improve policies and provisions within the trial bridge programme.

3.4 Research Objectives

The specific research objectives are to understand:

- How and to what extent does the trail bridge programme and its related policies consider the traditional, stereotypical context of gender relations and attempt to change them in a progressive manner?
- How can trail bridge related policies, programmes and tools promote women's participation in social, economic and public life, and sustain their leadership while ensuring quality implementation of the trial bridge programme?
- Is there a gap between prevailing policies and practices in realising gender mainstreaming in line with the Constitution of Nepal, and relevant Conventions and Acts to ensure women's rights and gender equality?
- How and what sort of impact on women has been observed through the trial bridge programme in different social and geographic settings of Nepal? What differences, if any, have been made in the lives women - especially in accessing public services, taking leadership roles, and gaining full employment – as part of addressing their fundamental needs and rights, and bringing about meaningful change?

4 Activities during the Inception Period

The inception period served to define the methodology, select the fieldwork sites, identify and assess the available policy and legal provisions, and review available international literature. For this the research team undertook two major activities

- desk review of available policy documents and literature;
- consultations with different relevant entities to understand their perceptions of how gender equality or mainstreaming is currently ensured in trail bridge programmes, and/or could be improved in future.

The research team was deliberately selected to include experts of both sexes with a range of specialisations - gender and social inclusion; trail bridge construction; research and statistical analysis. Two face to face meetings were held during the inception process, firstly to discuss and agree roles and responsibilities in the desk review and elaboration of the field methodology, and then to review and collectively assess the findings. This ensured that a holistic perspective was brought to all the research objectives. The team further met while revising the inception report before its submission.

4.1 Desk Review

The desk review covered legal provisions in Nepal for supporting gender equality and social inclusion, both in general and with specific regard to trail bridges. In addition, development literature, including academic publications, was reviewed to identify any existing research and/or lessons learned in Nepal or more widely. The complete list of reviewed policies and documents is given in the references at the end of this document.

4.1.1 *The Constitution of Nepal*

The 2015 Constitution of Nepal has several provisions promoting gender equality and upholding the rights of women. The preamble of the Constitution clearly commits to end gender-based discrimination. Furthermore, a special article guarantees Fundamental Rights (Art.38) of women. The Constitution enshrines the right of women to participate in all state structures and bodies on the principle of proportional inclusion. In addition, equal rights to lineage for women and men are accorded, along with the right to freedom from Gender Based Violence.

Article 51 (j) states that social justice and inclusion should be ensured by making appropriate livelihood arrangements, prioritising employment for single women who are in a “helpless” condition, and promoting self-reliance amongst women who are vulnerable, victims of conflict, excluded by family and by society. This should be done through necessary arrangements for women’s rehabilitation, protection and empowerment; ensuring the use of appropriate services and facilities for reproductive health; and placing an economic value on their labour contribution with regard to child care and care for the family. The latter is in fact quite a radical provision – or would be, if it was to be systematically implemented in practice. Overall, the new constitution creates a strong base for women and the socially disadvantaged to claim their rights as equal citizens.

The principle of inclusivity has also been proposed for adoption in the federal and provincial council of ministers. Specific reservation through affirmative action is not, however, guaranteed. Whilst proportional, inclusive representation is recognised as a fundamental right, the mechanisms to enforce this right are not set out. However, there are a variety of laws that address women's rights to participation, rights to property, rights to family, and right to freedom from gender based violence as well as the rights of indigenous and disadvantaged groups as full and equal citizens.

4.1.2 *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion under Nepal’s legal framework*

This section reviews some of the main laws and legal procedures in Nepal that currently seek to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, ethnicity and other social criteria.

Local Self-Governance Act, 1999 (2055 BS)

The Local-self Governance Act is an important piece of legislation upholding the principle of subsidiarity: of decisions being made as close as possible to where the impact is felt. It prioritises the voices of local people in local planning, and specifically calls for benefits to be targeted towards women, children, and marginalised communities. In the process of formulating their plans, Village Development Committees (VDCs) are expected to ensure high and representative local participation, and to prioritise local labour for development work. The Act is of relevance to the trail bridge programme as it obliges VDCs to ensure that any trail bridge work is planned and executed in a participatory, socially inclusive manner.

Right to Information Act, 2007 (2064 BS)

The Right to Information Act, 2064 (2007) makes the government agencies accountable to the citizens of Nepal. The main objective of the Act is to make the functioning and activities of the State open and transparent towards the public. It aims to improve citizens' access to information of public importance, held in public bodies, in a simple and easy manner. It also authorises the protection of sensitive information, the release of which could have an adverse impact on the nation and its citizens. Clauses 3, 4, and 7 ensure the rights to information of all citizens, and define the responsibilities of the public body to disseminate information. Thus if any citizen felt that a decision over the trail bridge programme had been made in a secretive manner, they could invoke the Act to receive full information.

National Foundation for Upliftment of Adivasi/Janajati Act, 2002 (2058 BS)

The National Foundation for Upliftment of Adivasi/Janajati Act, 2058 (2002) is one of the key legislative frameworks relating to Nepal's indigenous peoples. The Act identifies and legally recognises 59 indigenous communities, who are officially referred to as Adivasi Janajati (Indigenous Nationalities). According to the Nepal Federation of Adivasi Janajati, 10 of the 59 Adivasi Janajati are "endangered", 12 "highly marginalised", 20 "marginalised", 15 "disadvantaged" and 2 are "advanced" or better off on the basis of a composite index consisting of literacy, housing, landholdings, occupation, language, education, and population size. As far as the trail bridge programme is concerned, the Act lends support to locating bridges in areas populated by Adivasi Janajatis, and reinforces the importance of their full inclusion in planning and building processes.

Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offense & Punishment) Act, 2011 (2068BS)

The Caste- based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offense and Punishment) Act, 2068 protects the right of every individual to live in freedom with equality and human dignity by creating an environment in which no discrimination is practised on the grounds of caste, race, descent, community or occupation – whether in the name of custom, tradition, religion, culture, rituals or any other reason. Additionally, the Act ensures that such discrimination is a crime punishable under the law. Awareness of this Act, and respect of it, is weaker in remote areas than in more urban parts of the country. Clearly its provisions must be upheld in the trail bridge programme.

Social Protection Program Operational Procedure, 2016

The Social Protection Program Operational Procedure, 2016 (hereafter Procedure 2016), sets out the rights of the weakest, marginalised, and poorest citizens to social protection. It identifies six different categories of people as those eligible for allowances, notably:

- Elderly people
- Endangered Indigenous and Ethnic People
- Single women
- Widow
- Invalid or disabled persons
- Children below 5 years of age in the Karnali region and from Dalits families

The Procedure 2016 also requires the VDCs and municipalities to report their records on the targeted people to the District Development Council (DDC) and DDC to the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development. Whilst there is no direct link between this Procedure 2016 and the trail bridge programme, any benefits to the disadvantaged groups accrued through the programme are a positive achievement.

13th National Plan of Action (2070/071-2072/73)

The 13th National Plan of Action includes a section dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Two objectives are stated, notably

- to strengthen gender roles in promoting economic, social and political empowerment of women from all communities, class and geographical regions; and
- to end discrimination and gender based violence against women.

In order to fulfil these objectives, three strategies are set out:

- promoting the meaningful participation of women
- conducting a programme to end gender based violence and
- capacity building of marginalised women through their training, the promotion of living standards and the provision of protective measures and services.

Thus the Plan can be invoked as another mechanism upholding gender equality and women's empowerment through the trail bridge programme.

International Commitments

Nepal has ratified a number of international conventions and treaties committing the country to the promotion of gender equality. Some of the key instruments in this respect are:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,
- The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is considered as the international manifesto to unconditionally uphold women's human rights, established in 1991.
- ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, 1989 (No.169).

These international commitments require consequent action. For example, Nepal being the State party of the ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, 1989 (No.169) requires consultation with the peoples concerned through appropriate procedures and, in particular, through their representative institutions, whenever legislative or administrative measures are being considered that may affect them directly. It further states that indigenous and tribal peoples shall, wherever possible, participate in the benefits of natural resource utilisation activities and shall receive fair compensation for any damages that they may sustain as a result of such activities. The convention also includes a clause on relocation, clearly stating that the free and informed consent of indigenous people must be taken for this to occur.

Similarly, CEDAW is one of the major international conventions that ensures the rights of women and define the term *non-discrimination* against woman. CEDAW obligates the signatory State to take affirmative measures to protect, promote and fulfil the rights of women. The convention urges the State to take appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in the political, private and public life of the country, providing equal opportunities, access, benefits and treatment to men. Particular aspects mentioned are voting in all elections and public referendum and being eligible for election to all publically elected bodies; participation in the formulation of government policies and the implementation of these policies; and participation in non-governmental organisations, private companies and associations concerned with the public and

political life of the country. CEDAW follows major three principles of substantive equality, non-discrimination and state obligation. Nepal ratified CEDAW in 1991 without any reservation and declaration and with the commitment to accept the principles and standards set for the advancement of women's human rights. The ratification of CEDAW has obligated the Government of Nepal to develop policies and practices that in no way discriminate women. Furthermore, there is a requirement for periodic reporting to the CEDAW committee every four years, both by the government itself and through shadow reporting by civil society. The committee has urged Nepal to make the required changes progressively.

For the trail bridge programme, all these international commitments add support for a gender responsive, socially inclusive approach.

4.1.3 Trail bridges under Nepal's legal framework

The trail bridge programme is framed not only within an infrastructure policy, but also by a set of guidelines and regulations that are briefly reviewed below.

Local Infrastructure Development Policy, 2004

The Local Infrastructure Development Policy (2004) is the guiding document for local infrastructure development – trail bridges being covered under rural transportation. The policy prioritises infrastructure projects that serve many citizens; benefit Dalits, Janajatis and disadvantaged populations; contribute towards poverty alleviation; can secure local contributions; utilize local resources; and can be completed efficiently. Whilst all these priorities are rooted in concepts of good governance, they are not necessarily mutually reinforcing or even always mutually compatible.

The Policy aims to increase the access of marginalised groups, including women, to social services and economic opportunities. Accordingly, women's participation in infrastructure planning, implementation, and monitoring is encouraged. After completion of a project, the policy instructs officials to analyse the project's costs and benefits, including increased access to resources and benefits for women and marginalised groups, and to raise awareness about these benefits.

The Trail Bridge Strategy, 2006

The Trail Bridge Strategy (TBS), 2006 sets out the practical aspects of the policy, in terms of how to plan, build, and maintain trail bridges. It also specifies the goal of increasing the access of local communities to social and basic services, economic resources and opportunities, and particularly mentions women, Dalits, ethnic communities, the disadvantaged, discriminated and marginalised groups. The major focus of the strategy is to build trail bridges at convenient and feasible locations for greater mobility. It adopts a 'community approach' to short trail bridges (spanning less than 120 meters) by delegating the building and maintenance to local bodies through Users' Committees. These users' committees are expected to implement bridge building with technical support from local NGOs, District Development Committees, and technical assistance providers. Under the strategy, at least 30% of UC members must be women, and men and women must be paid equally for equal work.

Trail Bridge Sector Wide Approach Frameworks- I and II

Trail Bridge Sector Wide Approach (TB SWAP) Framework-I (2009-2014) is a key policy document that sought to promote a coherent, government-led process to plan, implement, and maintain all trail bridges in the country.

Based upon the Trail Bridge Strategy (2006), the policy document outlined the involvement of women in terms of 'participatory inclusion' in Users' Committees and during bridge construction. As the sub-sector has adopted a 'community approach' to building short span trail bridges since the

promulgation of the Trail Bridge Strategy (2006), users' committees implement bridge building processes, through the technical support of local NGOs, District Development Committees/District Technical Offices and technical assistance providers.

The document has working principles on representation of women in users' committees (at 33%), reservation of at least one key position for a socially discriminated group, physical presence during meetings (at 33%), priority in employment earning opportunities (50% of employment is targeted towards disadvantaged groups, which include women), and equal wage for equal work. These principles established the necessary directives required for ensuring fair representation in decision making bodies and opportunities for short-term employment.

Under Trail Bridge Sector Wide Approach Framework-II (2014 – 2019), regional technical assistance is outsourced to NGOs and to consulting firms. Gender mainstreaming provisions are broadly similar to those in the preceding framework, though the commitments have been increased with regards to ensuring the representation of women in the Users' Committees. For example, the representation of women has been set at a minimum of 40% (compared to the 33% set by Framework-I), while other indicators such as proportionate representation of discriminated groups within the UC as well as within decision making positions (at least one individual from a discriminated group) have been continued.

Equal pay for equal work (for men and women) has also become a well-established norm and has been continued with Trail Bridge Sector Wide Approach Framework-II.

The Trail Bridge Sector Wide Approach-Directives (2009)

These The Trail Bridge Sector Wide Approach- Directives were elaborated for the implementation of the TB SWAP Framework-I. Whilst having inclusive intentions, such as ensuring at least 50% of the employment generated is targeted towards discriminated groups, no special provisions are stated for proactively implementing such provisions. For example, although women-friendly construction sites, with provision for child care, is emerging as good practice in some public works programmes, the document is silent on such matters. Similarly, whilst training and capacity building would be an obvious need for women, no targets are set for women participants. Past observations indicate that while some women may attend trainings, the fact that most participants are men, and often engineers, means that the women are marginalised and often benefit less from the trainings than the men.

The directives give priority to women and Dalits as Bridge Wardens for routine maintenance. They are provided with basic routine maintenance skills, tools and nominal fees (currently NPR 6,000 per year).

The Guideline of Users' Committee, 2012

The Government of Nepal has developed the Guideline of Users' committee (2012) for the formulation, operation and management of users' committee, issued to all district development committees and municipalities, goes further than the trail bridge strategy in its recommendations on gendered representation. For example, the Guidelines 2012 requires that at least 33% of participants in trail bridge users' committees must be women; that at least one of the key posts (Chair, Secretary or Treasurer) must be held by a woman; and that the five-membered monitoring committee should include at least two women. However, the Guideline 2012 has not yet been revised as per the provision of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015.

Non-Government Organization Selection Guidelines, 2007

The NGO Selection Guidelines 2007 support the District Development Committees in selecting the local NGOs that can provide technical and social assistance to the users' committees in the construction and maintenance of short span trail bridges. These guidelines include prerequisites for

suitable NGOs, selection procedures, and details of the activities that the NGOs are expected to conduct. A major weakness of the guidelines is that they are very broad and do not specifically address how NGOs are to mainstream gender equality within the trail bridge sub-sector.

Public Hearing, Public Review and Public Audit Guidelines, 2064 BS

These guidelines contain the procedures, activities, issues, and reporting formats required for undertaking public hearings, reviews and audits, along with the displaying of hoarding boards within the trail bridge building process. These guidelines seek to foster social accountability by engaging local communities in the building and maintaining of trail bridges. The incorporation of these measures indicates that the sub-sector is committed towards enabling the beneficiaries to stay informed. Nevertheless, to implement these measures, both the Government of Nepal and Technical Assistance providers must take proactive steps.

Social-Organisational-Support Manual, 2007 (Second Edition)

As part of a 'community approach' towards building Short Span Trail Bridges, the aim of this manual is to engage local bodies such as District Development Committee and Non-Government Organisations. The manual acknowledges that "the biggest challenge in community bridge building has been (to ensure) the active involvement of all the concerned considering the existing diverse social stratification as well as the poverty and gender..." (SOS, 2007:6) and directs the NGOs/DDCs to ensure that women and marginalised groups in particular are included in the bridge building processes.

The manual lays out the steps for forming users' committees and for ensuring that they are proportionately representative of the beneficiary population, including women. This percentage is less than TB SWAp Framework-II (2014-2019), indicating the need for an update (which is in process). The manual also instructs the NGOs and DDCs to provide childcare for women participants. In addition, it requires that the NGO/DDC personnel maintain Project Books, mobilise material and human resources, moderate conflicts, and encourage active participation of women UC members.

Post Bridge Building Assessments (2010-2015)

Each year, external reviewers make 'Post Bridge Building Assessments on the outcomes of Short Span Trail Bridges. A review of the PBBAs since 2010 indicates the increased use and benefits from the bridges. For example, the bridges now provide safer transportation routes. Previously, women (in particular) often lost their lives when they fell from temporary crossings or when they tried to swim across rivers. Safe and reliable access has led to increased access to health facilities for pregnant women. Health care workers have also suggested that the increase in the number of patients, mostly women, is due to the safer access coupled with greater awareness.

The bridges also provide reliable and safe access throughout the year to carry out daily activities such as going to schools, visiting health centres or markets, performing household chores, and attending social functions. A slight majority of the crossings were made by men (53%) compared to women (47%). Clear gender-based differences are reported in how men and women used the bridges. Women crossed the bridges primarily to perform household chores, while men crossed the bridges to search for employment or to visit the markets. This gender disparity is not surprising because women in rural areas have had less education opportunities than men, and most of them are confined to domestic spheres with distinguished gender role. Women and girls carry out most of the household chores such as collecting water or wood, gathering fodder, or going to the mill to grind food grains.

The PBBA studies found that trail bridge use has saved time for local people. For example, in a two-way journey using the bridge can save anywhere from 40 minutes to 68 minutes. Many parents

consistently reported that they no longer needed to help their young children to cross rivers to attend school; the bridges have saved parents' and children's time and effort. Additional PBBA studies would be needed to analyse how these savings have qualitatively changed people's lives. In summary, safe and reliable access provided by the trail bridges mitigates physical hardships and helps reduce poverty by increasing access to market, health, education and communication centres. It also saves time and effort which can be used towards other income-generating activities. Trail bridges also help to unite isolated villages and support greater social networks.

To conclude this section, the policy framework in Nepal as related to infrastructure development and the rights of women and disadvantaged groups provides considerable scope for both participation and the enjoyment of benefits based on the provisions. The 2015 Constitution of Nepal makes even stronger demands in this regard; as a consequence, various commitments need to be updated. Nonetheless, there is still room for further policy improvements towards a more gender transformative agenda, and it is hoped that the current research will provide practical insights in this regard. In addition, whilst government policies are explicit about gender aspects regarding the community approach for small span bridges, they are silent with regard to the contracting approach used in Long Span Trail Bridges. This is a gap that requires further analysis.

4.1.4 Academic/development literature on Gender and Social Inclusion

A review of existing literature indicates that whilst there is no shortage of policy and project advice on the ways to mainstream gender into rural infrastructure programmes/projects (OECD, 1997; OECD, 2004; AFDB, 2009; World Bank, 2010; ADB, 2013), literature specifically discussing trail bridge programmes/projects and gender issues is distinctly limited. This research can therefore make a potentially important contribution to knowledge on this topic.

Approaches to integrating gender into rural infrastructure programmes/projects

The Women in Development (WID) approach of the 1970s first emerged with the aim of integrating women into development. It urged development agencies to invest in and include women in the workforce and increase their productivity so as to improve their lives. Critics however argued that women's contribution to economic growth overshadowed women's demand for gender equality (Razavi and Miller, 1995); while others pointed out that the approach focused solely on the public sphere and failed to understand the dynamics of the private sphere - downplaying women's role in household production (Koczberski, 1998).

Following this, the Women and Development approach emerged to remove women from patriarchal hegemonies. The approach emphasised the distinctive nature of the roles that women play in society, arguing that merely integrating women into development would only serve to reinforce existing structures of inequality. Thus women-only development projects were recommended. Critics were however quick to point out that women-only projects would struggle and ultimately fail due to their marginalised status and small scale. In addition, it was argued that the approach tended to view women more as 'a class', and failed to pay enough attention to the fact there are differences between women such as caste, ethnicity, age, religion, etc. The latter perspective was later elaborated by feminist intersectionality (Thompson, 2002).

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach later emerged as a way to understand the different contexts of men and women, to challenge structures that had marginalised women, and to address the differential power relations between them. This approach recognises that there are social, cultural, economic and political factors that determine how men and women participate, control and benefit from programme/project resources (World Bank, 2005). As such, 'gender equality' is recognised as both a 'condition for development' and as a 'development goal' in itself (Otzelberger, 2011).

Against the background of these perspectives, there have been increasing efforts in recent years by various institutions and organisations to design (and analyse) development interventions to mainstream gender into their programmes and projects. This is particularly the case for the transport sector, which has long been viewed to be gender blind - with most "...(assuming) that women and men will automatically benefit from new infrastructure, without due acknowledgement to the full range of social and economic impacts, both beneficial and negative" (OECD, 2004).

There is growing recognition that men and women often do not have equal access over infrastructure. This is true even when women and girls in rural areas spend more time and effort on mobility to conduct household chores (such as accessing water, collecting firewood), accessing health facilities (for themselves and their families), and face greater risks while travelling, amongst others (FAO, 2010; ADB, 2013, ICRW, 2005).

Furthermore, due to the multiple gender roles that women have to play in the reproductive, productive as well as community spheres, they are most likely to also experience 'time poverty' (ICRW, 2005; World Bank, 2010, ADB, 2013). Thus the need to juggle numerous tasks on a daily basis impacts significantly on women's mobility and the benefits that they can derive from the new developments. Hence, the opportunity costs of poor transport systems are disproportionately borne by women, who cannot afford to lose time. Conversely, when appropriate and well-designed systems are implemented, it can make a significant difference to a women's ability to undertake household chores; access services and employment opportunities; as well as increase social interactions (ADB, 2013).

One method of designing and implementing such projects has been to develop guidelines and toolkits to integrate gender issues. Amongst the numerous guidelines available, the BRIDGE gender group at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex has prepared a 'cutting edge pack' on Why Gender Matters in Infrastructure. This makes a range of points about the importance of women's participation in infrastructure planning, construction and maintenance. Although dated 2004, its provisions remain pertinent.

The BRIDGE authors observe that although donor agencies state that gender equality is critical to project sustainability, they '...often experience very real difficulties translating their political and policy commitments into practice on the ground' (OECD, 2004). The guideline therefore highlights eight 'key success factors' to make this "translation" to practice. They include:

- Incorporating gender-specific objectives into the project design;
- Using sex-disaggregated data to develop gender strategies;
- Involving women through consultations, participation and decision-making;
- Ensuring participation and decision-making;
- Developing gender-specific strategies to maximise the benefits for poor women and addressing the impacts on their lives and livelihoods;
- Providing sufficient project resources;
- Developing a shared vision for women's empowerment; and
- Monitoring gender objectives of the project.

The World Bank also has similar recommendations on 'Making Infrastructure work for Women and Men' - a review of infrastructure projects funded over 1995 – 2009 (World Bank, 2010). Highlighting the importance of consultations and targeting women, the review notes that infrastructure projects provide promising contexts for pursuing gender equality by reducing three significant barriers to women's empowerment (World Bank, 2010: 34):

- scarce free time;
- exclusion from local economic opportunities; and
- low presence in important decision making arenas.

Taking the example of a water project in Peru, the review points out that although additional costs were required in the beginning to initiate and train women in construction and maintenance, the returns were greater in terms of sustainability of the water pumps.

Meanwhile, the Asian Development Bank in its 'Gender Toolkit on Mobility' has produced a short list of recommendations on mainstreaming gender (ADB, 2013). Amongst those mentioned, the need to ensure employment for women during construction and maintenance; improve labour conditions; and provide newer and wider training opportunities to women in transport related ancillary work (such as vehicle repairs), are significant.

It may be noted that the literature focuses squarely on women, because they are seen to be the most vulnerable, in need of support. However, ignoring the needs and perspectives of men can lead to an 'incomplete' understanding of the complex and dynamic relationships between men and women (at household and community levels). This will in turn affect the achievement of the overall gender goals. Critics of studies and recommendations focusing only on women therefore argue that a much more nuanced understanding is needed, including men - recognising that women are part of families and societies, and cannot be isolated from them (Demetriades et al, 2008).

Mainstreaming Gender in Bridge Projects in Nepal

In the majority of documents reviewed, bridges receive very marginal discussion (if at all) as one form of rural, locally important but relatively minor infrastructure.

For example, in the Asian Development Bank's Gender Toolkit, rural bridges are seen as an 'add on to' road networks, which can lead to significant time and cost savings by linking communities with service centres. The document notes that bridges can provide sources of employment during construction and maintenance and may also lead to new income opportunities for women if their access to markets improves (ADB, 2013). Another point made is that bridges often become informal market hubs, especially used by women, and that providing shelter for the sellers and easy access for customers is therefore desirable.

Though no academic literature pertaining specifically to the involvement of women during trail bridge construction was identified, a broader review of labour-based road programmes in Nepal indicated that women's participation in wage-earning activities had had an empowering effect. In a series of variously authored chapters on Gender, Roads and Mobility in Asia, Hada (2012) reports on the positive effect on gender relations brought about through the equal treatment of women and men labourers working on the SDC supported Lamosangu-Jiri road.

Hada (2012) notes that interventions by the District Roads Support Programme went beyond ensuring fair pay and decent working conditions for the labourers, to include other interventions such as savings and credit schemes. As a result, "the women in the road corridors have been significantly empowered." At the same time, the author also comments that, "the benefit of construction of roads using the labour intensive approach was felt by poor women and men. However, the economic opportunities created from developments following the road construction went mostly to middle-class men who owned businesses". Such lessons also have relevance for the trail bridge programme, especially as the same donor-funding agency (SDC) is involved in both the projects. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in the nature and scale of the two infrastructure programmes; the employment earning opportunities during trail bridge construction are generally far less than that of the roads programme, which was calculated to be on average 98 person-days for a local labourer (Starkey et al, 2013).

Shrestha (2012) also comments on the positive impact of trail bridges on health outcomes. Using figures derived from the HELVETAS trail bridge programme, Shrestha points out that on average a bridge saved 30 minutes' time in crossing a river – a saving that could make the difference between life and death in the case of a snake bite. (Of course this assumes that a health post with appropriate anti-venom would be available on the other side of the bridge, which may often not be the case).

The same author, quoting the HELVETAS study, attributes trail bridge construction, in part, to a reduction in maternal mortality through better access to health services. She adds that in a survey of trail bridge use, 90% of local respondents considered that there had been an improvement in immunisation campaigns due to more ready access for health staff. One point made clear from the chapter is that attributing improved health outcomes directly to trail bridge construction is difficult, although their contribution to these improved outcomes is obvious to all concerned.

To conclude the review of available literature, the observations and recommendations are neither surprising, nor provide any really new policy insights that could be incorporated into current trail bridge policy in Nepal. However, it is clear that there is a need to think creatively about encouraging the greater engagement of women of all social groups in trail bridge planning, construction, maintenance and use – with the goal of transformative change in gender relation.

4.2 Consultation

Various related agencies and persons were consulted in order to understand their perceptions, views and also critical observations on the way that gender issues and social inclusion are addressed in trail bridge programmes. The consultation was only conducted at national level, and was broadly divided into two groups.

- a. Consultations with government institutions and the major donor in the sector, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and
- b. Women’s rights organisations and individuals.

Due to recent changes within the Government of Nepal, several positions are vacant. This meant that it was not possible to consult directly with certain relevant officials, as for example in the National Planning Commission (NPC). Instead, consultations were held with those who were part of the NPC earlier and who worked directly in the issue of gender equality and development.

In the consultation meeting with government institutions and SDC, discussions were more concentrated on opinions and observations about current policy provisions and possible gaps with regard to gender mainstreaming in infrastructure. This was both in general, and particularly with regard to trail bridges.

In consultations with women’s rights organisations and individuals, questions were formulated somewhat differently. The aim was to ascertain their impression of gender mainstreaming in infrastructure development, its relevance to ensure gender equality, the aspects that should be covered, and how this should be done.

The following table summarises the main findings of these consultations.

Institutions/ individuals	Main discussions	Remarks
Department of Woman and Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s economic empowerment and addressing gender based violence (GBV) are their priorities. Most of the government-supported programmes focus on these two issues, especially the elimination of GBV. • A gender focal person in each ministry is expected to mainstream gender in every policy, plan and programme; however, this person also requires training to improve her capacity in this regard. • They understand that policy provision is ample; only implementation is required. 	Infrastructure is not a departmental priority – at least, they have been unable to give much focus/attention to it yet. They depend on the gender focal persons in each of the ministries to incorporate provisions of gender equality in other policies and programmes. Conscious planning and budgeting should be the next

	<p>This has to some extent taken place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They also understand that gender is taken into account in infrastructure related work but have little awareness of the trail bridge section so far. 	<p>priority of the department i.e. coordinated action to ensure gender equality and the rights of women.</p>
DoLIDAR	<p>DoLIDAR is interested in the study and has committed to contribute to the process. This indicates the demand and need for such a study which can be helpful for them to improve in their work.</p>	<p>It was very difficult to meet all the required officials from the DoLIDAR; despite several attempts it was not possible to meet everybody as planned.</p>
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC	<p>SDC in its Country Strategy has prioritised gender mainstreaming at local level through two approaches i.e.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in users’ committee and • prioritisation of women (and discriminated groups) for employment opportunities. <p>SDC realises that women’s participation has largely focused on numbers with the UC, and understands this as a starting point for improvement i.e. from less than 5% to around 45%. There is also a need for qualitative engagement which ultimately ensures women and other discriminated groups in the decision making positions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDC would welcome the recommendations of this study to ensure gender equality and its mainstreaming but also urge the research team to be practical (rather than merely theoretical). • SDC also stated that the scope of the trail bridge programme is not to transform gender relations within the wider community, given the limited period of engagement in trail bridge construction in the local community of approximately nine months (out of the approx. total two-year cycle, which also involves designing, fabrication, etc). During this time the focus should be on enhancing women’s agency so that they have a say over the bridge building process. If this also leads to wider transformative changes within the community, then that is an excellent outcome, though not the primary aim of the programme. • Regarding planning, SDC is firm that the programme needs to fall within existing GoN mechanisms and cannot be considered in isolation. Currently there are 17 steps in the planning process which 	<p>The research team met with two responsible staff of SDC separately. There appeared to be some difference in perception on gender issues between the two members of SDC staff interviewed.</p>

	<p>need to be followed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The GESI focal person of SDC stated that the term ‘empowerment’ in the SDC country strategy needs clarification as it can be interpreted variously, and should be seen in broad terms of changing power relations within the community. • The importance of gender responsive budgeting is yet to be internalised in each programme. Thus, ‘gender mainstreaming’ needs to be defined precisely in each programme document, including a focus on working with men for gender equality. 	
<p>Ex. Member of National Planning Commission and current advisor of the President of Nepal</p>	<p>Her focus was on overall infrastructure related interventions i.e. road, public buildings like school, health-posts and bridges – not trail bridges alone. Her observations included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender mainstreaming should start from the design phase itself with the participation of women to ensure technical fitness for women and disabled people; there should be no barrier to access due to design faults. • Both the space and its utilities should be women-friendly. • Job opportunities for women should be created with equal wages. • Women are not provided adequate training opportunities in the required skills as infrastructure is regarded as a ‘man’s job’; this should be addressed through policies and plans and programmes. • A proper monitoring system should be in place to ensure the quality of the infrastructure along with workable and effective outcomes. • Engaging pregnant women and school going girls in the name of women’s participation should be avoided • Much infrastructure related work is done through contractors, who do not comply with the principles of inclusion, equal wage and are profit driven. This should be managed and monitored through concrete policy provisions. • The current policy recognises that “participation” should be unpacked to understand at which level, why and how it benefits women and society overall. 	<p>The research team was impressed by the interviewee’s degree of information and awareness, given her wide ranging responsibilities. She also had some observations from the field, especially in current post-earthquake rehabilitation and reconstruction related work. She critiqued the working modality of various INGOs, finding them to be not consciously working on gender equality in all their plans and programmes.</p>

<p>Women's rights organisations</p>	<p>The general view was that this topic has not yet surfaced as an issue in women's empowerment or in the overall development agenda of Nepal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if women are involved in different committees, it is generally merely to show numbers, and their engagement is minimal. Infrastructure is still "man's work". • Most of the meetings are organised early in the morning when women are engaged in household chores, so only men attend the meetings making major decisions. • The issue of unequal wages and mobilising women as cheap labour is quite evident in infrastructure related work. • Private contractors are gender insensitive, and are generally not monitored by the government on such matters. • Women are not sufficiently confident in this field and women's rights organisations are more focused on the issue of violence against women and participation in politics and economic empowerment • Transforming gender relations though infrastructural development has not been their priority, but they collectively called for strong and specific policies, equal wages and women's participation from the design phase onwards. • They consider that women are inadequately informed about different provisions and opportunities. The horizon of understanding women's development should widen. 	<p>Leaders of four women's rights organisations were met by the research team. They expressed very similar views. It was further observed that none of them were aware of current policy provisions for gender mainstreaming in trail bridges, and that they largely spoke on overarching advocacies of participation, equal opportunities and wages.</p>
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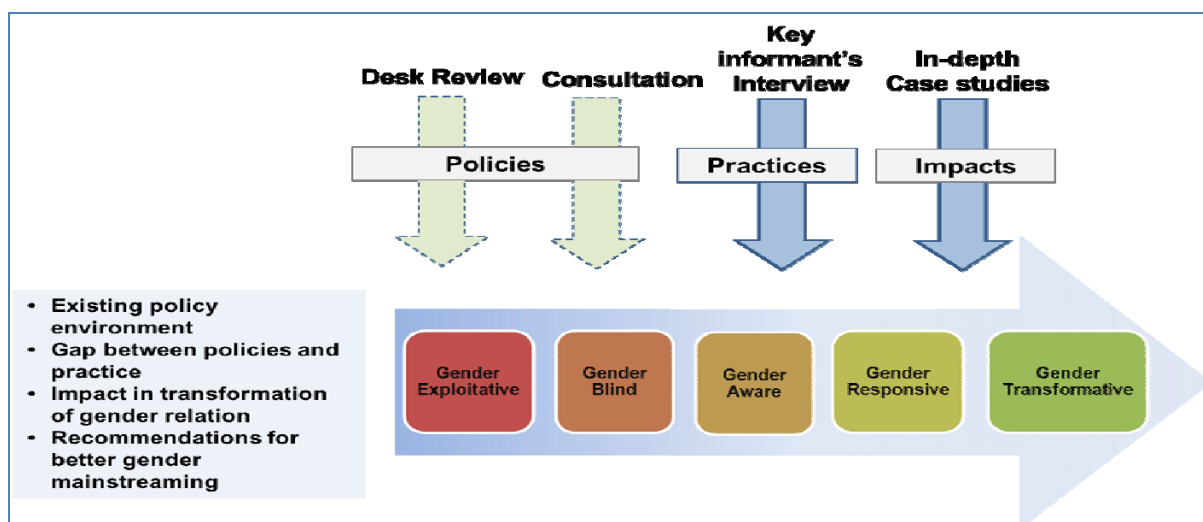
5 Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The proposed research is essentially qualitative research based on in-depth case studies. As mentioned in chapter 2.1, the government's policies are explicit about gender aspects for the construction of Short Span Trail Bridges (SSTB) using the community approach, but are silent on the construction of Long Span Trail Bridges (LSTB), implemented by contractors. SSTBs constitute about 90% of all bridges constructed, and this research will focus on such bridges. However, it will also look into gender aspects under the contracting approach adopted for LSTB construction.

As set out in the technical proposal, the study will adopt the methodology as shown in the figure below.

The methodological framework¹ of the research



The inception period observed the completion of the desk review and consultation process (see sections 4.1 and 4.2), nevertheless the research team will continue to review any new documents and to consult with relevant people during the next steps of the research. These are the key informant interviews and in-depth case studies, to be conducted in the field.

Fieldwork will be conducted in the nine selected bridges in the three selected districts. The key informant interviews will aim to determine how policies are translated into practices, and identify any gaps between policies and practices. The following key informants are foreseen:

- District Development Committees of the selected districts
- District Technical Offices of the selected districts
- Women Development Offices of the selected districts
- Trail Bridge Support Unit
- Regional Technical Assistance Providers for the Trail Bridge Programme
- NGOs providing social and organisational support to the selected bridges
- Private sector fabricators producing steel parts necessary for trail bridges
- Contractor(s) implementing Long Span Trail Bridges.

¹ The activities in broken line were completed during inception period

In-depth case studies of woman beneficiaries will be conducted at each of the nine selected bridges - both 'completed' as well as 'under-construction' bridges, as follows.

- Two women members from the bridge users' committee: one executive member and one general member. Each will be from a different caste or ethnic group, in order to capture insights into how caste/ethnicity influences women's empowerment within the same community and geographical context. Where possible, women representatives who have received the Demonstrated Model Bridge Training (DMBT) and Women Leadership Trainings (WLT) will be selected.
- One woman labourer who worked on trail bridge construction (non-member of users' committee)
- One woman beneficiary who was neither a member of the users' committee nor was involved in construction work.

Case studies will be prepared based on interviews with both the women individually, and with their family members, including the men. The following table shows the maximum number of cases that will be prepared per bridge. The number of case studies may be slightly lower than foreseen, depending on the number of available women during the field visits.

Trail Bridge Types	S N	Types of case studies	No. of Case Studies to conduct						Total
			Morang		Argakhanchi		Darchula		
			Women rep > 66%	Women rep < 33%	Women rep > 66%	Women rep < 33%	Women rep > 66%	Women rep < 33%	
Completed Trail Bridge with Women members >66%	1	Women UC member from discriminated group	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
	2	Women UC members from non-discriminated group	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
	3	Women involved in TB construction	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
	4	Women beneficiaries	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Under construction Trail Bridges	1	Women UC member from discriminated group	1		1		1		3
	2	Women UC members from non-discriminated group	1		1		1		3
	3	Women involved in TB construction	1		1		1		3
	4	Women beneficiaries	1		1		1		3
Total cases - maximum			12		12		12		36

5.1.1 Selection of Bridges

The study will cover the bridges built during the period of TB SWAp framework (2009-2014). In total, 1,158 SSTBs bridges were built through local bodies over that period, with the following composition of users' committees in terms of women involvement.

Number of bridges	Percentage of women in Users' Committee									
	0 -10	10-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	60-70	70-80	80-90	90-100
	2	23	83	397	589	51	5	2	1	5
	Less 33% = 281					Greater than 66% = 11				

The research will look into both bridges under construction and those that are completed. This will provide the opportunity to observe women's participation in bridge building process as per the policies (physical representation, expression, voices heard, etc), as well as investigating the impacts of completed bridges in the lives (positive, negative and unintended impacts of the access provided) of women and men. The latter will include whether there has been any re-distribution/reduction of unpaid care work, the position and condition of women, allocation and control over resources, etc.

Since the research seeks to assess whether the presence of a critical mass of women in users' committees affects the power relations with men, the districts chosen for the research should be ones that offer a combination of a completed bridge with more than two thirds (>66%) women members in users' committees; and a completed bridge with less than one third (<33%) women members in users' committees. The districts should also have at least one bridge under construction. Based on these criteria, the following districts are qualified as the potential research districts from each of the three ecological regions.

Name of districts	Ecological zone	Bridge with >66% women in UC	Bridge with <33% women in UC	Under-construction bridge
Morang	Terai	2	4	6
Rukum	Hills	1	1	14
Argakhanchi	Hills	2	2	5
Dolpa	Mountain	2	7	9
Darchula	Mountain	1	3	12

Additional criteria of the reduced distance to the road head gained by the bridge, and the shortest distance from the road head, were considered in making the final selection of the bridges among the available ones in five districts mentioned above. The following are the selected districts, bridges and the associated details.

District	Ecological zone	Features of selected bridge	Completed -1	Completed -2	Under construction
Morang	Terai	Selected bridge name	Adarsha	Kumbigaudaghat	Kalithan
		Date of Completion	2011	2013	-
		% of women in UC	100%	33%	46
		Distance to road head	0	0	0
		Distance gained in hour	1	3.7	1.5
Arghakhanchi	Hill	Selected bridge name	Bahakati	Nayabasti	Bhorle Ghat
		Date of Completion	2011	2013	-
		% of women in UC	100%	27%	45
		Distance to road head	2 hours	0.5 hours	0
		Distance gained in hour	1	1.8	4.7

Darchula	Mountain	Selected bridge name	Chhola Bagar	Malekhata	Sajani
		Date of Completion	2014	2012	-
		% of women in UC	67%	27%	33%
		Distance to road head	0	4 hours	0
		Distance gained in hour	9	4	2

Of all the LSTB bridges in the country that are ‘recently completed’ or ‘under construction’, there is one that lies within visiting distance of the selected SSTBs. Hence, the sample bridges will comprise nine SSTBs and one LSTB.

5.1.2 Research Tools

The table below summarises the various research tools envisaged.

Research tool	Informants	Type of information
Semi structured interview and Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women beneficiaries of the bridges (selected for in-depth case studies) and their male counterparts (in family) 	Practical experiences and their impact: any changes that occurred after the construction of the TB in terms of gender transformation
Semi Structured Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District level government officials from District Development Committee, District Technical Officer, Women Development Officer Officials of Trail Bridge Support Unit and Regional Technical Assistance Providers for the Trail Bridge Programme NGOs providing social and organisational support to the selected bridges Private sector fabricators who produce steel parts necessary for trail bridges Contractor implementing LSTB 	Practices versus policies
Focus Group Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Users’ Committee Members Bridge Maintenance Committee members 	Practical experiences and impacts

5.1.3 Execution of the Research

The research will be executed by the research team with field-based support from research associates. The following section presents the team members and their roles

Mona Sherpa (Team Leader): Mona is a renowned feminist in Nepal and currently holds the position of Deputy Country Director of HELVETAS in Nepal. Holding a Master’s in Humanities and Social Sciences, Mona has fourteen years of experience. Among her areas of key expertise are strategic and programme management; women’s rights and empowerment; knowledge management and policy advocacy; REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Technique); and capacity building of community based organisations and networks in Nepal and beyond. She has conducted several studies on women’s issues e.g. unpaid care work, women’s roles and empowerment.

Mona will lead the research and will take the overall responsibility for it. She will be engaged in stakeholders’ consultation, key informants’ interviews and in depth case studies in one of the districts, in analysis of the data and reports (Inception, Mid-term, Final), and in the preparation and dissemination of the research findings to influence relevant policies. She will be the contact point for communication with ReCAP.

Jane Carter (Gender Expert- International): Jane currently holds the position of Gender and Social Equity Coordinator of HELVETAS in Zurich. She has a PhD in Rural Development Forestry from the University of Oxford, for which she conducted fieldwork in Nepal. Among her key qualifications are the promotion of gender equality and social inclusion in development; the design of tools and approaches for gender-responsive and socially inclusive programme implementation; institutional development of community-based organisations in a socially inclusive manner; natural resources governance and research in the fields of gender equality, social inclusion and natural resources management. She has more than 30 years of experience, and a wide range of publications.

Jane will be responsible for bringing an international perspective in the research. She will also advise on the research design, ensure the quality of the research outputs, coordinate the production of an academically oriented paper, support in national (Nepal) seminar for consultation with policy makers and different other stakeholders, and ensure the dissemination of the research findings at international level, especially through the webinar.

Devendra Chhetry (Statistician): A retired Professor with a PhD in Statistics, Devendra has more than 40 years of experience. He has been involved in studying the effectiveness of trail bridges since 2003. He is the architect of the Post Bridge Building Assessment methodology for trail bridges, therefore he holds sound knowledge of trail bridges and their impacts.

Devendra will bring his knowledge and experience of the trail bridge sector and will contribute in detailing the research design and methodology, and reviewing the data and its analysis for reliability and validity. He will also contribute in the academically oriented paper.

Indu Tuladhar (Policy Analyst): With a Master's in International Conflict Analysis, Indu has 20 years of experience. She has a wide array of expertise in gender and social inclusion; policy analysis; monitoring and evaluation; and programme management. Indu has analysed various policies including the constitution of Nepal from gender and child rights perspective. She has been involved in various studies on gender and social inclusion, evaluation of different projects, delivery of training on gender and child issues, and has contributed to many papers.

Indu will be responsible for analysing the existing policies in the rural transport, in particular trail bridges and the gender dimensions therein. She will be engaged in the design of tools, key informant interviews and in-depth case studies in one of the districts, and the analysis of data. She will also be responsible for developing a policy brief based on the findings of the research.

Ansu Tumbahangfe (Rural Livelihoods Expert): Ansu is currently working as the Results Monitoring and Reporting Manager at the Trail Bridge Support Unit/HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation. Holding a Master's in Rural Livelihood, and Rural Development, Ansu has over 10 years' experience in conducting quantitative and qualitative research and is regarded as a specialist in the use of Immersive and Reality Check Approach studies in Nepal and abroad. Her expertise includes, designing participatory learning systems and developing/implementing Results Based Management, policy research analysis, and designing programmes/projects. Furthermore, Ansu brings with her the experience of reviewing the TB SWAp Framework-I and the development of TB SWAp Framework-II.

Ansu's involvement will be concentrated on conducting the focus group discussion and in-depth interviews at the sampled bridge sites. Her inputs will also include analysis of the findings and writing of the research report. As a part of Trail Bridge Support Unit (TBSU) of HELVETAS, Ansu has direct contact with personnel at the policy (MoFALD/DoLIDAR) and practice levels (Bridge Section of DoLIDAR, Regional Technical Assistance Providers, local NGOs). She will therefore contribute to disseminating the research findings and influencing stakeholders within the trail bridge sub-sector programme.

Niraj Acharya (Rural Infrastructure Expert): Niraj is currently working as Water and Infrastructure Coordinator in HELVETAS Nepal. A Civil Engineer and an Educationist (Technical & Vocational) by qualification, Niraj has almost 20 years of experience. His expertise lies in rural infrastructure

(including trail bridges), technical and vocational education and training; programme management; capacity building; knowledge management; programme development; and educational and development research.

Niraj will bring his knowledge of the trail bridge sub-sector and will contribute in policy and practice related issues in trail bridges from the planning to the post construction. He will be responsible for research design, and writing the reports. As a member of the Knowledge Management team of HELVETAS, Niraj will be a key person in disseminating the research results through the South – South cooperation unit to countries such as Ethiopia, Cameroon, and Laos.

The gender balance of the fieldwork teams will be maintained through the selection of research associates of the required sex to complement the other team members. The research associates will be hired from the selected districts to ensure familiarity with the local context, and will be provided with an intensive orientation about the research and their expected role. The main tasks of the Research Associates will include communicating with the people from the selected bridges, fixing the dates for field visits, organising meetings with district authorities and NGOs, and taking notes during the focus group discussion.

5.1.4 Limitation of the Research

This is essentially a qualitative piece of research, with the quantitative information of bridges being based on secondary sources. Qualitative information from specific bridges cannot be generalised but will provide an in-depth, nuanced understanding of gender roles and relations in various settings. The study will be focused on SSTBs, with the observations on LSTBs being derived from a single case study.

5.2 Broad Theme for Assessment

The expressed aims of the prevailing laws, acts, policies and plans and programmes will set the background for the research team to understand and identify clear, direct and indirect, attributes of the trail bridge programme in transforming gender relations. However, in the process of defining the questionnaire, the team may also include other aspects for broader assessment in interviews, focus group discussion and further consultations at both local and national level. The research team is also aware of the intersection of many broad themes. This will be specifically taken into account in formulating different questions for the assessment.

S.N.	Major components	Broad theme
1.	Participation and representations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this taken to mean the physical participation of women or does it also include their expression of opinions and being heard in different committees? • Has women’s leadership been ensured? If so, at what level of the committee? Are they also the part of executive body? • Has anything been done to ensure women’s participation? Are there additional benefits provided to women? When and where do meetings usually take place? • Has anything been done to ensure/encourage the engagement of women from disadvantaged groups such as Dalits and Janajatis? • Have recent development trends such as increased labour migration, literacy, economic status, reproductive health and such had any influence on women’s engagement in different committees? • Is the participation and representation of women ensured as mentioned in the policy? If so, how, and what is the trend in terms of time/ year? • In the different stages of the Trail Bridge programme, are there

		differences in the way and degree to which women and men take part?
2.	Economic opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what kind of work are women engaged? • Are women skilled enough to be part of the construction work? • Is there any wage difference between men and women? Does that cover the standard of minimum wage as provisioned by the Government of Nepal? • Are there any special provisions in place to ensure women’s engagement in the construction work or in the post construction phase i.e. maintenance? • Is there any change in the number of women in different businesses or enterprises after the construction of the bridge?
3.	Gender roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the trend of women’s engagement in the trail bridge programme? • Does the community accept the idea of women or men taking leadership roles in the trail bridge programme? • Is there any provision for flexi hours for individuals engaged in labour or in committees? • Has there been any change in the condition and position of women in the society? If so, could any of this change be attributed the trail bridge programme? • How do men and the local community in general perceive women’s engagement in the trail bridge programme? • Has the trail bridge programme had any impact on women’s workload in any way (i.e. unpaid care work)? If so, what impact, and how did this happen? • Has there been any change in women’s mobility outside the house or the community following the construction of the trail bridge? • How often are women given the responsibility of trail bridge maintenance work? If they are, how are they paid?
4.	Access and opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do women have access to information, opportunities and different processes under trail bridge programme? • Are any special measures in place to ensure women’s access to the trail bridge programme, from the beginning to the end? • Are there any specific mechanisms to ensure the implementation of the available policy provisions? How does this work in practice in the trail bridge programme? • Has women’s control over different natural and physical resources changed after the construction of the trail bridge? If so, how? • Is there any specific budget to ensure the increased access of women to different opportunities? • Who crosses the trail bridge, and for what purpose?
5.	Ensuring rights of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What provisions, if any, are put in place to ensure there is no sexual harassment at the work site? • Has the trail bridge programme supported women from the community to ensure their other rights? If so, what rights are ensured, and how? • Are women adequately informed about the processes and opportunities related to the trail bridge programme and how it has been delivered? • Is there any situation that curtails women from being part of trail bridge programme?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do women with small children and/or other care responsibilities (such as disabled or elderly family members) take part in the trail bridge programme? If so, are any additional benefits provided to them? Has the trail bridge programme been able to bring new facilities to the village? If so, has this been helpful to women?
6.	Social cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the trail bridge resulted in any change to relations with nearby communities, or engagement in any social networks? If so, what changes have occurred? Has the trail bridge had any specific effects on women’s social networks? If so, what?
7.	Role of different actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which actors are involved in the trail bridge programme, and who takes what role? In what way do the different roles of these actors influence women, and gender relations more generally? Who plays the greatest role in translating policy provisions into practice?

5.3 Method of Analysis

The analysis will be entirely based on the evidences gained from the various sources outlined – that is, the literature review, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and in-depth case studies. The findings will nevertheless be backed by the facts and figures derived from secondary sources as explained in section 5.1.

The gender continuum as outlined below will serve as the reference for the overall analysis. Through the analysis, the point at which the current policy and practice falls on the gender continuum will be located – that is, whether it is gender exploitative, blind, aware, responsive or transformative.

Exploitative	Blind	Aware	Responsive/ Accommodative	Transformative
Take advantage of the rigid gender norms and existing imbalances to empower and to achieve the programme objective	No prior consideration for how gender norms and unequal power relations affect the achievement of objectives or how objectives impact on gender	Consciously address gender constraints and opportunities and plan a gender objective	Acknowledge the role of gender norms and inequalities and seek to develop actions that adjust to or compensate for them. However, such projects do not actively seek to change the norms and inequalities	Encourage critical awareness of gender roles among men and women; promote the position of women; challenge the distribution of resources and allocation of duties between men and women; and/or address the power relationships between women and others in the communities

Special emphasis will be given to any positive outcomes of the trail bridge programme in effecting changes to gender roles and power relations between men and women in the respective communities.

As the sample bridges are from three ecological regions representing different socio-economic settings, the case studies will provide insights into such dimensions, as influenced by remoteness, ethnicity, educational attainment and similar variables. Through the field research, the team will seek to identify factors that support or hinder positive changes in gender relations. If pertinent, observations will also be made on any other development interventions that have had any effect on redistributing roles and labour divisions, to assess their relevance for the trail bridge programme.

The research will seek to formulate recommendations at two levels:

- Policies - mapping out any current gaps; and
- Practices – mechanisms for the enforcement of the current policies and practices on the ground.

The recommendations will take into account the concept of ‘progressive realisation’.

5.4 Dissemination of Findings

As it has been mentioned in the research proposal, the current study is of a pioneering nature. The results of the research are therefore expected to attract considerable interest, and will be disseminated amongst academics, policy makers, related development agencies, and organisations and networks advocating and working for the rights of women. The main objective of the dissemination is to generate debate and attract interest in making appropriate changes at the levels of both policy and practice.

The final findings of the research will be published in a quality report to be disseminated in the planned seminar. Several other documents will also be published in the process of the research, as also mentioned in the research proposal.

- Inception report and final research report will be uploaded in the webpage of ReCAP and HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Nepal.
- A shorter version of the report derived from the research report in both English and Nepali languages will be circulated mainly to the interested parties for their information.
- A policy brief will be prepared and published in both English and Nepali for sharing with policy makers. The aim will be to contribute to appropriate changes in current policies, frameworks and practices. HELVETAS will also develop an advocacy strategy and plan for internal use.
- An academically oriented research article will be published in an international peer-reviewed journal relevant to the transport sector. The team will also submit an article for publication in a gender or women’s rights related journal.

The published reports and documents will be disseminated through different forums to reach a wider readership, targeting different audiences such as

- General public, journalists and development actors through the web-page
- Women’s rights activists, organisations and networks through the gender equality and social inclusion related platforms at both national and international level through national consultations and the seminar.
- Policy makers and other stakeholders through the seminar and Policy Brief.
- Specific sharing with DoLIDAR, SDC and TBSU as DoLIDAR implements the TB SWAp under which SDC provides financial support and HELVETAS provides technical assistance to the government.
- The webinar will open to interested individuals beyond the direct stakeholders. Participants from other countries implementing trail bridge programmes such as Ethiopia, Laos, Guatemala and Honduras will be invited to join the webinar.
- HELVETAS may further build on this research to assess the situation in other countries and collectively influence their trail bridge programme.

6 Work plan

The research team will closely coordinate with the District Technical Office and District Development Committee while in the field, as the latter are the responsible agencies for trail bridges in the districts. The research team plans to execute the research following the schedule given below. No changes are made in the given work plan compared to the one proposed in the technical proposal.

S.N	Activity	September				October				November				December				January				February				March				April			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
5	Preparation of Inception Report and submission to ReCAP	■																															
6	Selection of bridges, design and development of research tools and preparation for field visits		■	■																													
7	Visit to the sites									■	■	■	■																				
8	Mid term progress report													■																			
9	Analysis of information													■	■	■	■																
10	Preparation of Draft Final Report																	■	■	■	■												
11	Seminar to disseminate the findings																					■											
12	Submission of the final report to RecAP																					■											
13	Comments by the RecAP																									■	■						
14	Submission of the final report (including the shorter version of the report)																									■	■	■	■				
15	Publishing of policy brief and shorter version report																													■	■	■	■
16	Journal paper ready for submission																													■	■	■	■

7 Risks

The political situation in the country is still volatile. The political disagreements between major political parties, especially on the federal structure, have caused uncertainty in recent times and may impede movement in the field. Various political parties are demanding amendments to the constitution on different issues and provisions. Unfortunately, one of the selected districts falls under a relatively high risk zone for political unrest. This may impact the planned schedule of fieldwork. In case of difficulties, HELVETAS may resort to mobilising local partners and resources to complete some of the field tasks within the given time frame.

Nepal also falls within a high risk zone for possible earthquakes, as was illustrated in the two major earthquakes and numerous aftershocks in April and May 2015 and till date. HELVETAS has an organisational preparedness plan in place for such an eventuality. However, the ability to respond and still deliver research results on a timely basis is inevitably strongly related to the scale of any disaster.

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Annex A: Districts qualifying for the research and completed bridges therein

District	Bridge no	Bridge name	% of women in UC
Agrakhanchi	50 5 013 18 06 4	Bahakati	100 %
	50 5 037 18 06 3	Banke dhodheni	71 %
	50 5 002 18 06 1	Hadikot	36 %
	50 5 037 18 06 1	Nayabasti	27 %
Darchula	75 5 040 18 06 1	Chhola Bagar	67 %
	75 5 020 18 06 1	Lima	33 %
	75 5 033 18 06 1	Chiure bagar	33 %
	75 5 036 18 06 1	Malekatha	27 %
Dolpa	62 5 011 18 06 2	Khargad	100 %
	62 5 023 18 06 1	Bandar Phadka	73 %
	62 5 008 18 06 1	Sribinde	33 %
	62 5 009 18 06 1	Luhun Bagar	27 %
	62 5 011 18 06 1	Jimichaur	27 %
	62 5 005 18 06 1	Mathillo Galligad	22 %
	62 5 005 18 06 6	Nada	22 %
	62 5 015 18 06 1	Raktang	20 %
	62 5 010 18 06 1	Khaddu	11 %
Morang	05 5 001 18 06 1	Adarsha	100 %
	05 5 023 18 06 1	Kadiya	100 %
	05 5 005 18 06 2	Kathgada	33 %
	05 5 011 18 06 1	Kumbigaudaghat	33 %
	05 5 057 18 06 2	Gherawoti	33 %
	05 5 007 18 06 1	Chhalgachhi	29 %
Rukum	52 5 018 18 06 1	Domai khola Truss	100 %
	52 5 041 18 06 1	Tilicha	18 %
Sarlahi	19 5 062 18 06 1	Sundarpur	86 %
Syangja	41 5 020 18 06 1	Matethar Ghat	67 %