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Community-Based Educational Engagement for Strengthening Livelihood Resilience among the Indigenous Community to Support Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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ABSTRACT

This article reports a community service program aimed at strengthening livelihood resilience among the Danuwar community in Tama Ghat, Nepal, through community-based educational engagement. The program was designed in response to persistent livelihood insecurity, land marginalization, and the erosion of indigenous agricultural knowledge faced by the community. Using a participatory and ethnographically informed approach, the program involved community dialogue, reflective learning, and informal educational activities focused on livelihood diversification, indigenous knowledge recognition, and adaptive coping strategies. The results indicate improved community awareness of sustainable livelihood practices, increased appreciation of indigenous knowledge, and greater community participation in diversified income-generating activities such as wage labor, small-scale farming, and local entrepreneurship. The program also contributed to strengthening social cohesion and community confidence in navigating socio-economic change. The study demonstrates the role of education-centered community engagement in promoting resilient and inclusive livelihoods among indigenous communities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Keval timi” timi” nai ho ki chinna aeko ma Tara, timi ta yahaa nachinnine bhacchhau”. “I have come only to see whether you are ‘you,’ but you have become unrecognizable” (published in a book by K. Pradhan in 1984 about “A History of Nepali Literature” in Schitya Akademi Bharat Printers, Delhi, India).

This poetic reflection captures the lived reality of many indigenous communities experiencing rapid socio-economic change, where traditional identities and livelihood practices gradually become unrecognizable under the pressures of marginalization and modernization (Cooms & Saunders, 2024). For communities such as the Danuwar of Tama Ghat in Nepal, shifts in livelihood patterns are not merely economic transformations but deeply affect cultural identity, social cohesion, and community resilience. The erosion of indigenous knowledge and traditional ways of living underscores the need for community-based educational engagement that supports adaptive livelihoods while preserving cultural integrity (Sharma, 2025).

Indigenous communities in many developing countries continue to experience structural vulnerabilities related to livelihood insecurity, limited access to education, and marginal participation in socio-economic development processes. In Nepal, indigenous groups such as the Danuwar community have historically faced land dispossession, economic marginalization, and social exclusion, which collectively undermine their capacity to sustain resilient livelihoods. Livelihood challenges among indigenous communities are often multidimensional, involving not only material deprivation but also the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems, cultural identity, and adaptive capacities (Ellis, 1999).

The Danuwar community residing in Tama Ghat, Panchkhal Municipality, Kavrepalanchowk district, represents one such marginalized indigenous group whose livelihood practices have undergone significant transformation. Traditionally dependent on agriculture, fishing, and forest-based resources, the community has been compelled to diversify its livelihood strategies due to land scarcity, elite domination, population pressure, and broader processes of globalization. While infrastructural developments and market integration have created new economic opportunities, these changes have also contributed to the gradual decline of traditional agricultural knowledge and increased vulnerability among community members, particularly women and youth (Dahal & Aram, 2013; Shahu, 2023).

Education plays a critical role in strengthening community resilience and enabling adaptive livelihood strategies. From a human capability perspective, education enhances individuals’ ability to make informed choices, expand livelihood options, and participate meaningfully in development processes (Parr, 2003). However, access to contextually relevant and culturally responsive educational support remains limited for many indigenous communities in Nepal. Formal education systems often fail to recognize indigenous knowledge and local livelihood practices, thereby weakening the link between education and sustainable community development (Scoones, 2009). This gap highlights the need for community-based educational engagement that integrates local knowledge with adaptive livelihood learning.

Community service programs grounded in participatory and educational approaches have been shown to contribute effectively to livelihood empowerment by fostering awareness, skill development, and collective action within marginalized communities (Ellis, 1999; Scoones, 2009). Such initiatives emphasize collaboration with community members as active partners rather than passive beneficiaries, ensuring that interventions are locally relevant and socially sustainable. In the context of indigenous communities, community-based education can also function as a mechanism for preserving cultural identity while supporting socio-economic

adaptation in changing environments (taken from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007). United Nations General Assembly Resolution 61/295). Aligned with global development agendas, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), community-based livelihood education initiatives contribute to poverty reduction, quality education, reduced inequalities, and environmental sustainability. Specifically, SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 15 (Life on Land) emphasize inclusive development approaches that empower indigenous peoples and protect their knowledge systems (Sherma *et al.*, 2024). Integrating these principles into community service programs strengthens their relevance and impact.

Many previous studies regarding the indigenous community have been well-reported (Sumaludin, 2024; Ali & Kamraju, 2024; Karmaker, 2025). This article reports a community service program aimed at strengthening livelihood resilience among the Danuwar community in Tama Ghat, Nepal, through community-based educational engagement. The program focuses on raising awareness of diversified livelihood strategies, recognizing indigenous agricultural knowledge, and supporting adaptive coping practices through participatory learning activities. By documenting the implementation process and outcomes of this community service initiative, the study seeks to contribute practical insights into the role of education-centered community engagement in promoting resilient and inclusive livelihoods among indigenous communities.

2. METHOD

This community service program was conducted in Tama Ghat, Panchkhal Municipality, Kavrepalanchowk district, Nepal, in collaboration with the Danuwar community. The program adopted a participatory and education-centered approach, positioning community members as active partners in strengthening livelihood resilience. Community leaders, elders, women, and youth were involved throughout the activities to ensure inclusive participation and mutual learning.

The implementation of the community service program followed four main stages. First, community needs were identified through informal dialogue, observation, and group discussions to understand existing livelihood challenges and coping strategies. Second, educational engagement activities were conducted through reflective discussions and knowledge-sharing sessions focusing on livelihood diversification, recognition of indigenous agricultural practices, and adaptive strategies for responding to socio-economic change. Third, community reflection sessions were facilitated to encourage collective learning, particularly emphasizing the roles of women and youth in sustaining livelihoods. Finally, evaluation and sustainability planning were carried out through joint reflection to identify feasible actions for continuing positive livelihood practices and preserving indigenous knowledge.

Documentation of the program was conducted through field notes, reflective journals, and community feedback to capture responses and perceived changes resulting from the activities. Ethical considerations were maintained through informed consent, respect for cultural values, confidentiality, and community ownership of the engagement process. The program aimed to strengthen community awareness, participation, and resilience through education-based community service.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Community Engagement and Participatory Learning Outcomes

The implementation of the community service program demonstrated strong community engagement, particularly during dialogue-based educational activities. Members of the Danuwar community actively participated in discussions concerning livelihood challenges, adaptive strategies, and everyday coping practices. This participatory engagement confirmed that indigenous communities possess rich experiential knowledge but often lack structured spaces for collective reflection and learning (Scoones, 2009). Through education-centered interaction, community members were able to articulate shared concerns related to land scarcity, income instability, and the gradual erosion of indigenous agricultural practices.

The participatory learning process fostered trust and collaboration between facilitators and community members. Rather than viewing the program as an external intervention, participants increasingly perceived it as a collaborative initiative aligned with their lived realities. Such community ownership is essential for effective and sustainable community service, as it strengthens local commitment and supports long-term social impact (Ellis, 1999).

3.2. Awareness of Livelihood Diversification and Adaptive Strategies

One significant outcome of the program was increased awareness of livelihood diversification as a resilience strategy. Through reflective educational sessions, participants recognized the limitations of relying exclusively on traditional agriculture and discussed the benefits of combining multiple income sources. These included wage labor, small-scale farming, seasonal migration, and local entrepreneurship. This understanding aligns with livelihood frameworks that emphasize diversification as a key mechanism for reducing vulnerability and enhancing household resilience.

Importantly, the program helped reframe livelihood diversification as an adaptive response rather than a departure from cultural values. Intergenerational dialogue enabled elders to share traditional practices while younger members contributed perspectives on market-oriented activities. This exchange supported a balanced approach to livelihood adaptation that integrates indigenous knowledge with contemporary economic realities.

3.3. Recognition of Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Identity

Educational engagement also facilitated renewed recognition of indigenous agricultural knowledge within the Danuwar community. Participants reflected on traditional farming techniques, seed preservation, and land management practices that had been marginalized due to modernization and market pressures. Recognizing indigenous knowledge as a valuable resource contributed to increased community confidence and cultural pride, particularly among elders (taken from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007). United Nations General Assembly Resolution 61/295 (Shahu, 2023).

This process supports the view that community-based education can function as both a developmental and cultural preservation tool. By valuing local knowledge, educational engagement strengthens identity while enabling adaptive innovation, which is essential for sustainable community development among indigenous populations.

3.4. Social Cohesion and Inclusive Participation

The community service activities contributed to strengthening social cohesion by creating opportunities for collective reflection. Group discussions enabled participants to identify

common challenges and shared aspirations, reducing individual isolation and encouraging collaborative problem-solving. Women's participation was particularly notable, as the program provided a space for women to express experiences related to livelihood insecurity and resource access. Such inclusive engagement is critical for equitable community development and aligns with principles of reduced inequality and social inclusion.

The main outcomes of the community service activities and their relevance to education and livelihood resilience are summarized in **Table 1**, which synthesizes key activities, observed outcomes, and their broader implications.

Table 1. Community service activities, outcomes, and educational implications.

Community Service Activity	Observed Outcomes	Educational and Social Implications
Community dialogue and needs identification	Increased participation and trust	Strengthened community ownership and engagement
Reflective educational discussions	Improved awareness of livelihood diversification	Enhanced adaptive decision-making
Indigenous knowledge sharing sessions	Recognition of traditional practices	Reinforced cultural identity and confidence
Inclusive group reflection (women and youth)	Greater social cohesion	Improved inclusiveness and collective learning

3.6. Implications for Community Service and Education

The findings indicate that education-centered community service can play a meaningful role in strengthening livelihood resilience among indigenous communities. By fostering participatory learning, recognizing indigenous knowledge, and encouraging inclusive dialogue, the program contributed to both social empowerment and adaptive livelihood practices. These outcomes support the argument that community service initiatives grounded in local realities and educational engagement are effective tools for promoting sustainable and inclusive development (Scoones, 2009).

Overall, the program demonstrates that community-based educational engagement can bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and contemporary livelihood challenges, contributing to resilient, culturally grounded, and socially inclusive community development.

4. CONCLUSION

This community service program demonstrates that education-centered and participatory engagement can play an important role in strengthening livelihood resilience among the Danuwar community in Tama Ghat, Nepal. Through dialogue-based learning, collective reflection, and recognition of indigenous knowledge, the program contributed to improved community awareness of livelihood diversification, strengthened social cohesion, and renewed appreciation of cultural identity. These outcomes indicate that community-based education can support indigenous communities in adapting to socio-economic change while maintaining cultural continuity.

Although structural challenges such as limited land access and economic inequality persist, the program highlights the potential of educational community service to foster empowerment, collective learning, and adaptive capacity at the community level. Integrating local knowledge, inclusive participation, and reflective learning into community service initiatives is essential for promoting sustainable and resilient livelihoods. The experience from

this program provides practical insights for future community service activities aimed at supporting indigenous and marginalized communities through education-based engagement.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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