Fields Without Safety Nets: Analysis of Gendered Informality in the Agricultural Sector and the Cost of Social Insecurity

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1 Introduction

Nepal's rural labor is shifting as male outmigration, climate stress, and financialization reshape livelihoods. Women now serve as cultivators, caregivers, household heads, and informal entrepreneurs, yet much of their work remains unpaid and outside formal labor policies. To address this, MoLESS introduced the Social Security Act (2079 BS) to include informal and self-employed workers, especially women. Despite its intent, uptake is minimal. Rural women continue to rely on banks, cooperatives, and microfinance for risk management and income smoothing, leaving them vulnerable to debt cycles, market shocks, and exclusion from contributory safety nets.

2 Objectives

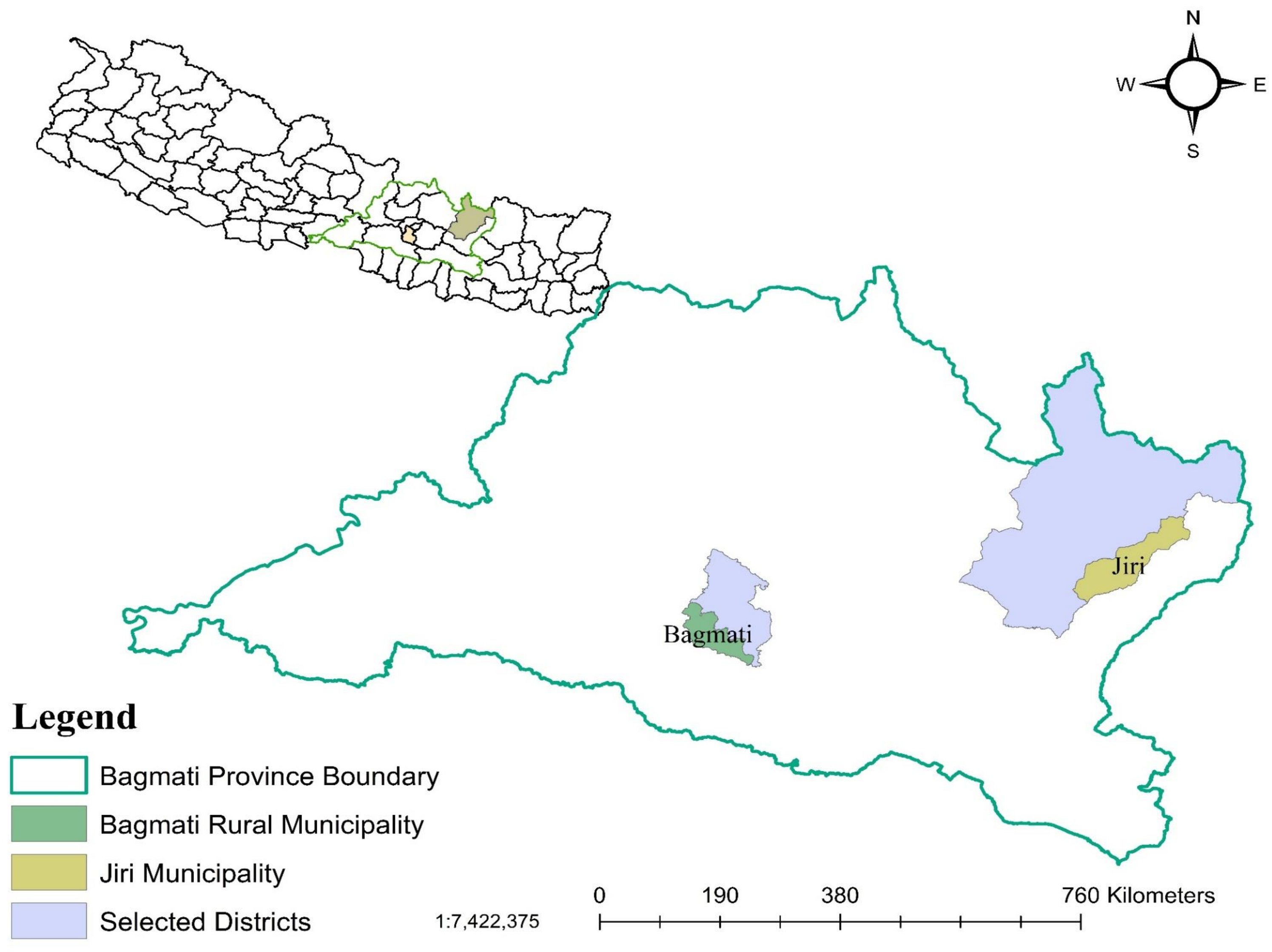
Main Objective

Analyze why women informal workers in Nepal's agriculture rely more on BFIs than the government's Social Security Fund, and how this is shaped by gendered labor dynamics and rural employment trends.

Sub-Objectives

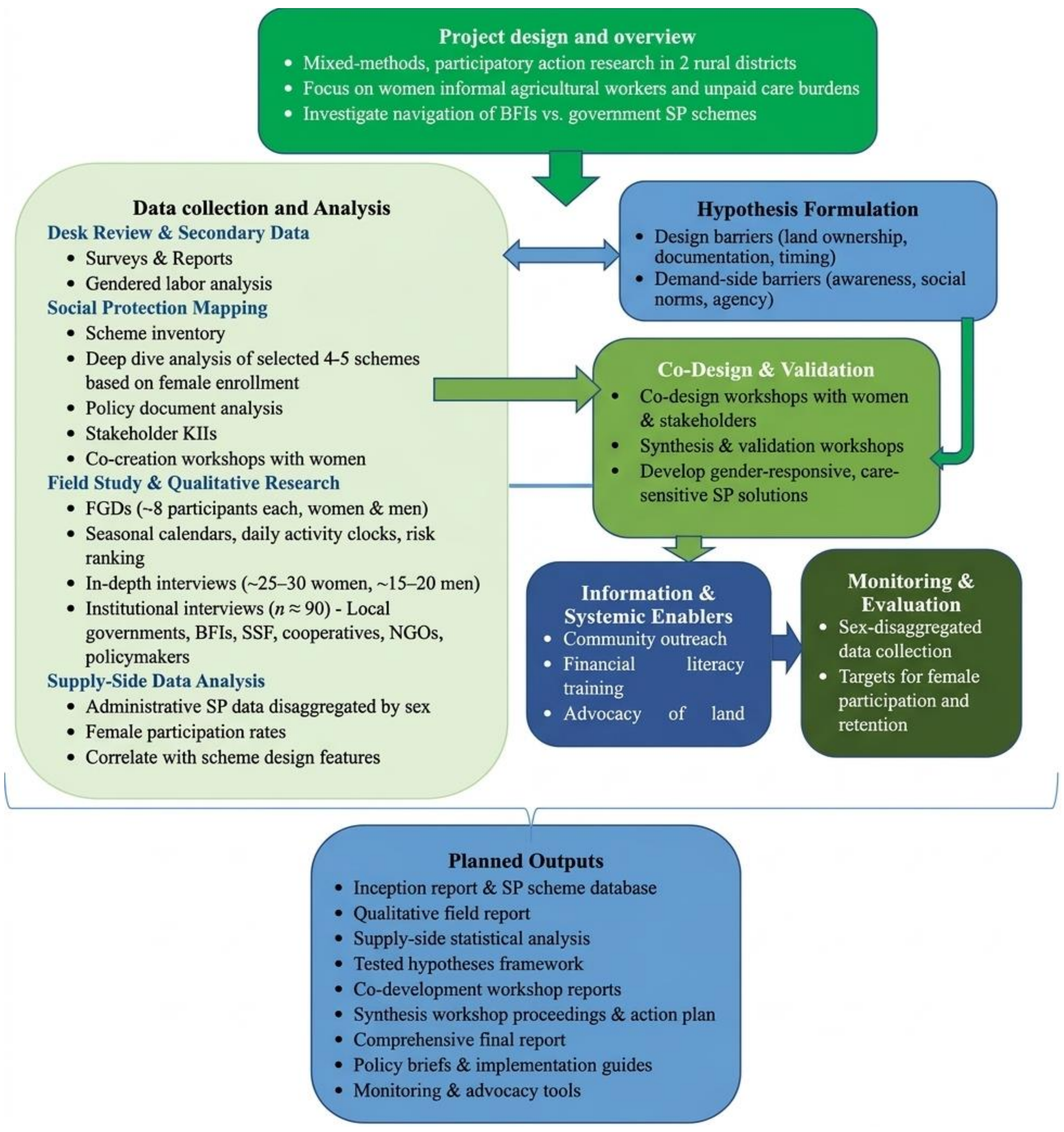
- Map the gendered risk environment and coping mechanisms, including BFIs.
- Review and analyze social protection schemes for design flaws and redesign opportunities.
- Identify gendered uptake patterns and supply-side administrative barriers.
- Examine demand-side barriers preventing women's access to schemes.
- Translate findings into actionable policy recommendations.

3 Study Coverage



The study focuses on two contrasting socio-economic contexts in Nepal, **Jiri Municipality,** a rural area characterized by strong agrarian livelihoods and **Bagmati Rural Municipality** an area with urban proximity yet on the fringes of inclusion.

4 Methodology



5 Key Activities

The project is ongoing research hence; some activities are complete while some are ongoing.

Completed: Stakeholder identification and mapping; comprehensive secondary literature review; securing ethical approvals from the Social Welfare Council and local authorities.

Ongoing (Fieldwork):

• Conducting KIIs with major stakeholders in Lalitpur and Dolakha .

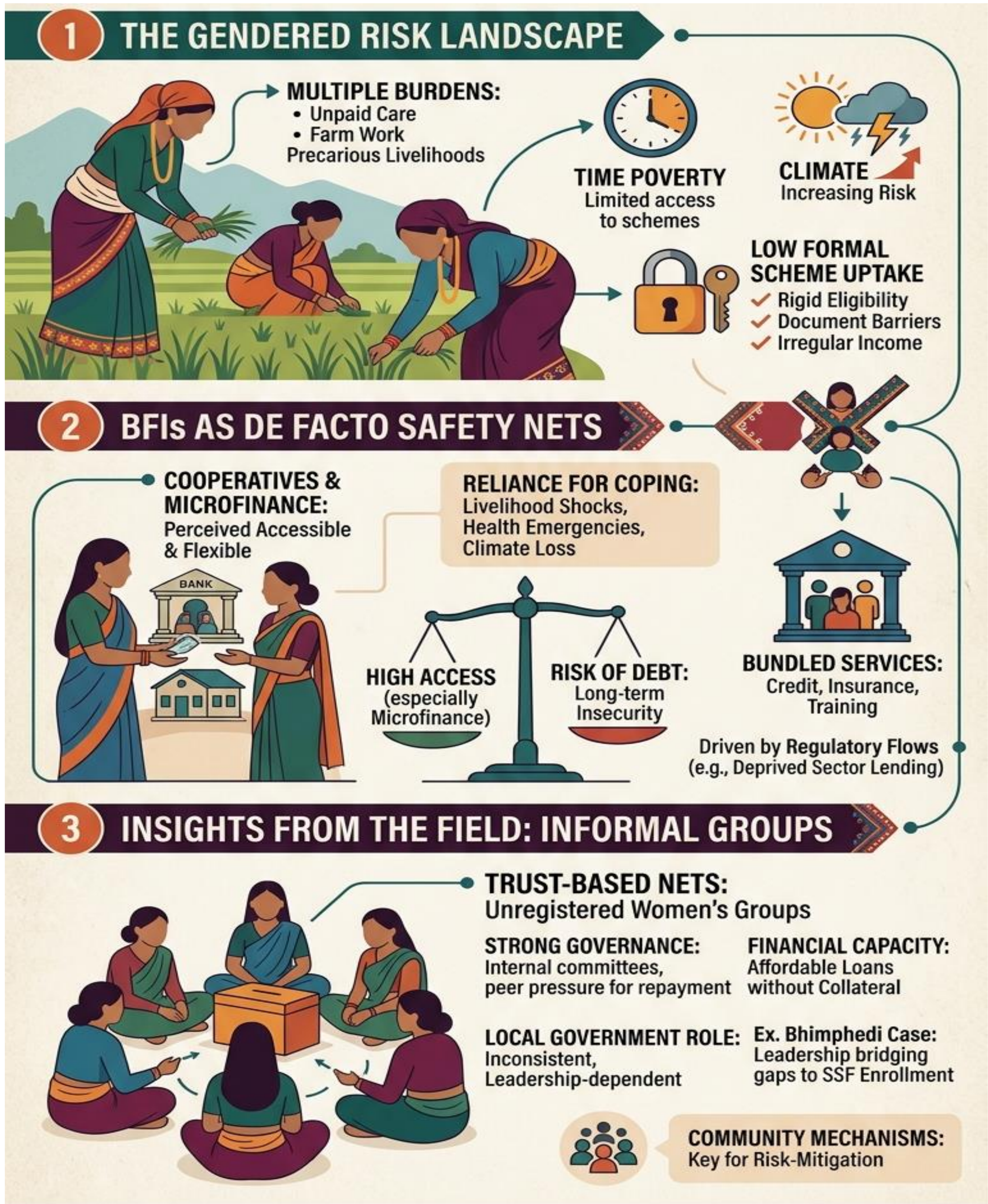
Community level consultation with Women's Cooperatives in Jiri

In the remaining period, the project:

• aims to develop co-designed financial inclusion roadmaps and gender-responsive improvements to social protection program design.

• finalize outputs including an Advocacy Toolkit, policy brief, and implementation guides to help policymakers recognize and value unpaid care work.

6 Key Observations



- Field findings show women rely on informal savings groups, cooperatives, and microfinance not by choice alone, but because these systems align with their realities of trust and usability.
- The next phase will use Key Informant Interviews with lead farmers, women's cooperatives, Ama Samuha, and agricultural groups to explore variations, power dynamics, and pathways for scalable inclusion.

(a). Consulatations with Local Government at Bhimphedi Rural Municipality (b). Community level consultation with Women's Cooperatives in Jiri-6 and (c). Visit to informal worker at a textile industry

7 Actionable Recommendations

- Design for Time Poverty Restructure social protection to reflect women's care and farm labor constraints, with localized, flexible, and season-sensitive processes.
- Integrate Livelihoods and Protection Link training, inputs, and cooperative participation directly to social protection enrollment, reducing reliance on debt for shocks.
- Institutionalize Local Accountability Incentivize municipalities to enroll informal workers, assign clear responsibilities, and embed accountability so schemes succeed by design.

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