Aalborg University

Department of Culture and Learning

Masters in Tourism

Impact of Homestays in women empowerment and entrepreneurship in Nepal: A case study of Nagarkot

Master's Thesis	Fall 2025

Submitted By

Apasara Barailee
Masters in Tourism
Aalborg University, Copenhagen Campus

Supervisor

Martin Trandberg Jensen

Keystrokes (with spaces): 106,906

Abstract

Women's empowerment through tourism has gained increasing attention within gender and development scholarship; however, empirical evidence from peri-urban contexts remains limited. This study examines how operating homestays influences women's empowerment and entrepreneurial development in **Nagarkot**, a peri-urban tourism destination on the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Situated at the intersection of rural livelihoods and urban tourism markets, Nagarkot provides a distinctive context for exploring how homestay tourism reshapes women's socio-economic roles, agency, and gender relations within traditionally patriarchal settings.

Adopting a **qualitative case study approach**, the research draws on in-depth semi-structured interviews with women homestay operators, male family members, and key community stakeholder. The study is guided by women's empowerment and gender-relational frameworks, particularly drawing on Kabeer's resources–agency–achievements model and Scheyvens' empowerment framework. Data were analysed using **thematic analysis**, combining deductive preset themes derived from the literature with inductively generated emergent themes grounded in participants' lived experiences.

The findings reveal that homestay tourism has contributed positively to women's **economic empowerment** by generating independent income and enhancing social legitimacy within households and communities. Women experienced increased **agency and decision-making power**, often through negotiated and joint household decision-making rather than individual autonomy. Significant gains in **social and psychological empowerment** were evident, including increased confidence, public recognition, and identity shifts from unpaid household roles to entrepreneurship. At the same time, the study highlights persistent challenges, including women's continued responsibility for unpaid domestic labour, resulting in a double workload. Shifts in **gender roles and relations** were observed, with male responses ranging from resistance to active allyship, underscoring empowerment as a relational and contested process. The research also identifies **social disruption and tension**, such as household conflict and community-level inequality, arising from uneven benefit distribution and changing power dynamics.

Critically, the study finds that empowerment through homestay tourism remains **partial and fragile** without sustained institutional support, inclusive governance, and capacity-building initiatives. Women articulated empowerment as extending beyond income to encompass dignity, voice, confidence, and long-term security, emphasizing the need for a holistic understanding of gender equality.

This research contributes to tourism and gender scholarship by offering a nuanced, context-sensitive analysis of women's empowerment in a peri-urban destination, an area often overlooked in existing literature. The findings demonstrate that while homestay tourism can serve as a meaningful pathway toward women's empowerment, its transformative potential depends on relational change, equitable benefit-sharing, and supportive policy frameworks that embed gender equality within sustainable tourism development strategies in Nepal.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

CHN: Community Homestay Network

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

UN: United Nations

CBT: Community Based Tourism

GAD: Gender and Development

RA: Research Assistant

Impact of Homestays in women empowerment and entrepreneurship in Nepal: A case study of Nagarkot

Chapter 1 Introduction

Rural tourism has emerged as a vital component of sustainable development strategies in many developing countries, offering a means to diversify rural economies, preserve cultural heritage, and reduce urban migration. It emphasizes small-scale, community-based experiences that allow visitors to engage with local traditions, lifestyles, and natural environments (Ivona, 2021). Unlike mass tourism, rural tourism seeks to adopt closer interactions between hosts and guests, creating opportunities for cultural exchange and inclusive economic growth. Research carried by *Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2015)*, with title '*Homestay Tourism and the Commercialization of the Rural Home in Thailand*' has found the development of alternative tourism in rural areas of Thailand. These form of tourism has also been a vital instrument for economic development of the rural population utilizing rural settings where they live (p45) (Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen, & Duangsaeng, 2015).

In the context of Nepal, rural tourism holds particular significance as much of the population resides in countryside regions where traditional livelihoods, primarily agriculture, are increasingly vulnerable to globalization, migration, and changing climatic conditions. Thus, promoting rural tourism serves not only as a strategy for income generation but also as a pathway to revitalize rural communities and empower residents to take part in sustainable development (Bhandari, 2013).

Within the framework of rural tourism, homestay programs have become an especially impactful model for community participation and empowerment. Homestays integrate accommodation, cultural exchange, and livelihood diversification by allowing local families to host tourists in their homes and share everyday practices. This model minimizes the need for large-scale infrastructure while ensuring that tourism benefits are distributed directly to households (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

In Nepal, the formalization of homestay tourism through the Homestay Operation Guideline 2010 (Department of Tourism, Nepal, 2025) has encouraged hundreds of communities to establish homestays as a tool for economic inclusion and cultural preservation. Particularly for women,

homestays have opened new avenues for entrepreneurship, skill development, and empowerment, enabling them to transform domestic spaces into income-generating enterprises. As such, homestays not only strengthen the rural tourism sector but also contribute significantly to advancing gender equality and local entrepreneurship across Nepal's evolving rural and peri-urban landscapes.

1.1 Background of the study

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in Nepal and a key contributor to the country's economic and social development. According to *The Kathmandu Post* (2024), Nepal's tourism sector held 1.19 million jobs and generated 2.5 billion USD in revenue in 2023 alone (Prasain, 2024). Beyond its economic potential, tourism has increasingly been recognized as a powerful tool for poverty alleviation, community development, and cultural preservation, especially in rural and semi-rural areas. United Nations started the initiative with project named '*Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP)*' from 2001 to 2006 in rural areas of Nepal (Bhattarai, Adhikari, & Bamford, 2006). The project was one of the first initiatives in identifying rural tourism destination and empowering the people, especially vulnerable in rural areas of Nepal which had tourism potentials. The report concluded with positive impact of tourism in poverty alleviation among marginalized communities in rural areas of Nepal.

Rural tourism, which promotes travel experiences centered around nature, culture, and local lifestyles, allows visitors to engage directly with communities and their traditions. It provides alternative livelihood opportunities in regions where agriculture and seasonal migration have historically dominated. In the context of Nepal, the development of homestay programs has become a cornerstone of Nepal's community-based tourism initiatives, linking local households directly to the tourism economy (Nepal Tourism Board, 2025).

The introduction of the Homestay Operation Guideline 2010 by the Government of Nepal marked a significant milestone in institutionalizing homestay tourism. This policy aimed to promote inclusive and participatory tourism by encouraging communities, particularly women and marginalized groups, to open their homes to visitors (Department of Tourism, Nepal, 2025). Homestays differ from conventional tourism businesses by emphasizing cultural immersion and

direct benefit-sharing, ensuring that tourism revenue remains within local economies. For many rural and peri-urban families, homestay operations provide an opportunity to diversify income sources, improve living standards, and strengthen social networks. In addition to that, homestays foster cultural exchange, helping preserve traditional crafts, cuisine, and rituals that might otherwise fade under the pressures of modernization and urban migration.

Figure 1: Tourists trying traditional way of making food at local homestay in Nepal (Source: Nepal Tourism Board)

1.1.1 Why Nagarkot for research?

In recent years, the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley, specially Nagarkot, has become an emerging space for rural and cultural tourism. Such village also reflect a dynamic mix of traditional lifestyles and growing exposure to urban influences (Rai, 2012). Improved infrastructure and accessibility have encouraged domestic and international visitors to explore these areas, creating new avenues for local women to participate in tourism through homestay operations.

The village is part of Changunarayan Municipality of Bhaktapur District. It takes about an hour to reach the village with public transportation. Notably, Nagarkot is famous for sunrise and sunset

view as well as Mount Everest can be seen on any clear day, making it one of the must visit place for tourists.
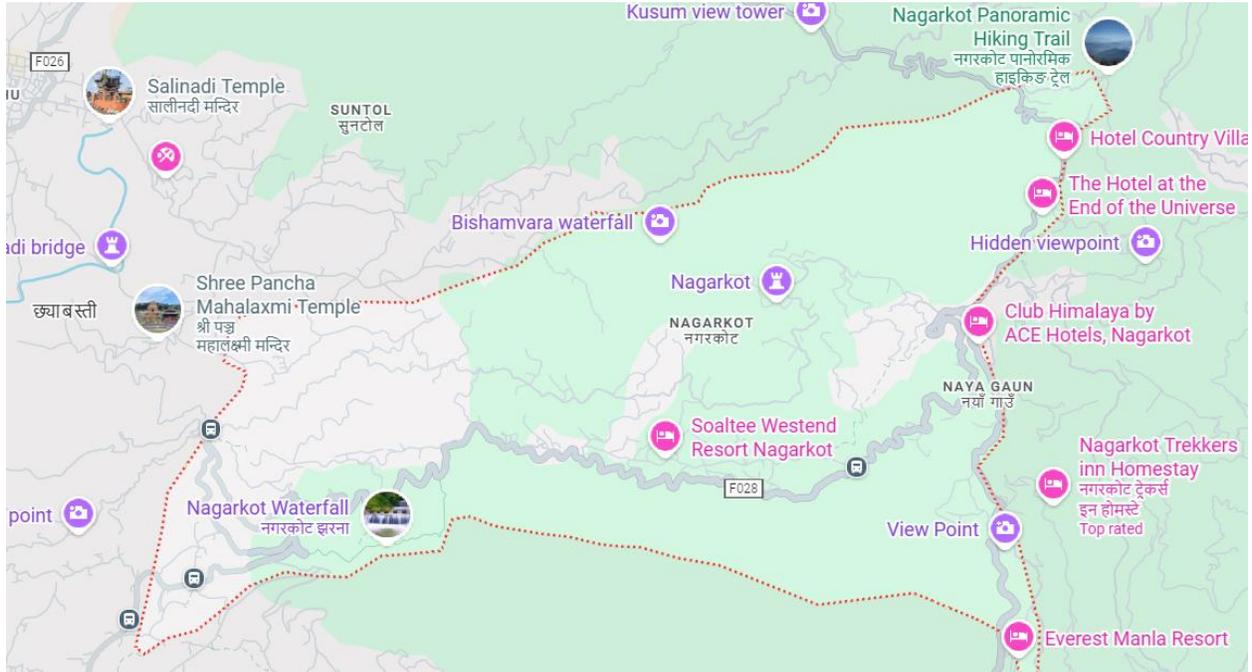
Figure 2: Map showing Nagarkot and its proximity (Source: Google Maps)

Women who once remained confined to household and agricultural roles are increasingly engaging in hospitality management, small-scale entrepreneurship, and decision-making activities within their communities. However, while these developments are promising, there remains limited research assessing the extent and depth of women's empowerment and entrepreneurial growth resulting from homestay involvement in these peri-urban settings (Nassani, et al., 2019). Understanding these impacts is essential to evaluate whether homestay tourism is fulfilling its potential as a sustainable and gender-inclusive development strategy in Nepal.

Figure 3: Mountains seen from Nagarkot

1.2 Motivation and Problem Formulation
1.2.1 Personal Motivation

My interest in this topic roots from a deep curiosity about how tourism can serve as a vehicle for social transformation, particularly in empowering women within traditional and semi-rural communities. One being a woman myself and another having observed the changing dynamics of Nepal's rural tourism landscape during my internship in Nepal. where homestays are increasingly managed and led by women, I became intrigued by the ways these initiatives influence not only economic outcomes but also social identities and household relations. The outskirts of Kathmandu Valley offer a unique setting to explore these changes, as these areas represent a space of transition between rural heritage and urban influence. Through this research, I aim to understand whether homestay participation truly translates into empowerment, enhancing women's confidence, agency, and decision-making power, or whether existing social hierarchies continue to limit their transformative potential. Personally, I view this study as an opportunity to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality, women empowerment and sustainable tourism in Nepal.

1.2.2 Problem Formulation

Although homestay tourism has been widely promoted as a tool for rural development and women's empowerment, its actual impact on women's lives remains underexplored, particularly in peri-urban settings such as Nagarkot, Bandipur, and Panauti. Women's participation in homestays is often celebrated for generating income and promoting community involvement, yet it is unclear whether this participation leads to long-term empowerment or meaningful entrepreneurial growth (Thakuri & Nepal, 2016). Many women continue to face constraints related to property ownership, financial autonomy, and societal expectations that limit their ability to manage and expand homestay enterprises independently.

To add more to the context, existing studies on homestay tourism in Nepal tend to focus on remote rural communities, leaving a gap in understanding how such initiatives function within rapidly changing peri-urban environments. This research, therefore, seeks to address the following problem: To what extent does homestay tourism contribute to women's empowerment and entrepreneurship in the outskirt villages of Kathmandu Valley, and what social, economic, and cultural factors influence these outcomes?

1.3 Research Aim / Research Question

Main research question: **How has operating homestays have impacted the women in rural village like Nagarkot?**

Sub Questions:

1. How has operating homestays contributed to women's income and household financial stability? (Economic impact)

2. How has running homestays influenced women's social status within their families and communities? (Social impact)

3. What new skills (e.g., hospitality, communication, financial management) have women developed through homestay operations? (Women empowerment)

1.4 Research Objectives

- To evaluate and compare the impact of operating homestays for women within socio-economic status, especially before and after the operation.

- To analytically compare the levels of empowerment between women engaged in homestay entrepreneurship and those involved primarily in traditional household roles within the selected research area.

- To analysis how women balance homestay responsibilities with traditional household duties.

1.5 Scope and Significance of the study

This study is significant in its contribution to understanding the nexus between tourism, women's empowerment, and entrepreneurship within Nepal's evolving rural and peri-urban landscape. Academically, it adds to the growing discourse on gender and development by examining how homestay tourism functions as a pathway toward economic independence, social recognition, and decision-making power for women in traditionally patriarchal settings. While much of the existing literature focuses on remote rural areas, this research explores the transitional spaces on the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley, where rural livelihoods intersect with urban influences, to reveal new dimensions of empowerment and gender dynamics in tourism-based entrepreneurship.

Practically, the study provides valuable insights for local women, community organizations, and development practitioners engaged in promoting inclusive tourism. By documenting the lived experiences of women homestay operators, the research can inform capacity-building initiatives, entrepreneurship training, and financial literacy programs designed to strengthen women's participation in the tourism value chain. It also highlights the barriers, such as limited access to credit, unequal property rights, and cultural constraints, that continue to hinder women's full empowerment, thereby suggesting practical measures for more gender-equitable tourism development.

At the policy level, this study aligns with the vision of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls, as well as Nepal's national tourism and gender empowerment frameworks. By evaluating how homestay tourism can serve as an instrument for achieving SDG 5, the research underscores the potential of community-based tourism to reduce gender disparities, promote women's leadership,

and foster inclusive economic growth. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to a more equitable model of rural tourism, one in which women are not only economic participants but active agents of social change and sustainable development in their communities (Esquivel & Sweetman, 2016).

1.6 Structure of the study

The thesis is divided into six chapters, each one helping to explore how homestay operation affect women's empowerment and business startups in village primarily Nagarkot, situated on the edges of Kathmandu Valley. The first chapter starts by explaining why this topic matters, the main problem, and a quick summary of the whole thesis. It also sets out the research question and smaller questions to guide the study, creating a clear starting point for looking at social and economic issues. The second chapter reviews existing studies and ideas, covering basics like what homestays are, how they empower women, and entrepreneurship. It focuses on rural areas in Nepal and uses theories about gender roles, job opportunities, and community growth to build a strong base for analysis.

The third chapter explains how the research was done, including the thinking behind it, methods like interviews or surveys, ways to collect data, and steps to make sure the work is trustworthy, honest, and ethical, so everything is clear and reliable. The fourth chapter looks closely at the data collected, discussing and explaining results from talks with people and observations. It shows trends in how homestays help women gain more control over decisions, learn new skills, and earn money through their businesses.

The fifth chapter discusses the findings and analyses if the findings are aligned with research questions and research objectives. This chapter answers the research questions of the study. The final sixth chapter wraps up the main findings on how homestays change lives, points out limits like small sample sizes or outside influences, and suggests practical ideas for government, NGOs, and locals to build better support, grow lasting businesses, and boost women's strength in these areas, plus ideas for more studies ahead.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review section of the paper focuses on various available literatures previously studied by various scholars and analyse their findings and try to link with our paper, as suggested by Ridley (2012) in her book The literature review: A step-by-step guide for students (Ridley, 2012). The chapter starts with introducing homestay tourism in context of rural tourism.

2.1 Conceptual Overview

2.1.1 Rural Tourism: Definition, Evolution, and Global Perspectives

According to the UN Tourism (2025), rural tourism is a unique form of travel focused on experiencing the tranquillity and charm of rural life while encouraging a close connection with the natural environment, local culture, and traditional lifestyles (UN Tourism, 2025). It serves as a peaceful alternative to the hectic pace of urban living, allowing travellers to immerse themselves in serene landscapes, take part in local customs, and appreciate the unhurried rhythm of rural communities. This type of tourism promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of nature through authentic engagement with rural ways of life. Similarly, the European Parliament (2023) defines rural tourism as '*an experience rooted in open spaces and shaped by interaction with nature and local residents, primarily within rural and countryside settings*' (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2023).

According to World Bank in Tamang (2025), Nepal is the country with 78% of its population living in rural areas until 2023, (Tamang, 2025). In our research, Nagarkot, though are closer to the capital city, not all houses are modern. We could find houses made from mud and having the roof of galvanized tin and hay in many places through out our research area. In addition to that, it is not just the homestay these villages are offering to the tourists but also various activities like hiking, cultural exploration in the village which are parts of rural tourism.

2.1.2 Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

Nepal has been getting traction on tourism landscape as safe destination and warm and welcoming host for a long time. From porters and trekking guides to homestay hosts, those tourists have loved not only the nature but also the people they get in touch during their stay. To strengthen this, Government of Nepal has updated the previous policy of 2009 in 2005 which prioritize the

development of infrastructure, emphasize on sustainability and promotes community-based tourism (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Nepal, 2025).

There are many cases in academic research where community-based tourism has helped to develop both, destinations as well as community hosting the tourists, especially women in those community. A study carried by Dolezal and Novelli (2022) in Bali, Indonesia, the tourism in the island is led by local residents which has led to the selection of community-based tourism as preferred way of tourism development in the destination. The writers found various hurdles associated with the community-based tourism development, especially during partnership among multi-stakeholder partnerships. However, writers concluded that having CBT in Bali, Indonesia has enabled residents to have space for social empowerment (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022).

In our context, we will also evaluate the multi-stakeholder's relationships in the research area. This paper will also attempt to unravel the knots of social entanglements between 2 genders in the geographical location. Keeping Dolezal & Novelli's (2022) findings in mind, the paper also look through social empowerment for the locals and segregate it with overall empowerment brough by CBT to locals with female, hosting homestays in Nagarkot.

2.1.3 The Homestay Tourism Model: Concept, Features, and Global Practices

The homestay tourism model is a form of community-based tourism (CBT) that enables visitors to stay with local families, experience their culture, and participate in daily life. Unlike mass tourism, which often isolates visitors from local realities, homestay tourism emphasizes authenticity, cultural immersion, and host–guest interaction (Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen, & Duangsaeng, 2015). According to Kontogeorgopoulos et al., (2015) it provides a means for communities, particularly those in rural or marginalized areas, to benefit directly from tourism by transforming their homes into micro-enterprises by commercializing their homes. Homestays are typically characterized by small-scale operations, local ownership, and community participation, ensuring that economic benefits remain within the locality. Globally, countries such as Thailand, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam have adopted the homestay model as a strategy to promote sustainable tourism and rural livelihood diversification.

Homestay tourism also plays a crucial role in promoting gender-inclusive economic opportunities. In many developing regions, women are central to the success of homestay operations, as these ventures often align with their traditional household roles and social responsibilities while opening new avenues for entrepreneurship and empowerment (Tolkach & King, 2015). For instance, research in rural Vietnam highlights that women's involvement in homestays enhances their decision-making power, income control, and social status within the community that eventually leading to tourism development (Quang, et al., 2024).

In Nepal, the homestay model has been institutionalized through the Homestay Operation Guideline 2010, which encourages communities to participate in tourism development by utilizing local culture and resources. Within the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley, this model holds particular promise as it merges rural hospitality with peri-urban accessibility, providing women with opportunities to become both cultural ambassadors and micro-entrepreneurs. Thus, the global and local evolution of homestay tourism underscores its potential as a sustainable, community-driven approach that advances gender equality and rural economic development.

2.2 Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

The concept of women's empowerment has evolved as a central theme in development and gender studies, emphasizing women's ability to make choices, exercise agency, and influence social and economic outcomes that affect their lives. Scheyvens (1999) proposed a framework to evaluate the empowerment with four different dimensions, economic, social, psychological, and political. (Scheyvens, 1999). Though the framework is to evaluate the local communities, we will use the framework to evaluate the empowerment of women in homestay operation in Nagarkot. Within the framework of the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, empowerment involves enhancing women's access to resources, such as education, income, networks, and decision-making power, while challenging the social norms that reinforce inequality. A report prepared for the World Bank conference by Malhotra et. al. (2002) has identified economic, social, and psychological empowerment as the three interrelated dimensions that collectively reflect the extent of women's transformation and participation in public life (Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, 2002).

Building on this theoretical foundation, women's empowerment in the context of homestay tourism can be viewed as both a process and an outcome that emerges through active participation in tourism-related entrepreneurial activities. The economic dimension of empowerment is often the most visible, as women gain income through homestay operations, which allows them to contribute financially to their households and invest in personal or family development. Studies in South and Southeast Asia have shown that participation in small-scale tourism enterprises enables women to enhance their financial independence and control over resources, leading to improved decision-making power within the household (Gupta & Dash, 2021; Suntikul et al., 2020). In Nagarkot, where tourism is closely tied to cultural authenticity and local hospitality, homestay operations provide women an avenue to translate traditional domestic skills into marketable services, bridging the gap between unpaid household labor and paid economic activity. This transition not only strengthens their financial position but also reshapes gender dynamics within the community.

At the same time, social and psychological empowerment emerge as integral outcomes of women's engagement in the homestay sector. Socially, women gain visibility and respect within their communities as they interact with guests, participate in local decision-making, and collaborate with tourism networks. Such engagement promotes confidence and collective agency, reinforcing their social capital and leadership roles (Tolkach & King, 2015). Psychologically, involvement in tourism fosters a sense of pride, self-worth, and identity as women see themselves as capable entrepreneurs and cultural ambassadors. In Nagarkot, where traditional gender norms still influence women's mobility and public participation, the homestay model serves as a transformative platform, one that not only generates income but also cultivates self-efficacy and empowerment at multiple levels. By applying Scheyvens' (1999) framework, this study seeks to examine how these interrelated dimensions of empowerment manifest among women homestay operators and how tourism-based entrepreneurship contributes to advancing gender equality and sustainable rural development in the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley.

2.3 Homestay Tourism and Women's Empowerment in Nepal

Empowerment is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional and dynamic process that encompasses economic independence, psychological confidence, social recognition, and political participation. Rowlands (1997) conceptualizes empowerment through the interrelated forms of "power within," "power to," and "power with," which capture both individual agency and collective strength. These dimensions emphasize that empowerment is not only about access to resources but also about self-awareness, confidence, and solidarity. Within the field of tourism studies, Scheyvens (1999) adapted these ideas into a practical framework for assessing empowerment through four dimensions, economic, social, psychological, and political, particularly within community-based tourism contexts (Rowlands, 1997). This framework is especially relevant for evaluating how homestay operations influence women's lives in settings like Nagarkot, where tourism development intersects with traditional cultural expectations and gender roles. Through homestay participation, women have opportunities to engage in entrepreneurship, interact with guests, and generate income, which collectively contribute to their empowerment at both individual and community levels.

To add more in the context, global research underscores that women's empowerment is fundamental to achieving sustainable tourism development, particularly in societies where patriarchal norms continue to shape gender relations. Abou-Shouk, et al., (2021) highlight how women's participation in tourism enterprises across countries such as Egypt, the UAE, and Oman enhances both social inclusion and local sustainability, despite persistent cultural barriers (Abou-Shouk, Mannaa, & Elbaz, 2021). These findings resonate with the Nepalese context, where women engaged in homestay tourism gain greater visibility and autonomy but also face limitations rooted in social structures and gendered expectations. While some women in Nagarkot and have leveraged homestays as pathways to financial self-reliance and leadership, others continue to navigate challenges related to decision-making authority, workload distribution, and access to training or capital. Understanding this duality is essential for analysing how homestay tourism can serve as both an empowering and constraining force for women, shaping their trajectories within the broader framework of gender equality and sustainable rural development.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the research design and methods that guided my study on the impact of homestay tourism on women's empowerment and entrepreneurship in the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley. For me, methodology chapter was foundation of this thesis, where I have brainstormed for a long time and could not come to the right way to conduct the study. Since my aim was to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and social dynamics that shape women's participation in homestay operations, I had to inner debate on the perception of realities, what should be considered truth and how come we to know something that is completely new to us (Crotty, 1998).

For me, methodology is the lens that help me to see the whole research and conduct it without any biasness, to respondents, analysis and outcome of the study. Therefore, I adopted a qualitative research approach. This approach allowed me to understand not only the economic outcomes of women's involvement but also the personal and social transformations that accompany their engagement in tourism. Through this methodology, I sought to capture the nuanced ways in which gender, culture, and entrepreneurship intersect within the context of peri-urban Nepal.

To achieve this, I employed a combination of semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis as my primary research tools. I purposefully selected Nagarkot village located in the east outskirts of Kathmandu Valley where homestay tourism has become increasingly prominent, as these sites represent communities in transition from traditional livelihoods to more tourism-oriented economies. Throughout the research process, I remained attentive to ethical considerations, ensuring that all participants provided informed consent and that their identities were protected if they wanted to. By combining field insights with theoretical perspectives from gender and development studies, I aimed to construct a comprehensive understanding of how homestay tourism advances women's empowerment and entrepreneurial growth in these evolving communities.

3.1 Philosophy of Science

This research is positioned within an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that social reality is not objective or singular but is socially constructed through human interaction, meanings, and

experiences (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Interpretivism is particularly appropriate for tourism and gender research that seeks to understand how individuals interpret and negotiate their roles within specific socio-cultural and institutional contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this study, women's empowerment through homestay operations is understood as a subjective and context-dependent process, shaped by local gender norms, household relations, and tourism governance structures in rural Nepal.

From an ontological perspective, the study adopts a relativist stance, recognizing the existence of multiple realities as experienced by different actors, including women homestay operators, family members, local leaders, and tourism officials. These realities are fluid and relational rather than fixed, reflecting the socially embedded nature of gender relations and empowerment processes Guarino, Oberle & Staab, 2009). Such an ontological position aligns with gender and development scholarship, which emphasizes that empowerment cannot be universally defined or measured but must be understood within specific cultural and social contexts (Kabeer, 1999).

Epistemologically, the research is grounded in a subjectivist and constructionist orientation, whereby knowledge is co-created through interactions between the researcher and participants. Rather than striving for value-free objectivity, the study acknowledges the role of interpretation, reflexivity, and positionality in the production of knowledge. This epistemological stance is consistent with feminist and gender-sensitive research traditions, which argue for the importance of privileging marginalized voices, particularly women's narratives, in order to reveal power relations and social inequalities (Cornwall, 2016).

The methodological implications of this philosophical positioning are reflected in the adoption of a qualitative case study design, supported by semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. As argued by Nunkoo, Hall, and Ladsawut (2017), tourism social science research benefits from methodological choices that are sensitive to gendered power relations and that move beyond positivist, quantitatively dominated approaches. Qualitative methodologies are particularly well suited to capturing women's lived experiences, agency, and constraints within tourism systems, especially in contexts where gendered labor and decision-making are often informal and invisible.

The use of thematic analysis further aligns with this interpretivist and gender-aware philosophy of science, as it allows for the systematic interpretation of meanings, patterns, and narratives emerging from participants' accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through this philosophical and methodological alignment, the study seeks to produce rich, contextually grounded knowledge that contributes to tourism scholarship, gender and development theory, and policy discussions on inclusive rural tourism in Nepal.

Overall, this philosophical positioning supports a context-sensitive, reflexive, and ethically grounded inquiry into women's participation in homestay tourism. By situating the research within an interpretivist and gender-aware philosophy of science, the study seeks to generate rich, meaningful insights that contribute to tourism scholarship, gender and development theory, and policy debates on inclusive rural tourism in Nepal.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore how operating homestays has impacted women in rural communities located on the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley, with a specific focus on Nagarkot (Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Swift, 2014). A qualitative case study is particularly appropriate for examining complex social phenomena embedded within real-life contexts, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009). In tourism and hospitality research, qualitative case studies have been widely employed to capture lived experiences, power relations, and socio-cultural transformations at the local level (Nunkoo, 2018).

The case of Nagarkot is selected due to its proximity to Kathmandu Valley and its active engagement in community-based homestay tourism, where women play a central role in hosting, management, and cultural representation. Studying such a setting allows for an in-depth, context-sensitive understanding of how rural tourism intersects with gender roles, livelihoods, and community development. Case study research in rural tourism contexts has proven effective in revealing how tourism initiatives influence women's socio-economic positioning and agency (Scheyvens, 1999; Acharya & Halpenny, 2013).

The analysis is guided by gender equality and women's empowerment theories, which conceptualize empowerment as a multidimensional process encompassing access to resources, agency, decision-making power, and changes in gender relations (Kabeer, 1999). Applying this theoretical lens enables the study to move beyond purely economic outcomes and instead examine social, cultural, and relational dimensions of empowerment generated through women's participation in homestay entrepreneurship. This framework is particularly relevant in patriarchal rural contexts such as Nepal, where tourism may simultaneously create opportunities and reproduce structural inequalities.

To ensure a holistic and triangulated perspective, the study incorporates views from multiple actors, including women homestay operators, family members (particularly husbands) and local leaders. Engaging multiple stakeholders enhances analytical depth and credibility by capturing diverse interpretations of women's roles and the broader impacts of homestay tourism at household and community levels (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Data collection will involve semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document review. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to articulate their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in their own words while enabling the researcher to probe emerging themes (Bryman, 2016). Participant observation will be used to gain insights into everyday practices, gendered labor divisions, and interactions between hosts and guests, thereby complementing interview data and strengthening contextual understanding. In addition, relevant tourism policies, local development plans, and community records will be reviewed to situate individual experiences within broader institutional and policy frameworks.

Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which allows for the systematic identification and interpretation of recurring patterns across qualitative data sets. The choice of this qualitative analytical approach is consistent with tourism social science research that emphasizes the importance of gender-sensitive methodologies in capturing women's voices, lived experiences, and power relations (Nunkoo, Hall, & Ladsawut, 2017). By prioritizing participants' narratives and contextual meanings, thematic analysis enables a nuanced understanding of how

empowerment, entrepreneurship, and structural constraints are experienced and articulated by women involved in homestay operations. This methodological alignment strengthens the study's capacity to reveal gendered dimensions of tourism development that are often overlooked in quantitatively driven research, while maintaining analytical rigor and reflexivity.

3.3 Qualitative case study approach

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine how operating homestays has impacted women in rural communities on the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley, with a specific focus on Nagarkot. Case study research is particularly suited to investigating contemporary social phenomena within their real-life context, as it enables an in-depth exploration of experiences, relationships, and processes embedded in a specific setting (Denscombe, 2017). In line with the objectives of this research, the case study approach serves exploratory purpose, allowing for a detailed examination of women's lived experiences, empowerment processes, and gender relations associated with homestay tourism.

Case studies may be designed using a single case or multiple cases and can involve multiple levels of analysis depending on the scope of the research (Yin, 1984, as cited in Eisenhardt, 1989). This study employs a single-case design, which facilitates close engagement with the research context and enables a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Focusing on one case allows the researcher to capture the complexity of women's participation in homestay operations, including household dynamics, community interactions, and institutional influences (Denscombe, 2017). Such depth is particularly important when examining empowerment, which is a multidimensional and context-specific process.

The selection of Nagarkot as the case site was purposive rather than random. Nagarkot represents a relevant and information-rich setting due to the presence of established homestay initiatives in which women play a central managerial and operational role. Despite its proximity to Kathmandu Valley, the area has received limited scholarly attention with regard to the gendered impacts of homestay tourism. This provides an opportunity to contribute original insights to the literature on women's empowerment, rural tourism, and inclusive development in Nepal. The researcher's

academic focus on gender, rural tourism, and community development, along with preliminary engagement with local stakeholders, further supported the suitability of this case.

A qualitative research approach underpins the overall research design, as it allows for a nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives, meanings, and experiences. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document review, enabling the triangulation of data from women homestay operators, family members, local leaders, and tourism officials. These methods are particularly appropriate for addressing the research questions, which seek to understand not only economic outcomes but also changes in women's agency, decision-making power, and social roles.

Data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis, which facilitates the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns related to women's empowerment, entrepreneurship, and structural challenges within the homestay sector (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analytical approach supports a systematic examination of how women experience and negotiate opportunities and constraints associated with homestay operations. By integrating a qualitative case study design with thematic analysis, this research generates a context-sensitive and gender-informed understanding of how homestay tourism influences women's lives and contributes to broader socio-economic transformations in rural areas near the Kathmandu Valley.

3.4 Research Strategy

This study adopts an exploratory research strategy to examine how homestay operations affect different dimensions of women's lives in rural communities on the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley (Stevens, & Wrenn, 2013). Exploratory research is particularly appropriate when a research topic is relatively under-researched or when existing knowledge is fragmented, as it allows the researcher to gain initial insights and develop a deeper understanding of complex social phenomena (Stebbins, 2001). In the context of women's participation in homestay tourism, an exploratory strategy enables the investigation of economic, social, cultural, and empowerment-related outcomes without imposing predefined analytical categories.

The exploratory strategy aligns closely with the qualitative case study approach, as both emphasize flexibility, depth, and context sensitivity. Case studies are especially suitable for exploratory research because they allow the researcher to investigate phenomena within their real-life settings and to capture multiple perspectives (Yin, 2009). Rather than seeking generalizable findings, this study aims to understand how women themselves perceive and experience changes in income generation, household decision-making, social status, and gender relations as a result of operating homestays. Such an approach is particularly relevant for empowerment research, which is inherently multidimensional and context dependent (Kabeer, 1999).

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, the exploratory research strategy facilitates the identification of emerging themes and patterns across different dimensions of women's lives. Exploratory qualitative research allows researchers to remain open to unexpected findings and to refine analytical focus as data collection progresses (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This flexibility is essential for capturing subtle social changes, such as shifts in confidence, negotiation of household roles, and evolving community perceptions, that may not be evident through structured or quantitative approaches.

Overall, the exploratory research strategy supports a holistic and gender-sensitive understanding of the impacts of homestay tourism on women in rural Nepal. By uncovering both enabling factors and structural constraints associated with homestay entrepreneurship, the study contributes to tourism and gender scholarship by generating grounded insights into how rural tourism initiatives can influence women's empowerment and socio-economic transformation. Exploratory research is therefore well suited to informing future research agendas and policy interventions aimed at promoting inclusive and equitable tourism development (Veal, 2017).

3.5 Selection and Role of the Research Assistant

For this study, a local research assistant (RA) was recruited to facilitate the research process in Nagarkot, particularly in arranging video and in-person interviews with participants. The RA served as a bridge between the authors and various other respondents as well as stakeholders of Nagarkot village. The RA, being from Nagarkot itself was very helpful to complete the study. The recruitment had following criteria

- Had to be a women

- Should be from Nagarkot

- Should have some knowledge on homestay operation

I selected **Ms. Asmita Nagarkoti (**will be called RA onwards), who was pursuing her bachelor's degree and had good interpersonal skills, communication skills and patience. The selection was in accordance with to Leslie and Storey (2003), who stated having a good RA would strengthen the research for any researcher. Likewise, Berg (2007) emphasizes that local assistants can act as guides, translators, or facilitators, providing essential access to communities and fostering culturally appropriate interactions with participants.

The RA's role was strictly facilitative; she was not involved in data analysis, interpretation, or report writing. Instead, her responsibilities focused solely on logistical coordination, establishing contact with participants, and facilitating interviews, ensuring smooth fieldwork while maintaining ethical research practices.

3.6 Multi-Method Data Collection

This study employs a multi-method qualitative data collection strategy, combining ethnographic approaches with semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. The use of multiple methods allows for data triangulation and enhances the depth, credibility, and contextual sensitivity of the findings. Given the study's focus on women's lived experiences, empowerment processes, and gender relations within homestay tourism, a multi-method approach is particularly appropriate for capturing both narrated experiences and observed practices within their everyday social and cultural settings (Palakshappa & Ellen Gordon, 2006).

3.6.1 Ethnographic Engagement and Participant Observation

An ethnographic orientation underpins the fieldwork, emphasizing prolonged engagement with the research context and attention to everyday practices, interactions, and meanings. Ethnography enables the researcher to understand how homestay operations are embedded in daily life, household routines, and community relations, rather than treating tourism activities as isolated economic practices (Mannik & McGarry, 2017). As part of this approach, participant observation

will be conducted through visits to selected homestays and engagement with hosts during routine activities. This method allows the researcher to observe host–guest interactions, divisions of household labor, decision-making practices, and women's participation in community life. Participant observation also supports the identification of non-verbal dynamics and unspoken norms that may not emerge through interviews alone, thereby complementing and validating interview data.

3.6.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews constitute the primary method of data collection. This approach allows participants to express their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations in their own words while providing sufficient structure to address the research questions systematically (Adams 2015). The main respondents are women who actively operate homestays, as they are central to understanding the impacts of homestay tourism on women's economic roles, social status, and empowerment. To capture a broader and more nuanced perspective, interviews will also be conducted with other key stakeholders, including husbands or family members, and representatives of homestay associations. Including multiple actors helps reveal how women's participation in homestays is perceived, supported, or constrained at household, community, and institutional levels.

Table 1 Interview list of homestay operators, their husbands and relation officer of CHN

Nagarkot Community Homestay Stakeholder interview table		
S.N.	**Name**	**Role**
1.	Tara Sherestha (Female, 32 years)	Homestay owner
2.	Laxmi Bastola (Female, 44 years)	Homestay owner
3.	Aruna Tamang (Female, 29 years)	Homestay owner
4.	Kavita Bastola (Female, 23 years)	Homestay owner
5.	Shiva Bastola (Male, 49 years)	Husband ofadg operator
6.	Kumar Tamang (Male, 33 years)	Husband of operator
7.	Anonymous (relation offer, CHN)	Relation Officer

3.6.3 Role of the Research Assistant and Ethical Considerations

A research assistant will be engaged primarily as a logistical facilitator to support access to participants and coordinate video-based interviews where necessary. The assistant's role will be

strictly limited to visiting the research location, establishing contact with respondents, and facilitating the technical aspects of interviews. The research assistant will not be involved in data analysis, or interpretation. To maintain academic integrity and minimize bias, the assistant will have a lower academic qualification than the principal researcher, with a maximum qualification of a bachelor's degree. This arrangement ensures that all analytical decisions remain the responsibility of the researcher while allowing practical field access in a geographically distant context.

Overall, the combination of ethnographic engagement, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis enables a comprehensive and gender-sensitive understanding of how homestay tourism influences women's lives and community dynamics in rural areas near the Kathmandu Valley.

3.7 Purposive Sampling Strategy

This study employs purposive sampling as the primary sampling strategy. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research when the objective is to gain in-depth understanding of a phenomenon by selecting information-rich participants who have direct experience with the issue under investigation (Patton, 2002). Given the study's focus on women's empowerment and homestay entrepreneurship in Nagarkot, purposive sampling enables the selection of participants who are most relevant to addressing the research questions.

The core participants of this study are women who actively operate homestays in Nagarkot, as they are central to understanding how homestay tourism influences women's economic roles, social status, and empowerment. Women homestay operators were selected based on specific criteria, including their active involvement in homestay operations, length of experience, and willingness to share their experiences. To capture diverse perspectives, variation in age, educational background, marital status, and years of involvement in homestay tourism was intentionally considered during participant selection.

In addition to women homestay operators, other key stakeholders were purposively selected to provide complementary and contrasting perspectives. These included husbands or family members, and representatives involved in homestay coordination or tourism governance.

The selection of Nagarkot as the case study site was also purposive. Nagarkot represents an information-rich context due to its proximity to Kathmandu Valley, established tourism activity, and the growing presence of women-led homestays. Despite its prominence as a tourism destination, Nagarkot remains under-examined in terms of gendered impacts of homestay tourism, making it a suitable and relevant setting for this research.

Overall, purposive sampling supports the study's exploratory and interpretivist approach by prioritizing depth over breadth and enabling the researcher to engage with participants who can provide detailed, context-specific insights. Rather than aiming for statistical representativeness, the sampling strategy seeks analytical richness and relevance, allowing the study to generate meaningful interpretations of women's lived experiences and the broader socio-economic transformations associated with homestay tourism.

3.8 Data Analysis
3.8.1 Thematic Analysis
This study embraces thematic analysis as the primary method for analyzing qualitative data generated through interviews, observations, and document review. Thematic analysis is a flexible and systematic approach that allows the researcher to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is particularly suitable for exploratory and interpretivist research that seeks to understand participants' lived experiences and socially constructed realities.

As Braun and Clarke (2006) define it, "*thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*" (p. 79). This method is well suited to the present study as it enables an in-depth examination of how women homestay operators experience empowerment, entrepreneurship, and changing gender relations within their specific social and

cultural context. Rather than quantifying responses, thematic analysis allows meanings, narratives, and interpretations to emerge directly from participants' accounts.

Thematic analysis was particularly effective in capturing both common patterns and divergent experiences among participants, including women homestay operators of different ages, educational backgrounds, and stages of involvement, as well as male family members and institutional stakeholders. This approach also enabled the identification of unintended consequences and social disruptions associated with women's empowerment, such as shifting household power dynamics and community tensions, which are central to the research objectives.

3.8.2 Data and Coding

In organizing and analysing the qualitative data, the study examined each interview as a distinct analytical unit, while also considering how responses varied across different participant groups, including women homestay operators, family members, and community stakeholders. This approach made it possible to capture not only individual experiences but also patterns of agreement, divergence, and interaction across interviews, thereby enhancing understanding of how homestay tourism influences women's empowerment at household and community levels.

The coding process began with the identification of preset codes, which were established prior to detailed data analysis. These preset codes were developed deductively, drawing directly from the research questions, interview guides, and the theoretical and empirical literature on women's empowerment and tourism. In total, six preset codes were defined: economic empowerment; agency and decision-making; social empowerment; gender roles and relations; social disruption and tension; and sustainability and gender equality. These categories provided an initial analytical structure and guided the first cycle of coding by organizing the data according to key conceptual dimensions relevant to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Following this deductive phase, the analysis incorporated emergent coding, allowing themes to arise inductively from the data. Emergent codes were identified through repeated engagement with interview transcripts and reflected recurring ideas, experiences, and narratives that were not fully

captured by the preset categories alone. While emergent codes were grounded in the preset framework, they extended and refined it by revealing context-specific dynamics such as negotiated household power, shifting masculinities, informal leadership, and concerns about long-term sustainability. The relationship between preset and emergent codes is presented in the thematic table, where each emergent theme is linked to its corresponding preset category and accompanied by a clear definition. This combined deductive–inductive coding strategy enabled a context-sensitive interpretation of women's empowerment through homestay tourism in Nagarkot.

Table 2: Preset and Emergent themes

Preset Themes	Emergent Themes (Interviews)	Definition of Emergent Themes
Economic Empowerment	Income as legitimacy	Income from homestays provides women not only financial security but social legitimacy, strengthening their authority within households and communities.
	Transition from unpaid to recognized labor	Domestic work becomes visible and economically valued through homestay operations, altering perceptions of women's labor.
Agency and Decision-Making	Negotiated household power	Empowerment emerges through gradual renegotiation of household decision-making rather than immediate equality.
	Joint decision-making	Women's income contribution leads to shared decision-making between spouses.
Social Empowerment	Community recognition	Women gain social visibility and respect within the village.
	Women as role models	Successful operators inspire and mentor other women.
Gender Roles and Relations	Shifting masculinity	Men increasingly participate in household labor and childcare.
	Male allyship vs resistance	Men shift from resistance to support as women succeed economically.
Social Disruption and Tension	Household conflict	Rapid empowerment occasionally generates domestic tension.
	Community inequality	Unequal benefit distribution causes jealousy and competition.
Gender Equality	Empowerment as gradual process	Empowerment is incremental and shaped by social context.

	Empowerment beyond income	Women define empowerment holistically, including dignity, voice, and agency.

Chapter 4: Finding and Analysis

This chapter presents and analyses the empirical findings of the study, drawing on in-depth interviews with women homestay operators, family members, and institutional stakeholders in Nagarkot. The analysis is guided by a thematic framework developed through a combined deductive and inductive coding process, as outlined in the methodology chapter. Preset themes derived from the literature on women's empowerment, gender relations, and tourism development provide the overarching analytical structure, while emergent themes identified from participants' narratives offer context-specific insights into lived experiences of homestay tourism. Together, these themes enable a nuanced examination of how homestay operations influence women's economic roles, agency, social positioning, and household and community dynamics.

4.1 Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment emerged as a central theme across all interviews, confirming the pivotal role of homestay tourism in reshaping women's economic positions within households and the wider community. Consistent with empowerment literature, economic empowerment in this study extends beyond income generation to include changes in legitimacy, recognition, and bargaining power (Kabeer, 1999; Scheyvens, 1999). Two interrelated emergent sub-themes, income as legitimacy and transition from unpaid to recognized labor, illustrate how financial participation through homestays functions as both a material and symbolic catalyst for women's empowerment in Nagarkot.

4.1.1 Income as Legitimacy

Interview data indicate that income earned from homestay operations provides women with social legitimacy, strengthening their authority within household and community decision-making spaces. As defined in the thematic framework, income functions as a legitimizing force rather than merely a financial outcome. Several women emphasized that their voices gained importance only after their economic contribution became visible and sustained.

For example, Tara Shrestha explained:

"*Because I manage the homestay and it is our main income, my opinions are taken seriously now. Earlier, I did not have much say, but now family decisions are discussed with me.*"

This narrative demonstrates how income enhances women's bargaining power, supporting Kabeer's (1999) argument that access to resources is a prerequisite for exercising agency. Economic contribution enables women to negotiate their roles within households rather than merely comply with pre-existing hierarchies.

Male respondents reinforced this interpretation. Kumar Tamang observed that women's income through homestays has altered traditional power relations within the village:

"*When women started earning regularly, their voices naturally became stronger. You can see it not only at home but also in community meetings and even in local elections.*"

This observation highlights how economic empowerment at the household level can spill over into broader social and political domains, aligning with Scheyvens' (1999) notion of economic empowerment as a foundation for wider forms of empowerment. Importantly, legitimacy was described as a gradual process rather than an immediate outcome, suggesting that empowerment develops cumulatively as income becomes stable and socially recognized.

The findings of this study also resonate strongly with empirical evidence presented by Pal, Gupta, and Joshi (2022), who demonstrate that women's access to independent income is a critical driver of both social and economic empowerment. Their study on financial inclusion in India argues that regular income generation enhances women's bargaining power, self-esteem, and participation in household decision-making, rather than empowerment being an automatic consequence of employment alone. This aligns closely with the Nagarkot case, where homestay income functions as a stabilizing and legitimizing resource. Women repeatedly emphasized that empowerment emerged not simply from earning money, but from the control and visibility of that income. As one respondent noted, earning through homestays meant that her contribution was "seen and counted" within the household, echoing Pal et al.'s (2022) conclusion that financial participation reshapes intra-household power relations when women retain agency over resources. The

homestay model, similar to mechanisms of financial inclusion discussed by Pal et al. (2022), enables women to convert localized skills and domestic spaces into income-generating assets, reinforcing economic security while simultaneously strengthening social recognition. This comparative alignment across contexts suggests that women-led homestay tourism in Nagarkot operates as a form of grassroots financial inclusion, producing empowerment outcomes consistent with broader development evidence from South Asia.

4.1.2 Transition from Unpaid to Recognized Labor

A second emergent theme highlights how homestay tourism transforms women's domestic labor into economically valued work. As outlined in the thematic framework, homestay operations render previously unpaid household tasks visible and recognized within the tourism economy. Participants repeatedly reflected on this shift in both identity and social perception.

Laxmi Bastola, one of the earliest homestay operators in Nagarkot, described this transformation clearly:

"Starting the homestay completely transformed how I see myself. I no longer see myself only as a housewife; I now identify as a businesswoman. Managing guests, handling finances, and interacting with tourists has given me confidence and self-respect."

This statement illustrates how homestays reframe domestic skills as entrepreneurial assets. Feminist scholarship has long argued that the invisibility of unpaid care and domestic labor reinforces gender inequality (Cornwall, 2016). In this context, homestay tourism offers a pathway through which women's everyday labor becomes socially and economically acknowledged.

However, the findings also reveal tensions embedded within this transition. While labor becomes monetized, women often continue to shoulder the majority of household responsibilities. Kavita Bastola, a younger homestay operator, reflected on the increased workload:

"Balancing homestay work with household duties is challenging, especially at my age. Sometimes the workload feels heavy, but I try to manage my time carefully. My family provides support, and over time, they have become more understanding of my responsibilities."

This reflects Scheyvens' (1999) caution that economic empowerment does not automatically dismantle structural gender inequalities. Instead, empowerment through tourism may coexist with persistent expectations around women's domestic roles, resulting in a double burden.

Overall, the findings under this preset theme demonstrate that economic empowerment through homestay tourism in Nagarkot is both enabling and complex. While income enhances legitimacy and recognition, it simultaneously exposes enduring gendered divisions of labor. These dynamics underscore the importance of interpreting economic empowerment as a negotiated and relational process rather than a singular outcome.

4.2 Agency and Decision-Making

Agency and decision-making emerged as a core dimension through which women's empowerment via homestay tourism is both experienced and negotiated. While economic empowerment provided the material foundation, agency was expressed through women's increasing ability to influence decisions within households, businesses, and community spaces. In line with Drydyk (2017), agency in this study is understood not merely as individual choice, but as the effective capacity to act within power-laden social structures. Two key emergent sub-themes, negotiated household power and joint decision-making, illustrate how agency is exercised relationally rather than autonomously.

4.2.1 Negotiated Household Power

Interview data indicate that women's agency did not manifest as an abrupt shift in authority but rather through a gradual renegotiation of household power relations. As defined in the thematic framework, negotiated household power refers to incremental changes in decision-making roles shaped by dialogue, income contribution, and shifting perceptions of competence. Several women emphasized that their increased agency was earned over time rather than granted automatically.

Tara Shrestha reflected on this gradual process, noting:

"I am now directly involved in financial planning, investments, and major decisions. My opinions are respected, and I feel that my contribution is recognized not only emotionally but also economically."

This illustrates what Drydyk (2017) describes as agency exercised within constraints, where empowerment involves expanding one's room for maneuver rather than eliminating power asymmetries entirely. Women's agency in Nagarkot was not about replacing male authority, but about renegotiating it through demonstrated capability and responsibility.

Male perspectives further confirm this relational dynamic. Shiva Bastola openly acknowledged his initial resistance and subsequent transformation:

"I did not believe my wife could manage a business. But when I saw how she handled everything, I started consulting her in every decision, personal and professional."

This shift underscores Drydyk's (2017) argument that empowerment involves changes in power relations, not just individual capacities. Agency here is co-constructed, emerging through altered expectations and mutual recognition within the household.

4.2.2 Joint Decision-Making

A second emergent theme highlights joint decision-making as a visible outcome of enhanced agency. Women repeatedly emphasized that earning through homestays enabled them to participate meaningfully in decisions related to finances, children's education, business expansion, and future planning. Unlike earlier situations where decisions were male-dominated, homestay income positioned women as indispensable contributors.

Aruna Tamang described this transformation clearly:

"Gender roles in my household have become more flexible and balanced. My work is respected, and my husband supports the homestay whenever needed. Decision-making is shared, and my contribution is recognized as equally important."

This finding aligns with Kabeer's (1999) conception of agency as the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. However, the interviews suggest that agency is collective rather than individualistic, embedded within family relationships rather than exercised in isolation.

Shiva Bastola further observed that joint decision-making has become more normalized within the community:

"My role has changed completely. Earlier, I was the main decision-maker and provider. Now, decisions, whether personal, financial, or professional, are made jointly. I consult my wife before making any major choices."

Drydyk (2017) cautions that empowerment should not be reduced to formal participation alone; what matters is whether individuals can effectively influence outcomes. In this study, joint decision-making represents a practical expression of agency, where women's voices carry weight and translate into action.

Nevertheless, agency remained uneven and contingent. Younger women such as Kavita Bastola described partial inclusion rather than full authority:

"I am not the main decision-maker yet, but now I am included. Earlier, I was not even asked."

This reinforces the understanding that empowerment is processual and stratified, shaped by age, marital status, and social position. While homestay tourism expands women's agency, it does so within existing hierarchies, requiring continuous negotiation rather than guaranteeing equal power.

Overall, the findings suggest that homestay tourism in Nagarkot enhances women's agency by enabling negotiated and shared decision-making, rather than individual autonomy detached from

social relations. Consistent with Drydyk (2017), empowerment in this context is best understood as a relational expansion of power, where women gain the capacity to influence decisions through economic contribution, demonstrated competence, and shifting gender norms.

4.3 Social Empowerment

Social empowerment refers to changes in women's social status, visibility, and relationships within the community as a result of their engagement in homestay tourism. In this study, social empowerment is understood as the process through which women gain recognition, respect, and influence beyond the household, enabling them to participate more actively in social networks and community life. Consistent with (Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, 2002), social empowerment occurs when tourism enhances local people's sense of self-worth and strengthens community cohesion rather than reinforcing marginalization. Two emergent themes, community recognition and women as role models, illustrate how homestay participation has reshaped women's social positioning in Nagarkot.

4.3.1 Community Recognition

Definition: Community recognition refers to women gaining social visibility and respect within the village as a result of their involvement in homestay operations.

Interview data strongly suggest that homestay tourism has transformed women from largely private actors into publicly recognized contributors to the local economy and tourism sector. Many women described how their social identity shifted once their work became visible beyond the household. Laxmi Bastola reflected on this change by stating:

"*Before the homestay, people hardly knew me outside my family. Now they recognize me as someone doing business and contributing to tourism in Nagarkot.*"
(Laxmi Bastola, woman homestay operator)

Similarly, Tara Shrestha emphasized that recognition was closely tied to contribution:

"My social status has improved. People in the community recognize me as a homestay owner and someone contributing to local tourism development. I feel more confident speaking in public or community discussions, and others are more willing to listen to my opinions." - (Tara Shrestha, woman homestay operator)

This increased recognition was not limited to symbolic respect but translated into social interaction and inclusion. Aruna Tamang, who plays a leadership role among homestay operators, noted:

"People invite me to meetings and ask for my opinion because they know I am involved in homestays and tourism." (Aruna Tamang, woman homestay operator)

These findings align closely with Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, (2002) argument that tourism can foster social empowerment when it enhances individuals' confidence and social standing within the community. Kapoor (2019) similarly found that women's entrepreneurship leads to increased public recognition and legitimacy, particularly in patriarchal rural settings where women's roles are traditionally confined to the domestic sphere. In Nagarkot, homestay tourism functions as a socially acceptable pathway for women to gain public visibility without overtly challenging cultural norms.

4.3.2 Women as Role Models

Beyond individual recognition, the interviews reveal a broader ripple effect of social empowerment, where women homestay operators actively influence other women in the community. Laxmi Bastola described how her experience has encouraged others:

"I am respected for my work and often approached for advice by other women who want to start homestays. This recognition has been one of the most rewarding outcomes of my journey."
(Laxmi Bastola, woman homestay operator)

Aruna Tamang highlighted her role in supporting and guiding other women, particularly those with lower educational backgrounds:

"I help other women with bookings and communication because not everyone is educated. We grow only if we support each other."
(Aruna Tamang, woman homestay operator)

Younger operators also perceived senior women as sources of motivation. Kavita Bastola explained:

"Seeing other women running homestays gave me confidence that I could also manage one."
(Kavita Bastola, young homestay operator)

These narratives demonstrate how social empowerment extends beyond individual achievement to collective transformation. Kapoor (2019) argues that women entrepreneurs often become informal leaders and role models, creating multiplier effects that encourage broader participation and confidence among other women. In the Nagarkot context, homestay operators act as visible examples of what women can achieve within their socio-cultural environment, thereby challenging traditional gender norms in subtle but meaningful ways.

Overall, the findings suggest that social empowerment through homestay tourism is both individual and collective. While women gain personal recognition and respect, they also contribute to shifting social expectations by inspiring other women and strengthening female networks. Consistent with (Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, 2002) and Kapoor (2019), social empowerment with women's transformation and participation in public life in this study emerges as a critical mechanism through which tourism facilitates broader gendered change at the community level.

4.4 Gender Roles and Relations
Gender roles and relations constitute a critical dimension of empowerment in this study, as homestay tourism directly intersects with deeply embedded patriarchal norms governing household responsibilities, authority, and gendered expectations. Rather than producing uniform change, the findings reveal a spectrum of responses ranging from resistance to active support. Consistent with gender and development literature, changes in women's economic and social roles inevitably provoke renegotiations of masculinity and household power (Connell, 2005; Abou-

Shouk, Mannaa, & Elbaz, 2021). Two emergent themes, shifting masculinity and male allyship versus resistance, capture how gender relations are being reworked in Nagarkot through women's participation in homestay tourism.

4.4.1 Shifting Masculinity

Definition: Shifting masculinity refers to changes in men's roles, attitudes, and practices, particularly increased participation in household labor, childcare, and shared responsibility as women engage in income-generating activities.

Male interviewees provided rich insights into how homestay tourism disrupted traditional expectations of masculinity, which previously positioned men as sole providers and decision-makers. Shiva Bastola openly reflected on how his role evolved after his wife's homestay became economically successful:

"*Earlier, I thought my job was only to earn money. Now I cook, take care of the children, and help with guests when my wife is busy.*"
(Shiva Bastola, husband of homestay operator)

This shift illustrates what Connell (2005) describes as the reconfiguration of hegemonic masculinity, where dominant male roles are renegotiated in response to changing economic and social realities. Rather than losing authority, men like Shiva reframed masculinity around responsibility, cooperation, and partnership.

Kumar Tamang similarly acknowledged a redefinition of male roles within households:

"*Helping in the house does not make a man weaker. It makes the family stronger, especially when women are also working.*"
(Kumar Tamang, husband of homestay operator)

Female respondents confirmed these changes from their own perspectives. Tara Shrestha noted:

"My husband helps with household work now, especially when guests are there. Before homestay, this was never the case."

(Tara Shrestha, woman homestay operator)

These narratives demonstrate that changes in masculinity extend beyond shifts in attitudes and are enacted through everyday practices such as shared household responsibilities and caregiving. This suggests that women's empowerment through homestay tourism is inherently relational, reshaping interactions and expectations between men and women rather than operating in isolation. Such findings are consistent with Abou-Shouk, Mannaa, and Elbaz (2021), who argue that meaningful empowerment in tourism contexts requires transformations in gender relations and power structures, not merely increased participation of women in economic activities.

4.4.2 Male Allyship versus Resistance

Definition: Male allyship versus resistance refers to the contrasting ways men respond to women's empowerment, ranging from initial opposition and skepticism to active support and advocacy.

Several male respondents described strong resistance at the outset of homestay initiatives. Shiva Bastola admitted:

"I was very skeptical. I did not want my wife to invite unknown foreigners into our home. I thought it was unsafe and unnecessary."

This resistance reflects entrenched patriarchal norms around control, protection, and women's mobility, commonly observed in rural South Asian contexts. However, as homestay operations proved economically viable, resistance often gave way to support. Shiva further explained:

"When the homestay started earning well, I realized my wife was capable. Now I consult her in every decision I make."

Kumar Tamang contrasted his own supportive stance with broader community attitudes:

"Educated men are more open, but many men still feel threatened when women earn more or gain recognition."

Female respondents also acknowledged male resistance as a social reality. Laxmi Bastola reflected:

"In the beginning, some men laughed at us and said women cannot run businesses. Now those same people ask how to start a homestay."
(Laxmi Bastola, woman homestay operator)

Connell (2005) emphasizes that changes in gender relations often generate tension before normalization occurs. This pattern is evident in Nagarkot, where women's economic success gradually reshaped male attitudes, transforming skepticism into allyship in many cases. However, the persistence of resistance among some men suggests that empowerment remains uneven and contested.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that homestay tourism in Nagarkot has catalyzed significant renegotiations of gender roles and relations. While women's empowerment prompted shifts toward shared responsibilities and male allyship, these changes were neither automatic nor universal. Consistent with Connell (2005), the study underscores that sustainable empowerment requires engaging men as participants in gender transformation rather than treating them solely as obstacles.

4.5 Social Disruption and Tension
While homestay tourism has generated multiple empowerment outcomes, the findings also reveal that women's empowerment is accompanied by social disruption and tension. These tensions arise as traditional gender hierarchies and social expectations are challenged by women's increasing economic visibility and decision-making power. Consistent with gender and development literature, empowerment processes are rarely linear or conflict-free and may provoke resistance, jealousy, and backlash, particularly in patriarchal settings (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Kabeer, 1999). Two emergent themes, household conflict and community inequality, illustrate the complex and sometimes contradictory social impacts of homestay-led empowerment in Nagarkot.

4.5.1 Household Conflict

Definition: Household conflict refers to tensions and disagreements within families arising from shifts in economic roles, decision-making power, and gender expectations as women engage in homestay operations.

Several respondents acknowledged that women's increasing economic roles initially generated conflict within households, particularly where men struggled to adapt to changing power dynamics. Shiva Bastola openly reflected on this tension during the early stages of his wife's homestay operation:

"*At first, there were arguments. I felt insecure because my wife was earning and meeting many people while I was away.*"
(Shiva Bastola, husband of homestay operator)

This sense of insecurity echoes Chant and Sweetman's (2012) argument that women's economic empowerment can provoke male anxiety when traditional provider roles are disrupted. Rather than empowerment being universally celebrated, it may challenge deeply ingrained masculine identities.

Women also described experiencing emotional strain as they navigated these tensions. Tara Shrestha explained:

"*There were times when managing the homestay and household together caused misunderstandings. Empowerment is not always smooth.*"
(Tara Shrestha, woman homestay operator)

Similarly, Kumar Tamang observed that not all households managed these transitions constructively:

"*In some families, rapid changes in power have led to conflicts. Some men feel insecure or excluded, especially if they are not economically active leading to chaos and even domestic violence. There have been cases where empowerment has led to tension, misunderstandings, and even separation.*"

(Kumar Tamang, husband of homestay operator)

These accounts support Kabeer's (1999) assertion that empowerment involves renegotiating power relations and may generate conflict before new norms stabilize. In Nagarkot, household conflict emerged not as a rejection of women's work itself, but as resistance to the redistribution of authority and responsibility.

4.5.2 Community Inequality

Definition: Community inequality refers to social tension arising from uneven access to homestay benefits, leading to jealousy, competition, and divisions within the community.

Beyond the household, respondents highlighted that not all families benefited equally from homestay tourism, resulting in social friction at the community level. Laxmi Bastola reflected on this disparity:

"*Some households earn a lot from homestays, while others earn nothing. This has created jealousy among neighbors.*"
(Laxmi Bastola, woman homestay operator)

Kavita Bastola similarly noted:

"*Sometimes people think homestay owners are becoming too successful, and that creates distance between families.*" (Kavita Bastola, young homestay operator)

Male respondents reinforced these observations. Kumar Tamang emphasized that unequal access to resources and information intensified competition:

"*Those who have better houses or connections benefit more. Others feel left out and blame the system or the women running homestays.*"

(Kumar Tamang, husband of homestay operator)

Chant and Sweetman (2012) argue that empowerment initiatives can unintentionally reproduce inequalities if benefits are unevenly distributed or if structural barriers remain unaddressed. In Nagarkot, while homestay tourism empowered some women, it also created new social boundaries between participating and non-participating households.

Despite these tensions, respondents generally viewed conflict as part of a broader transition rather than as a reason to reject women's empowerment. Laxmi Bastola reflected:

"Change always creates problems first. But over time, people understand."

This perspective reinforces the understanding that social disruption is not a failure of empowerment but an inherent feature of social transformation. As Scheyvens (1999) notes, empowerment must be evaluated not only by its benefits but also by how communities manage and negotiate emerging tensions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that women's empowerment through homestay tourism in Nagarkot has generated both positive change and social disruption. Household conflict and community inequality reveal the contested nature of empowerment, underscoring the need for inclusive strategies that address men's concerns, promote equitable benefit-sharing, and support dialogue at both household and community levels. Recognizing and addressing these tensions is essential for ensuring that empowerment processes remain sustainable and socially cohesive.

4.6 Sustainability and Gender Equality

Sustainability and gender equality represent the long-term dimensions of empowerment examined in this study. While homestay tourism has generated short- and medium-term economic and social benefits for women, respondents consistently emphasized that empowerment must be sustained over time and institutionalized to produce durable gender-equal outcomes. Drawing on Malhotra,

Schuler, and Boender (2002), gender equality is understood as a multidimensional process involving changes in resources, agency, and institutional structures, rather than isolated improvements in income or participation. Two interrelated emergent themes, , empowerment as a gradual process, and empowerment beyond income, illustrate how women and men in Nagarkot conceptualize the future of homestay tourism and gender equality.

4.6.1 Empowerment as a Gradual Process

Across interviews, empowerment was consistently described as slow and uneven rather than immediate. Kavita Bastola reflected on her experience:

"*I feel more confident now, but equality does not happen suddenly. It takes time and understanding.*"
(Kavita Bastola, young homestay operator)

Male respondents reinforced this perception. Shiva Bastola acknowledged:

"At first, change was difficult. Slowly, we learned to adjust." (Shiva Bastola, husband of homestay operator)

This aligns closely with Malhotra et al. (2002), who emphasize that empowerment unfolds over time through cumulative changes across domains rather than through single interventions. The Nagarkot case illustrates how homestay tourism initiates change, but sustained equality depends on continued negotiation within households and communities.

4.6.2 Empowerment Beyond Income

Definition: Empowerment beyond income refers to women's holistic understanding of empowerment as encompassing dignity, voice, recognition, and future aspirations, not income alone.

Although economic benefits were important, women repeatedly emphasized non-material dimensions of empowerment. Tara Shrestha captured this sentiment:

"Income is important, but empowerment also means being heard, respected, and confident."
(Tara Shrestha, woman homestay operator)

Similarly, Laxmi Bastola stated:
"Even if income goes down sometimes, the confidence and respect I gained will stay."

These narratives strongly support Malhotra et al.'s (2002) argument that gender equality must be assessed across multiple dimensions, including psychological and social change. Gupta and Dash (2021) further argue that tourism initiatives contribute meaningfully to gender equality only when they enhance women's voice, agency, and long-term capabilities. The Nagarkot findings re-confirms this view, demonstrating that women define empowerment in relational and dignity-based terms rather than purely economic ones.

Overall, this section demonstrates that while homestay tourism has initiated meaningful progress toward gender equality, and recognition of empowerment as a multidimensional and long-term process. Without these conditions, initial gains risk stagnation, reinforcing the importance of embedding gender equality within broader sustainable development strategies.

Conclusion

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that women's empowerment through homestay tourism in Nagarkot is a multidimensional, relational, and non-linear process. Economic empowerment emerged as a critical entry point, providing women with income and legitimacy that enabled greater agency and participation in decision-making. However, economic gains alone were insufficient to produce empowerment without accompanying shifts in social recognition, psychological confidence, and household gender relations. As women's roles expanded, gender norms were renegotiated through everyday practices, prompting both male allyship and resistance. These transformations generated social and psychological empowerment but also surfaced tensions in the form of household conflict and community-level inequality. Importantly, empowerment was widely understood by participants as gradual and context-specific, shaped by age, education, family support, and institutional conditions. Across themes, sustainability and

gender equality were framed not as outcomes of income generation alone, but as processes requiring inclusive governance, continuous capacity building, and engagement of both women and men. Collectively, the findings affirm that homestay tourism can serve as a meaningful pathway to women's empowerment in rural tourism contexts, but only when economic, social, and relational dimensions of empowerment evolve together and are supported by long-term structural and policy frameworks.

Chapter 5: Discussion
5.1 Introduction
This chapter discusses the empirical findings of the study in relation to the research objectives and existing literature on women's empowerment, gender relations, and community-based tourism. Drawing on in-depth interviews with women homestay operators, male family members, and key stakeholders in community homestay network of Nagarkot, the discussion situates the findings within broader theoretical frameworks of empowerment proposed by Kabeer (1999), Scheyvens (1999), Drydyk (2017), and subsequent gender and tourism scholarship. Rather than treating empowerment as a uniform outcome, this chapter conceptualizes it as a context-specific, relational, and processual phenomenon, shaped by household dynamics, socio-cultural norms, and institutional support.

The discussion is structured to directly address the study's three research objectives: (1) evaluating changes in women's socio-economic status before and after homestay operation, (2) comparing empowerment levels between women engaged in homestay entrepreneurship and those confined to traditional household roles, and (3) analysing how women balance homestay responsibilities with domestic duties. By integrating empirical evidence with theoretical interpretation, the chapter contributes to a subtle understanding of women's empowerment in peri-urban tourism contexts in Nepal.

5.2 Changes in Women's Socio-Economic Status Before and After Homestay Operation
The findings clearly indicate that operating homestays has brought significant changes to women's socio-economic status. Prior to homestay involvement, most women described their roles as

largely confined to unpaid household labor, with limited access to independent income and minimal participation in financial decision-making. Their contributions, while essential, remained largely invisible and undervalued, an experience consistent with feminist development literature on women's unpaid care work (Cornwall, 2016).

After initiating homestay operations, women experienced a marked shift in economic position. Income generation through homestays provided women with financial autonomy, increased bargaining power within households, and greater social legitimacy. This finding aligns with Kabeer's (1999) assertion that access to and control over resources is a critical foundation for empowerment. Importantly, the study demonstrates that economic empowerment was not solely about income quantity, but about income visibility, regularity, and control, echoing findings by Pal, Gupta, and Joshi (2022) on financial inclusion and women's empowerment in South Asia.

Beyond household-level impacts, improved socio-economic status translated into enhanced community standing. Women homestay operators became recognized contributors to local tourism, reinforcing Scheyvens' (1999) argument that tourism can foster economic empowerment when benefits are retained locally. However, the discussion must also acknowledge that socio-economic gains were uneven and contingent on factors such as education, family support, and access to networks, highlighting that empowerment is not automatically guaranteed through participation alone.

5.3 Comparing Empowerment: Homestay Entrepreneurs vs. Women in Traditional Household Roles

A key contribution of this study lies in its analytical comparison between women engaged in homestay entrepreneurship and those primarily involved in traditional household roles. The findings reveal clear differences across economic, social, psychological, and relational dimensions of empowerment.

Women operating homestays exhibited higher levels of agency, confidence, and social visibility compared to women who remained confined to domestic roles. Homestay operators reported increased participation in decision-making, broader social networks, and greater aspirations for

personal and professional growth. These outcomes support Kapoor's (2019) argument that entrepreneurship serves as a catalyst for both economic and social empowerment by enhancing women's self-efficacy and public legitimacy.

In contrast, women engaged solely in traditional household roles remained economically dependent and socially less visible, reinforcing Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender's (2002) observation that empowerment requires changes across multiple domains. While domestic roles are culturally valued, their lack of economic recognition limits women's access to power and voice. The comparison highlights that empowerment is not inherent to womanhood, but is shaped by access to opportunities, resources, and supportive environments.

However, the discussion also cautions against romanticizing entrepreneurship. Some homestay operators faced increased stress, workload, and social scrutiny, suggesting that empowerment involves trade-offs. This reinforces Drydyk's (2017) view that empowerment should be understood as expanded capacity to act within constraints, rather than the elimination of hardship.

5.4 Balancing Homestay Responsibilities and Traditional Household Duties

The third research objective, examining how women balance homestay responsibilities with traditional household duties, reveals one of the most complex dimensions of empowerment. The findings show that while homestay tourism expands women's economic and social roles, it does not automatically reduce their domestic responsibilities. Instead, many women experienced a double workload, managing both homestay operations and household duties simultaneously.

This finding aligns with Scheyvens' (1999) caution that tourism-led empowerment may coexist with persistent gender inequalities if household labor divisions remain unchanged. Despite increased income and recognition, women continued to shoulder primary responsibility for cooking, cleaning, childcare, and caregiving. This reflects broader patterns observed in gender and development literature, where women's productive roles expand without corresponding redistribution of reproductive labor (Chant & Sweetman, 2012).

Nevertheless, the study also identifies emerging shifts in household dynamics. In households where men became allies, domestic responsibilities were more evenly shared, enabling women to manage homestay operations more sustainably. Drawing on Connell's (2005) theory of masculinities, the discussion highlights that these changes represent a reconfiguration of gender roles rather than their dissolution. Male support was often pragmatic and incremental, emerging through lived experience rather than ideological commitment.

Thus, the ability to balance homestay and household responsibilities was uneven and heavily dependent on spousal support, family structure, and individual negotiation skills. This reinforces the argument that empowerment is relational and context-dependent, shaped by interactions within households rather than individual effort alone.

5.5 Empowerment, Tension, and Social Transformation

The discussion must also address the social tensions that accompanied empowerment. Household conflicts, community jealousy, and backlash were not anomalies but integral to the process of social change. Chant and Sweetman (2012) argue that empowerment initiatives often generate resistance when they disrupt established power hierarchies. In Nagarkot, such tensions emerged as women's economic success challenged traditional gender norms and community expectations.

Rather than undermining empowerment, these tensions signal active renegotiation of power. Over time, many households adapted, and resistance softened into acceptance or support. This finding reinforces the view that empowerment should be assessed over time and across contexts, rather than through immediate outcomes.

5.6 Sustainability, Gender Equality, and Long-Term Implications

Finally, the discussion emphasizes that empowerment through homestay tourism must be understood within a sustainability framework. Participants' concerns about stagnation, limited institutional support, and lack of training highlight the fragility of empowerment gains. As Malhotra et al. (2002) emphasize, sustainable gender equality requires structural change, not isolated interventions.

Gupta and Dash (2021) and Suntikul et al. (2020) similarly argue that inclusive governance, capacity building, and male engagement are essential for sustaining empowerment in tourism contexts. The findings suggest that homestays can act as entry points for empowerment, but long-term gender equality depends on supportive policies, community coordination, and recognition of empowerment as a gradual, multidimensional process.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

In this study, I set out to explore how operating homestays has influenced women's empowerment in rural and peri-urban communities on the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley, using Nagarkot as a case study. I approached this research with the understanding that empowerment is not a fixed outcome, but a complex, lived process shaped by social relations, cultural norms, and structural conditions. Through qualitative interviews with women homestay operators, male family members, and community stakeholders, I sought to understand empowerment as it is experienced, negotiated, and sometimes contested in everyday life.

Reflecting on the findings, I have come to see homestay tourism not as a simple pathway to empowerment, but as a space where opportunities and constraints coexist. While homestays created new economic and social possibilities for women, they also exposed enduring inequalities and generated new forms of responsibility and tension. This duality has been central to my interpretation of empowerment throughout the study.

6.1 Reflections on Socio-Economic Change Before and After Homestay Operation

One of the most visible changes I observed was the shift in women's socio-economic status before and after engaging in homestay operations. Prior to running homestays, many women described their roles as limited to unpaid household work, with little recognition of their contribution beyond the domestic sphere. As I listened to these narratives, it became clear that women's labor, though essential, was largely invisible in both economic and social terms.

After initiating homestay operations, women experienced a noticeable transformation. Earning income through homestays provided them with financial independence, increased legitimacy within their households, and greater confidence in interacting with others. From my perspective as a researcher, what stood out most was that empowerment was not simply about earning money, but about being seen as contributors and decision-makers. However, I also observed that these socio-economic gains were uneven and dependent on factors such as education, family support, and access to networks, reinforcing my understanding that empowerment is deeply contextual rather than universal.

6.2 Comparing Empowerment Across Women's Roles

In comparing women engaged in homestay entrepreneurship with those primarily involved in traditional household roles, I observed clear differences in levels of empowerment. Women operating homestays tended to demonstrate higher confidence, stronger decision-making capacity, and greater social visibility. They spoke about aspirations, leadership, and future planning in ways that women confined to domestic roles rarely did.

At the same time, this comparison prompted me to reflect critically on the costs of empowerment. Homestay entrepreneurship brought new pressures, responsibilities, and expectations. While women in traditional roles faced economic dependence and limited voice, women entrepreneurs often faced heavier workloads and social scrutiny. This comparison led me to conclude that empowerment should not be romanticized; it involves trade-offs, negotiations, and continuous effort rather than straightforward progress.

6.3 Reflections on Balancing Homestay Work and Household Responsibilities

One of the most challenging and revealing aspects of this research was understanding how women balance homestay responsibilities with traditional household duties. As a researcher, I was struck by how often empowerment was accompanied by exhaustion. Despite increased income and recognition, most women continued to bear primary responsibility for domestic work, resulting in what many described as a "double burden."

However, I also observed moments of change. In households where men supported women, by sharing domestic work or childcare, women were better able to sustain their homestay operations and personal well-being. These observations reinforced my belief that women's empowerment cannot be understood in isolation from men's roles and household dynamics. Empowerment, in this context, was not about women doing more alone, but about families adapting together.

6.4 Empowerment, Resistance, and Social Tensions

Throughout the research, I encountered stories of resistance, conflict, and social tension alongside narratives of progress. Some men initially opposed homestay operations, fearing loss of control or disruption of social norms. At the community level, uneven benefits led to jealousy and competition. Rather than viewing these tensions as failures, I came to understand them as signs of social change in motion.

These experiences deepened my appreciation of empowerment as a contested process. Change was not smooth or universally welcomed, but it was often negotiated through dialogue, time, and lived experience. This realization has shaped my overall interpretation of empowerment as something that unfolds gradually and unevenly, rather than as an immediate or guaranteed outcome of participation in tourism.

6.5 Reflections on Sustainability and Gender Equality

As I reflected on participants' concerns about the future, I became increasingly aware of the fragility of empowerment gains. Many women expressed fears of stagnation due to limited training, lack of policy support, and exclusion from decision-making processes. These concerns led me to conclude that while homestays can initiate empowerment, they cannot sustain it without institutional backing and inclusive governance.

Importantly, women consistently defined empowerment in holistic terms, emphasizing dignity, respect, confidence, and voice alongside income. This reinforced my belief that gender equality must be understood as a long-term, multidimensional process rather than a short-term economic

outcome. From my perspective, the sustainability of empowerment depends on whether these broader dimensions are supported over time.

6.6 Final Personal Reflections

To conclude this study, I reflect on how this research has reshaped my own understanding of women's empowerment. Homestay tourism in Nagarkot has clearly created meaningful opportunities for women to assert agency, gain recognition, and reshape aspects of their lives. At the same time, it has revealed the persistence of structural inequalities and the emotional and physical costs of empowerment.

Ultimately, I conclude that homestay tourism should be seen as a potential catalyst, not a solution, for women's empowerment. Empowerment is ongoing, relational, and deeply embedded in social contexts. By critically engaging with women's and men's lived experiences, this study contributes to a more realistic and grounded understanding of what empowerment looks like in practice, and what it requires to be sustained.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides in-depth insights into women's empowerment through homestay tourism in Nagarkot, several limitations must be acknowledged. Recognizing these limitations is essential for contextualizing the findings and for guiding future research in similar settings.

First, the study is based on a single case study of Nagarkot, which limits the extent to which findings can be generalized to other rural or peri-urban tourism destinations in Nepal. Initially, **Chhaling and Nagarkot**, two villages of Changunarayan Municipality were chosen and were discussed with thesis supervisor, however, Challing village has only one homestay and that would not be suitable to compare within the village as well as Nagarkot so Chhaling was discarded in the middle of the study. In addition, the case study approach enabled rich, context-sensitive analysis, women's experiences of homestay entrepreneurship may differ significantly across regions due to variations in culture, tourism maturity, infrastructure, and governance structures. As such, the findings should be understood as analytically rather than statistically generalizable.

Second, the research relies on qualitative interviews and self-reported narratives, which are inherently subjective. Participants may have emphasized positive outcomes or minimized challenges due to social desirability bias or the desire to present homestay initiatives favorably. Although I attempted to mitigate this by interviewing multiple stakeholder groups and probing for both positive and negative experiences, the findings ultimately reflect participants' interpretations of their own empowerment rather than externally measured outcomes. The study also accounts for the limited number of sample size for the study, which may not have been able to capture the full spectrum of the community views of Nagarkot villiage.

A further limitation relates to the use of a research assistant (RA) during data collection. While taking help from a local research assistant was essential for facilitating access to participants, coordinating interviews, and navigating language and cultural contexts, this arrangement may have influenced the data collection process. The presence of an intermediary could have affected how participants framed their responses, particularly on sensitive issues such as household conflict or gender relations. Although the RA's role was strictly limited to logistical facilitation and not data interpretation or analysis, the possibility of mediated interaction influencing participant responses cannot be entirely excluded. At the same time, I recognize that without local assistance, access to certain participants, especially women with limited digital literacy, would have been significantly constrained.

Additionally, the study captures empowerment at a single point in time, offering a snapshot rather than a longitudinal perspective. Empowerment is a dynamic process, and the impacts of homestay tourism may evolve, strengthen, or diminish over time. A longitudinal design would have allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how empowerment trajectories develop and whether observed gains are sustained in the long term.

Finally, the study focuses primarily on gender and empowerment and does not deeply examine other intersecting factors such as caste, ethnicity, or class. While these dimensions undoubtedly shape women's experiences and access to opportunities, they were beyond the scope of the present

research. Future studies incorporating an intersectional lens could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how empowerment is experienced differently among diverse groups of women.

References

Abou-Shouk, M. A., Mannaa, M. T., & Elbaz, A. M. (2021). *Women's empowerment and tourism development: A cross-country study*. Tourism management perspectives, 100782.

Acharya, B. P., & Halpenny, E. A. (2013). Homestays as an alternative tourism product for sustainable community development: A case study of women-managed tourism product in rural Nepal. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 10(4), 367–387. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2013.779313

Adams, W. C. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. Handbook of practical program evaluation, 492-505.

Berg, B. L. (2007). Qualitative Research Methods for social sciences (Vol. 7th edition). California State University.

Bhandari, P. (2013). Rural livelihood change? Household capital, community resources and livelihood transition. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 32, 126–136. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2013.05.001

Bhattarai, S., Adhikari, S. R., & Bamford, D. (2006). Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP) (NEP/99/013) FINAL EVALUATION REPORT. Kathmandu: UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME .

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Chant, S., & Sweetman, C. (2012). Fixing women or fixing the world?'Smart economics', efficiency approaches, and gender equality in development. *Gender & Development*, *20*(3), 517-529.

Connell, R. W. (2005). Masculinities University of California Press. *Berkeley, Los Angeles*.

Cornwall, A. (2016). Women's empowerment: What works? Journal of International Development, 28(3), 342–359.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.

Crotty, M. (1998). The foundations of social research: meaning and perspective in the research process. London: SAGE.

Denscombe, M. (2017). *EBOOK: The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Department of Tourism, Nepal. (2025, May 09). https://tourismdepartment.gov.np/content/88/homestay-operating-directive/. Retrieved from Homestay Operating Directives: https://tourismdepartment.gov.np/content/88/homestay-operating-directive/

Dolezal, C., & Novelli, M. (2022). Power in community-based tourism: empowerment and partnership in Bali. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 2352–2370.

Drydyk, J. (2017). Empowerment, agency, and power. In Gender justice and development: Vulnerability and empowerment (pp. 17-30). Routledge.

Esquivel, V., & Sweetman, C. (2016). Gender and the sustainable development goals. *Gender & Development*, *24*(1), 1-8.

European Parliamentary Research Service. (2023, September). Rural Tourism. Retrieved from European Parliament: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751464/EPRS_BRI(2023)751464_EN.pdf

Goodwin, H., & Santilli, R. (2009). Community-based tourism: A success? *ICRT Occasional Paper*, 11, 1–37

Guarino, N., Oberle, D., & Staab, S. (2009). What is an ontology?. In *Handbook on ontologies* (pp. 1-17). Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

Hyett, N., Kenny, A., & Dickson-Swift, V. (2014). Methodology or method? A critical review of qualitative case study reports. *International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being*, *9*(1), 23606.

Ivona, A. (2021). Sustainability of rural tourism and promotion of local development. Sustainability, 8854.

Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and change*, *30*(3), 435-464.

Kontogeorgopoulos, N., Churyen, A., & Duangsaeng, V. (2015). Homestay Tourism and the Commercialization of the Rural Home in Thailand. Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, 29-50.

Leslie, H., & Storey, D. (2003). The Development Fieldwork: A Practical guide. (R. Schyevens, & D. Storey, Eds.) London: Sage Publications.

Malhotra, A., Schuler, S. R., & Boender, C. (2002). Measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development. In background paper prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives (p. 58). Washington: World Bank.

Mannik, L., & McGarry, K. (2017). Practicing ethnography: A student guide to method and methodology. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Nepal. (2025, 09 06). Nepal Tourism Policy. Retrieved from Government of Nepal, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation: https://tourism.gov.np/category/policy/

Nassani, A. A., Aldakhil, A. M., Abro, M. M. Q., Islam, T., & Zaman, K. (2019). The impact of tourism and finance on women empowerment. *Journal of Policy Modeling*, *41*(2), 234-254.

Nepal Tourism Board. (2025, March 16). Nepal's Community Homestay Network Featured in TIME's 'World's Greatest Places 2025'. Retrieved from Nepal Tourism Board: https://trade.ntb.gov.np/nepals-community-homestay-network-featured-in-times-worlds-greatest-places-2025/

Nunkoo, R. (2018). The state of research methods in tourism and hospitality. In *Handbook of research methods for tourism and hospitality management* (pp. 3-23). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Nunkoo, R., Hall, C. M., & Ladsawut, J. (2017). Gender and choice of methodology in tourism social science research. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *63*, 207-210.

Pal, M., Gupta, H., & Joshi, Y. C. (2022). Social and economic empowerment of women through financial inclusion: empirical evidence from India. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, *41*(2), 294-305.

Palakshappa, N., & Ellen Gordon, M. (2006). Using a multi-method qualitative approach to examine collaborative relationships. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *9*(4), 389-403.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods 3rd. ed*. Sage publications.

Pervin, N., & Mokhtar, M. (2022). The interpretivist research paradigm: A subjective notion of a social context. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, *11*(2), 419-428.

Prasain, S. (2024, June 10). Nepal's tourism paid for 1.19 million jobs in 2023. Retrieved from The Kathmandu Post: https://kathmandupost.com/money/2024/06/10/nepal-s-tourism-paid-for-1-19-million-jobs-in-2023

Quang, T. D., Phan Tran, N. M., Sthapit, E., Thanh Nguyen, N. T., Le, T. M., Doan, T. N., & Thu-Do, T. (2024). Beyond the homestay: Women's participation in rural tourism development in Mekong Delta, Vietnam. . Tourism and Hospitality Research, 499–514.

Rai, S. (2012). Tourism and Its Impact on the Local Economy of Nagarkot. *Nepal Tourism and Development Review*, *2*(1), 155-159.

Ridley, D. (2012). The literature review: A step-by-step guide for students.

Rowlands, J. (1997). Questioning Empowerment: Working with Women in Honduras. Oxford: OxFam.

Scheyvens, R. (1999). Ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities. . Tourism management, 245-249.

Stebbins, R. A. (2001). *Exploratory research in the social sciences* (Vol. 48). Sage.

Stevens, L., & Wrenn, C. (2013). Exploratory (qualitative) research. *Concise encyclopedia of church and religious organization marketing*, *53*.

Tamang, A. (2025). From Dead City to Queen of the Hills: A Case Study of Bandipur's Journey of Placemaking towards Place Branding. . Aalborg: Aalborg Universitet.

Thakuri, I. B. M., & Nepal, G. (2016). Economic contribution of home-stay in Nepal. *Journal of Advanced Academic Research*, *3*(3), 1-10.

Tolkach, D., & King, B. (2015). Strengthening Community-Based Tourism in a new resource-based island nation: Why and how? . Tourism Management , 386–398.

UN Tourism. (2025, 10 01). Rural Tourism. Retrieved from UN Tourism: https://www.untourism.int/rural-tourism

Veal, A. J. (2017). *Research methods for leisure and tourism*. Pearson Uk.

Yin, R. K. (2009). Case study research: Design and methods. Vol. 5. . London: Sage.

Appendix A

Respondent: Tara Shrestha

Age: 32

Occupation: Homestay Owner

Location: Nagarkot

1. **Can you describe your household and livelihood situation before you started operating a homestay?**

- Before starting the homestay, our household income was uncertain and depended on agriculture an husband's income. Even though Nagarkot is known as a tourist destination, most benefits went to hotels or external businesses, and women like me had very few direct ways to earn independently. I was educated and interested in tourism, but there were no clear platforms for women to actively participate as business owners. At that time, I mainly contributed through unpaid household work, and my economic role was not clearly recognized.

2. **How did the decision to start a homestay come about, and what role did you personally play in that decision?**

- The idea of starting a homestay came from my own interest and passion for tourism and my love for Nagarkot. I believed that homestays could allow visitors to experience our culture while also benefiting local families. I was actively involved in discussions with my husband and family and strongly advocated for starting the homestay. While my family supported the idea, the initiative and motivation largely came from me. I wanted to create something sustainable that could also empower me as a woman.

3. **In what ways has operating a homestay affected your personal income and your household's financial situation?**

- Operating the homestay has become my primary source of income and has significantly improved our financial security. Unlike before, we now have a more stable and predictable income flow. This has reduced our dependence on seasonal or external work and has improved our overall quality of life. Financial stability has also allowed us to plan for the future rather than only focusing on day-to-day survival.

4. **How much control do you have over the income generated from the homestay, and has this changed your role in household decision-making?**

- I manage the homestay operations and therefore have substantial control over the income it generates. This has significantly changed my position within the household. I am now directly involved in financial planning, investments, and major decisions. My opinions are respected, and I feel that my contribution is recognized not only emotionally but also economically.

5. **What new skills or knowledge have you gained through managing the homestay, and how have these skills affected your confidence?**

- Running a homestay has helped me develop skills in hospitality management, communication, customer service, and basic business planning. I have also learned how to interact confidently with tourists from different cultures and with government or tourism officials. These skills have increased my self-confidence and made me feel capable as an entrepreneur, not just as a homemaker.

6. **How has your relationship with your husband or other family members changed since you began running the homestay?**

- My relationship with my husband and family has become more collaborative. They support the business and respect my leadership role. Because the homestay contributes significantly to household income, my work is valued, and decision-making has become more shared. This has strengthened mutual trust and understanding within the family.

7. **How do you balance homestay responsibilities with household work and care duties, and has your workload changed?**

- My workload has increased because I am responsible for both homestay operations and household duties. However, my family provides support, which helps me manage these responsibilities. Even though it can be physically and emotionally demanding, I feel motivated because the work gives me independence and purpose.

8. **Has your social status or recognition within the community changed as a result of being a homestay operator?**

- Yes, my social status has improved. People in the community recognize me as a homestay owner and someone contributing to local tourism development. I feel more confident speaking in public or community discussions, and others are more willing to listen to my opinions.

9. **Are you involved in community groups, tourism committees, or local decision-making related to homestays or tourism?**

- Currently, homestay operators like me have limited involvement in formal policymaking. This is something I am not satisfied with. I strongly believe that women who operate homestays should be included in tourism planning and policy discussions, as we understand the ground realities better than external decision-makers.

10. **How do you experience hosting guests in your home, and what does cultural exchange mean to you?**

- I enjoy hosting guests and sharing our culture, food, and daily life. Cultural exchange is one of the most meaningful aspects of homestays, as it allows tourists to understand local

traditions while also making us appreciate the value of our own culture. It creates mutual respect and learning.

11. What are the main challenges you face as a woman operating a homestay?

- One major challenge is the lack of sufficient government investment and technical support for homestays. I am also dissatisfied with certain local regulations, such as restrictions on outsiders buying property in homestay operation zones, which limits investment and business growth. These policies do not always consider the long-term sustainability of homestays.

12. Have you noticed any negative or unintended effects of homestay tourism?

- While homestays provide income, they can also increase women's workload and expectations. If not managed carefully, women may become overburdened in the name of empowerment. There is also a risk that benefits are unevenly distributed within the community.

13. Do you feel that homestay tourism has empowered you? In what ways?

- Yes, I feel empowered economically, socially, and personally. I am financially independent, more confident, and more respected within my family and community. I now see myself as an entrepreneur contributing to local development. I am also learning and getting better day by day which is very important for women like me.

14. What kinds of support would help strengthen women's participation in homestay tourism?

- Government investment, access to finance, training programs, and inclusion of homestay operators in policymaking would greatly strengthen women's participation. Policies should be created with direct input from women who are actively running homestays. We are

currently competing with hotels that has millions of rupees in investment whereas we share our home, we should be prioritized.

15. Looking ahead, what are your aspirations for yourself and other women involved in homestays?

- I hope to expand my homestay and see Nagarkot develop sustainably. I want women homestay operators to be recognized as entrepreneurs and leaders in tourism development, not just as service providers.

16. How do you think women-led homestays contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5?

- I didn't know about sustainable development goal until I started homestay and went for training. See, without homestay, I wouldn't know about it at all. Coming to the question, I believe women-led homestays directly support gender equality by giving women economic independence and decision-making power as males are not allowed to own and the payments from the operations are directly given to women. When women earn and manage income, their voices become stronger both at home and in the community. Homestays create opportunities for women to move beyond traditional roles.

17. In what ways can homestay tourism support sustainable development and decent work in Nagarkot?

Homestay tourism can create local employment, reduce outmigration, and ensure that tourism benefits stay within the community. If supported properly, it can promote sustainable livelihoods without harming the environment or local culture. Women's involvement is key to making tourism more inclusive and sustainable.

Appendix B

Respondent: Laxmi Bastola

Age: 44

Occupation: Homestay Operator

Location: Nagarkot

Education: Basic level (currently enrolled in adult education called Praudh Shikshya)

1. **Can you reflect on your life before you became involved in homestay tourism?**

- Before I started the homestay, my life was limited mostly to household responsibilities. I identified myself primarily as a housewife with primary level education, and my work was confined to domestic work and helping family in agriculture. I had little exposure outside my family and community, and I was not known for any economic activity. At that time, I never imagined myself as a business owner or someone contributing directly to tourism and family.

2. **What motivated you to start a homestay, especially at a time when very few women were involved?**

- I was among the first women to start a homestay in Nagarkot. At that time, the idea was new, and many people were unsure whether it would work. My husband was working abroad then, so I had to manage both the household and the homestay alone. My motivation came from the desire to improve my family's livelihood and to do something meaningful with my life. I wanted to turn my home into an opportunity.

3. **How did starting a homestay change your sense of identity and self-worth?**

- Starting the homestay completely transformed how I see myself. I no longer see myself only as a housewife; I now identify as a businesswoman. Managing guests, handling finances, and interacting with tourists has given me confidence and self-respect. I feel

proud of what I have achieved, especially because I started with limited education and no prior business experience.

4. **How did you manage the homestay in the absence of your husband, and how has his return changed the dynamics?**

- When my husband was abroad, I had to take full responsibility for the homestay. It was challenging, but it made me strong and independent. After my husband returned, he began supporting the business, and now we work together. However, the leadership role remains mine, and he respects the experience and knowledge I gained during his absence.

5. **What role has learning and education played in your journey as a homestay operator?**

- Education has become very important to me. Even though I only had basic schooling, operating a homestay made me realize the value of learning. That is why I enrolled in Praudh Shikshya (adult education) and I am currently enrolled in class 9. I want to communicate better with tourists, understand their needs, and manage my business more professionally. Learning has empowered me and given me confidence to grow further.

6. **In what ways has homestay income affected your household and personal independence?**

- Homestay income has made me financially independent. I contribute directly to household expenses and savings, which has changed how decisions are made at home. You won't believe me, I didn't even have a bank account before homestay. My husband used to send money to my father-in-law and he would give me the allocated money to run the house. I feel secure knowing that I am capable of supporting my family. This financial independence has strengthened my voice within the household.

7. **How has the community's perception of you changed since you became a homestay operator?**

- Earlier, I was not well-known outside my immediate circle. Now, people recognize me as one of the pioneers of homestay tourism in Nagarkot. I am respected for my work and often approached for advice by other women who want to start homestays. This recognition has been one of the most rewarding outcomes of my journey.

8. What challenges did you face as a woman starting a homestay with limited education?

- The biggest challenge was self-doubt and lack of confidence due to my limited education. There were also social expectations about women's roles. However, experience taught me more than formal education initially, and later motivated me to return to learning. Institutional support was limited, and most learning came through practice.

9. How do you see your role in encouraging other women to participate in homestay tourism?

- I actively encourage other women to join the homestay network if not try to be part of my homestay as staff and try themselves. I share my experiences and motivate them by showing that change is possible. Many women feel inspired when they see my journey from a housewife to a business owner. I believe women supporting women is key to collective empowerment.

10. How has homestay tourism influenced gender roles and expectations within your family?

- Homestay tourism has changed traditional gender roles not just in my household but in whole Nagarkot village. My work is now seen as equally important as my husband's. Household responsibilities are shared more than before, and my contributions are valued economically and socially.

11. **From your experience, what does empowerment mean for women involved in homestays?**

- For me, empowerment means confidence, independence, and respect. It means having the ability to make decisions, earn income, and be recognized in society. Homestays have given women like me a platform to step out of traditional boundaries.

12. **What kinds of institutional or policy support do you think women homestay operators need most?**

- Women homestay operators need training, access to credit which as of now needs approval from husband and family, and recognition in tourism policies. There should be more programs targeting women with low formal education, so they can build skills gradually. Policymakers should listen to women's voices when designing homestay regulations.

13. **How do you think women-led homestays contribute to gender equality (SDG 5)?**

- Women-led homestays promote gender equality by creating economic opportunities for women and challenging traditional roles. When women earn and manage businesses, they gain confidence and respect. This directly supports gender equality at the household and community levels.

14. **In what ways can homestay tourism support sustainable and inclusive development in Nagarkot (SDG 8)?**

- Homestay tourism creates local jobs, keeps income within the community, and reduces dependency on migration. It allows families to grow economically without damaging the environment or culture. Women's involvement ensures that development is inclusive and balanced.

15. Looking back, what does your journey as a homestay operator mean to you personally?

My journey has been deeply transformative. It has changed how I see myself and how others see me. From being a housewife with limited education to becoming a respected businesswoman, the homestay has given me dignity, confidence, and purpose.

16. What message would you like to share with women who hesitate to join homestay tourism?

- I want to tell them that change is possible at any age and with any level of education. Homestay tourism can open doors to empowerment, learning, and independence. Women should believe in themselves and support one another.

17. Do you have any secrets that you would like to share with us?

Don't get me wrong but now the house I use for homestay is not the one my family live in. Though they are invited to my kitchen and have breakfast or even dinner with us. This is to make sure they get their privacy as well as we do. And, I build that house with the income generated from Homestay.

Appendix C

Respondent: Aruna Tamang
Age: 29
Occupation: Homestay Operator and Community Homestay Leader
Location: Nagarkot
Education: Bachelor

1. **How did your educational background influence your decision to enter homestay tourism?**

- My educational background gave me the confidence to see homestay tourism not just as hosting guests, but as a system involving service quality, communication, planning, and coordination. I understood early on that tourism is not only about accommodation, but about experience, management, and relationships. When I moved to Nagarkot after marriage, I noticed that many homestays had potential but lacked professional organization. My education helped me identify where improvements were needed and made me confident that I could contribute meaningfully to this sector.

2. **What prompted you to shift from salaried employment to running a homestay?**

- I previously had a regular day job, which provided a stable income, but it did not give me personal satisfaction. I felt disconnected from my work and lacked a sense of purpose. When I started the homestay, I realized that this work allowed me to be creative, independent, and directly involved in community development. Although the financial return was uncertain at first, the emotional fulfillment and sense of ownership made me much happier. Over time, the homestay also became financially viable, reinforcing my decision.

3. **Can you describe your role beyond your own homestay within the wider homestay community?**

- My role goes far beyond managing my own homestay. I act as a communication bridge for many homestay operators who are not comfortable with technology, online booking platforms, or English communication with international tourists and travel agents. I manage inquiries, bookings, and guest coordination for several homestays in the community. This role has naturally placed me in a leadership position, where I am responsible not only for business operations but also for maintaining trust between guests and hosts.

4. **How has this leadership role affected your sense of empowerment and responsibility?**

- This leadership role has been empowering, but it also comes with a strong sense of responsibility. I feel confident knowing that my skills directly help other women earn income and gain confidence. At the same time, I am aware that mistakes can affect the entire community's reputation. This has taught me accountability, patience, and ethical leadership. Empowerment, for me, now includes responsibility toward others.

5. **In what ways has operating a homestay influenced your financial stability and independence?**

- Operating the homestay has significantly improved my financial independence. While income was unpredictable at the beginning, it has become more stable over time. I now contribute substantially to household expenses and savings. Financial independence has given me greater control over my life choices and reduced reliance on a single income source, which feels very empowering.

6. **How do you manage the balance between personal life and professional responsibilities?**

- Balancing personal and professional life is challenging, but I believe it is manageable because of flexibility and support. My husband helps whenever possible, especially during busy seasons. The ability to manage my schedule allows me to attend to family

responsibilities without sacrificing my professional role. This balance is important for my well-being and motivation. In addition, my in-laws too help me whenever I need more hands.

7. **What challenges do less-educated women face in homestay tourism, and how do you support them?**

- Women with limited education often lack confidence, especially when dealing with guests or digital platforms. They worry about communication, pricing, and formal procedures. I support them by handling bookings, explaining guest expectations, and encouraging them to attend training programs. I also reassure them that experience and willingness to learn are just as important as formal education.

8. **How do training programs and knowledge-sharing contribute to women's empowerment in homestays?**

- Training programs and seminars play a crucial role in empowerment in my opinion. They provide women with practical skills and boost confidence. I help organize training sessions for both homestay operators and housewives who may consider joining in the future. Knowledge-sharing reduces fear, builds collective strength, and helps women see themselves as capable entrepreneurs.

9. **How have gender roles within your household evolved since you became a homestay operator? Have you seen the change within your community too?**

- Gender roles in my household have become more flexible and balanced. My work is respected, and my husband supports the homestay whenever needed. Decision-making is shared, and my contribution is recognized as equally important. Homestay tourism has helped normalize women's economic participation within the household. It is also seen in the community as more balanced roles are now normal in Nagarkot. It pleases me to see such things among household which has very less education.

10. What does empowerment mean to you as a young woman and community leader?

- Empowerment, for me, means having the confidence and skills to make decisions and influence outcomes. It also means using my position to support other women. True empowerment is not only about personal success but about creating opportunities for others and contributing to collective progress.

11. What concerns do you have regarding the long-term sustainability of homestay tourism in Nagarkot?

- Despite the progress, I have concerns about sustainability. Many homestays have not modernized their services, and there is limited long-term planning for sustainable tourism growth in Nagarkot. Without innovation, quality improvement, and policy support, homestays may struggle to remain competitive in the future. It is good to see the growth in number of homestays in Nagarkot, but there should also be innovation within us to sustain the growth of operators and tourism activities here.

12. How do you think modernization and sustainability can be balanced in homestay tourism?

- Modernization should focus on improving service quality, digital access, and environmental practices while preserving cultural authenticity. Sustainable growth requires community involvement, proper planning, and government support. Modernization should not replace tradition but strengthen it. This are the issues I have raised in our meetings and will be addressed in next annual general meeting which would have our Mayor and tourism officials from government of Nepal.

13. In what ways do women-led homestays contribute to gender equality and decent work?

- Women-led homestays create decent employment opportunities and challenge traditional gender norms. They allow women to earn, lead, and make decisions. This contributes directly to gender equality and inclusive economic growth by ensuring women are active participants in tourism development. That's what has been evident in our community.

14. How has your journey in homestay tourism influenced your future aspirations?

- My journey has motivated me to continue strengthening the homestay network and advocate for better coordination, training, and sustainable planning. I see myself playing a long-term leadership role in community-based tourism development in Nagarkot.

15. If you could change things about the current homestay system, what would it be?

- I would improve collaboration between homestay operators, local government, and tourism authorities. Stronger coordination and shared planning are essential for sustainable growth and long-term success. I would also like to provide more trainings to the women in our community which would eventually benefit Nagarkot and be an example of homestay success across the nation.

Appendix D

Respondent: Kavita Bastola

Age: 23

Occupation: Homestay Operator

Location: Nagarkot

1. **Can you tell me about your background and how you became involved in homestay operations at a young age?**

- I am one of the youngest homestay operators in Nagarkot. Before starting the homestay, I was mostly involved in household work, helping my family and was university student. I did not have a clear long-term plan or strong economic independence. Being young, my opinions were often not taken seriously in family or community discussions. However, I was always curious about tourism and wanted to explore opportunities that could help me become independent without leaving my birthplace.

2. **What motivated you to start operating a homestay despite your age and limited experience?**

- My motivation came from observing other elder women in the village who had improved their lives through homestay tourism. I realized that homestays could allow me to earn income while staying close to my family. Even though I was unsure at first, I saw it as an opportunity to learn and grow. I wanted to prove that young women can also manage businesses responsibly.

3. **How has operating a homestay affected your household income and financial position?**

- The homestay has become an important source of income for my household. Although the earnings are still modest compared to more established homestays, the income has reduced

financial pressure on my family. Personally, earning my own income has given me confidence and reduced my dependence on others.

4. Has your role in household decision-making changed since you started earning through the homestay?

- Yes, my role has changed slowly. Earlier, I was rarely included in financial discussions. Now, because I contribute financially, my opinions are considered more seriously. While I am not the main decision-maker yet, I feel my voice has gained importance. My father and elder brother do take my opinion now.

5. What skills have you developed through managing the homestay?

- Through running the homestay, I have learned basic hospitality skills, communication with guests, time management, and responsibility. I am still learning, but these skills have helped me grow personally. I feel more confident interacting with people and managing daily tasks.

6. How do you manage homestay work alongside household responsibilities?

- Balancing homestay work with household duties is challenging, especially at my age. Sometimes the workload feels heavy, but I try to manage my time carefully. My family provides support, and over time, they have become more understanding of my responsibilities.

7. How has the community's perception of you changed since you became a homestay operator?

- Earlier, I was mostly seen as a young girl with limited responsibilities. Now, people recognize me as someone contributing to tourism and the household economy. This has improved my confidence and sense of belonging within the community.

8. **How does interacting with tourists influence your confidence and outlook on life?**

- Interacting with tourists has helped me become more open-minded and confident. Hearing different perspectives and learning about other cultures has changed how I see myself and my future. I feel more motivated to improve myself.

9. **What challenges do you face as a young woman operating a homestay?**

- One major challenge is being taken seriously due to my age. Some guests and community members assume I lack experience. Managing expectations and building trust takes time. Additionally, balancing workload and emotional pressure can be difficult, especially at my age. I am the youngest operator in Nagarkot.

10. **Do you feel that homestay tourism has empowered you? If so, how?**

- Yes, homestay tourism has empowered me, especially psychologically and economically. I feel more confident, independent, and capable. Even though my journey has just begun, I can see positive changes in myself.

11. **How do you see your future in homestay tourism?**

- I want to continue improving my homestay and learning new skills. In the future, I hope to expand my role and maybe support other young women who want to join homestay tourism. I see this as a long-term opportunity.

12. **In what ways do you think women-led homestays contribute to gender equality in Nagarkot?**

- Women-led homestays help challenge traditional roles by showing that women can manage businesses and earn income. Even young women like me can become active contributors to development. This helps promote gender equality gradually.

13. How does homestay tourism support sustainable development in your village?

- Homestays help keep income within the community and reduce the need for migration. It also promote circular economy as most of the products needed for homestays are locally produced. In addition to that, it also encourage cultural preservation and responsible tourism as local performer who were unpaid for years are not paid to organize shows for tourists. For young women, homestays provide local employment opportunities which is still rare case in Nepal.

14. What support do young women like you need to succeed in homestay tourism?

- Young women need training, mentoring, and encouragement from family and community leaders. Access to skills development and confidence-building programs would help us grow faster and more sustainably.

15. Looking back, what has been the most important change in your life since starting the homestay?

- The most important change is my confidence. I feel more independent and hopeful about my future. Homestay tourism has given me a sense of purpose and direction in life.

16. Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Well, I am still young and recently finished my university. I want to build another house to facilitate more tourists in my homestay. I also intend to marry in near future, I want my husband to join me here in homestay and help me to be better. I know this is completely

against the social norms here in nepal to join wife's family and business, I hope I get someone who understands it.

Appendix E

Respondent: Shiva Bastola
Age: 49
Gender: Male
Husband of a woman homestay operator
Location: Nagarkot

1. **What were your initial thoughts when the idea of starting a homestay was first discussed in your household?**

- Initially, I was very skeptical. Nagarkot already had many established hotels and lodges with better facilities, and I did not believe that a small homestay could compete with them. At that time, I was earning well abroad, so financially we were stable. From my perspective, starting a homestay felt unnecessary and risky. I saw it as uncharted territory, especially for women, because there were no clear examples of successful women-led homestays in Nagarkot then.

2. **How did your perception of your wife's ability to run a business influence your resistance?**

- Honestly, I did not believe my wife could manage a business independently. Not because she lacked ability, but because culturally, we are used to seeing women manage the household, not enterprises. I feared she would be overburdened, face criticism, or fail. At that time, I believed my role as a provider made the risk unnecessary. Looking back, this belief was shaped more by social norms than by her actual capabilities.

3. **What were your biggest fears regarding homestay tourism and women's participation in it?**

- My biggest fear was financial loss. I also worried about reputation, what people would say if the homestay failed. Another concern was safety and workload. I believed hosting strangers would disrupt family life and create unnecessary stress for my wife. These fears made me strongly opposed to the idea in the beginning.

4. **What changed your perspective, and when did you begin to see homestay operations differently?**

- My perspective began to change once the homestay started generating consistent income. I saw guests appreciating my wife's efforts, and I noticed how confidently she handled responsibilities. Over time, it became clear that the homestay was not only financially successful but also gave her confidence and recognition. This forced me to question my earlier assumptions.

5. **What led you to return to Nepal and become involved in the homestay operations?**
- Seeing the homestay's success made me realize that my presence was needed at home, not just financially but emotionally and practically. I returned to Nepal to support the business and my family. I now help with daily operations, guest management, and household chores. This was a major shift for me, both professionally and personally.

6. **How has your role within the household changed since your wife became a homestay operator?**
- My role has changed completely. Earlier, I was the main decision-maker and provider. Now, decisions, whether personal, financial, or professional, are made jointly. I consult my wife before making any major choices. I also take care of the children when my wife is busy with guests, something I never imagined doing before. I also work on our family owned lands where we product vegetables and fruits which is consumed in homestay.

7. **How do you perceive these changes in gender roles within your household?**

At first, these changes felt uncomfortable because they challenged traditional ideas of masculinity. My friends and relatives would call me '**Joitingre**' a man who doesn't have masculinity. But over time, I realized that sharing responsibilities strengthens the family. I no longer see household work as women's work. Supporting my wife has made our relationship more balanced and respectful. I have never been this happy before.

8. **Have you noticed social reactions or disruptions within the community due to these changes?**

- Yes, definitely. Some people initially mocked me for helping with household work and child care. There were comments suggesting that I had "lost authority." However, as the homestay succeeded, attitudes slowly changed. Now, many men ask me about how the business works and how they can support their wives. This shift did not happen without tension, but it shows changing social norms.

9. **From your perspective, how has homestay tourism affected women's empowerment in Nagarkot?**

- Homestay tourism has given women economic independence and confidence. When women earn and manage businesses, their voices naturally become stronger. I have seen this not only in my wife but in other women as well. Empowerment is visible in how women speak, negotiate, and make decisions today.

10. **How has your understanding of women's capabilities evolved through this experience?**

- I have learned that my earlier doubts were misplaced. Women are fully capable of managing businesses when given opportunities and support. My wife has proven this through her work. This experience has changed how I view women's roles, not just in my family, but in society. These changes are gradual and in increasing trend here in Nagarkot. Now, women from other villages like Chhaling, Changu come to our homestays and take guidance from women of our village on starting homestays in their village.

11. Do you think homestay tourism creates tensions within families or marriages? Why or why not?

Yes, it can create tensions, especially when power dynamics shift. When women start earning more, some men feel threatened. I have seen cases where this led to conflicts and even separation. Without dialogue and mutual respect, empowerment can create friction. Support from family is crucial. There is one example in Nagarkot where divorce was initiated by a homestay operator woman. It was the first case in our village. Since then, men in the village are more participative to the homestay operation and helpful in operation too.

12. How do you think men should be engaged in women-focused tourism initiatives?

- Men need to be included in conversations about women's empowerment. If men feel excluded, resistance increases. Education and awareness programs should target both men and women to ensure shared understanding and cooperation.

13. In what ways does your experience challenge traditional ideas of masculinity?

- My experience has taught me that masculinity is not about control but about responsibility and partnership. Supporting my wife does not make me weaker; it makes our family stronger. This realization was difficult but necessary.

14. How do you see the future of homestay tourism in Nagarkot from a family perspective?

- From a family perspective, homestays can provide sustainable income and stability if managed properly. However, they require cooperation, planning, and policy support. Without these, families may face burnout or conflict.

15. What message would you give to other men whose wives want to start homestay businesses?

- I would tell them not to underestimate their wives. Give them a chance to prove themselves. Support does not mean losing power; it means sharing it. When women succeed, families and communities' benefit.

Appendix F

Respondent: Kumar Tamang
Age: 34
Gender: Male
Occupation: Bank employee (day job)
Husband of a woman homestay operator
Location: Nagarkot

1. **How did you first perceive homestay tourism and your wife's involvement in it?**

- From the beginning, I viewed homestay tourism as a positive opportunity, especially for women. Being educated and exposed to different ideas through my banking job, I understood that tourism could bring income and confidence to households. When my wife showed interest in homestay operations, I encouraged her, although I was also aware that the system is complex and not always easy to navigate.

2. **What role do you personally play in supporting your wife's homestay business?**

- I mainly support her in understanding the tourism system, communication with guests, coordination with local networks, and dealing with institutions. I also help her connect with other women and encourage her to share knowledge rather than work alone. My support is not about controlling the business, but about enabling her to operate confidently.

3. **In what ways do you think homestay tourism has changed women's roles within households?**

- Homestay tourism has clearly changed women's roles. Women are no longer seen only as caretakers of the household; they are now income earners and decision-makers. This has increased their confidence and authority at home. In many households, including mine, financial discussions have become more balanced.

4. How has this shift affected traditional power dynamics between men and women in the community?

- The power dynamics have definitely shifted. Women's voices are heard now, not only at home but also in village meetings. This is a positive change, but it has also created discomfort among some men who are not used to sharing power. Empowerment changes long-standing hierarchies, and that naturally creates tension.

5. Can you give an example of how women's empowerment has translated into broader community change?

- A clear example is local politics. In the last ward election, two women were elected as representatives, which is the highest number ever seen in this village. This would have been unimaginable a few years ago. Women's involvement in homestays gave them confidence, visibility, and public trust. Many other women are not involved in other business, not just homestay and the empowerment is visible in the community.

6. From your perspective, what are the positive impacts of women's empowerment through homestays?

- The positive impacts are many. Economically, households are more stable than before. Socially, women are more confident and respected. Psychologically, women believe in themselves more. Homestays have allowed women to convert domestic skills into income-generating work, which exactly may not aligns well with our conservative cultural context but the society is evolving now.

7. Are there any negative or unintended consequences of women's empowerment that you have observed?
- Yes, there are some negative or unintended effects. In some families, rapid changes in power have led to conflicts. Some men feel insecure or excluded, especially if they are not

economically active leading to chaos and even domestic violence. There have been cases where empowerment has led to tension, misunderstandings, and even separation. This shows that empowerment needs to be accompanied by dialogue and mutual adjustment.

8. How do these changes align with what you consider the "average Nepali male mindset"?

- For many Nepali men, especially in rural or semi-rural areas, these changes are difficult to accept. Traditionally, men are seen as providers and decision-makers. When women begin earning more or gaining recognition, some men feel their identity is threatened. It took years to balance the society in Nagarkot but it was worth in.

9. Do you think men are sufficiently included in women-focused tourism initiatives?

- I don't think men should be part of the women-focused tourism activities. To balance this, our homestay association is starting a monthly group meeting of operators, leaders and interested people. If anything happens or anyone has to say anything, they can say in the meeting. I strongly believe this would remove tensions especially among men who feel threaten.

10. How has homestay tourism affected relationships and social cohesion in the village?

- Overall, homestay tourism has improved cooperation and networking among women. However, it has also created competition and inequality between households that benefit more and those that benefit less. This can cause jealousy or social fragmentation if not managed carefully. Like, some homestay can accommodate 10 guests where as some can only host 4. I think the distribution should be proportionate and satisfactory to all the operators.

11. What role does education and training play in making homestay tourism sustainable?

- Education and training are critical in every aspect of life. Without proper skills, homestay operators can struggle with service quality, management, and sustainability. Women need access to continuous training, not just one-time workshops. Government support is essential here.

12. How do you see the role of government in supporting women-led homestays?

- The government needs to provide better training programs, access to finance, and clearer policies. Right now, support exists, but it is not sufficient or well-coordinated. If homestays are to be sustainable, institutional backing must improve. As a bank employee, I personally feel women do have less exposure to finance and credit facility, which would be a milestone for economic freedom and entrepreneurial journey for Nepalese women in small business operation.

13. Do you think homestay tourism contributes to long-term sustainable development in Nagarkot?

- Yes, if managed properly. Homestays keep income within the community, reduce migration, and promote cultural preservation. However, without planning and regulation, they can also lead to overwork, burnout, or uneven development. Also, they should be properly regulated.

14. How do you personally reconcile tradition with changing gender roles?

- I believe traditions should evolve, not disappear. Supporting women does not mean rejecting culture; it means adapting it to present realities. When women succeed, families and communities become stronger.

15. What message would you like to share with other men in similar situations?

- I would say that women's empowerment is not a loss for men. It is a shared gain. Supporting women does not weaken families, it strengthens them. Change is uncomfortable, but necessary for progress. Women in western countries manage billion dollar empire, we need to trust our women to manage small home-based business.

Appendix G

Respondent: Anonymous
Role: Relation Officer
Organization: Community Homestay Network

1. **How did the Community Homestay Network (CHN) start engaging with homestay development in rural Nepal, and what were the initial reactions from local communities?**

- When CHN first introduced homestay operations in rural areas like Nagarkot, the idea was met with strong skepticism, especially among men. Many households were hesitant to open their homes to strangers due to safety concerns and social norms around privacy and hospitality. In the early phase, the community resisted the concept of inviting unknown foreign tourists into private spaces, fearing disruption of social norms and loss of control over traditional lifestyle. To address these concerns, homestay pilots initially allowed only female hosts and couples to accommodate guests, while the broader community observed how income might flow from tourism without eroding local cultural values. Over time, as women in these communities began generating income from sharing their homes and resources, perceptions changed. When women demonstrated economic success and increased visibility, the broader community, including many initial skeptics, started to acknowledge the value of homestays and became more supportive.

2. **What role have women played in transforming homestay tourism into a tool for empowerment?**

- Women have been central to CHN's vision of community-driven tourism. Rather than treating women as passive beneficiaries, CHN encourages them to take leadership in managing tourism activities, running homestays, and making decisions about services and revenue use. Through this process, women gain financial independence, confidence, and new skills, such as guest engagement, basic accounting, and intercultural communication.

These gains are not only economic but extend into social spheres: women begin to participate more actively in community affairs and challenge traditional patriarchal norms that once limited their public roles. CHN's experience shows that when women control tourism revenue locally, they often choose to invest in children's education, community projects, or health initiatives, thereby reinforcing their agency in family and community decision-making.

3. Can you describe the relationship between economic empowerment through homestays and changes in social norms around gender roles?

- Economic empowerment has had ripple effects beyond income generation in Nagarkot. In many Nepalese rural communities, women's voices were historically suppressed within patriarchal family structures. As women started earning directly from homestays, they gained greater voice and visibility in household and community decision-making. This social empowerment manifests in multiple ways: women are consulted on family matters, recognized by neighbors, and invited into community discussions where they previously had little presence. This shift marks a transformation in gender norms, friends, relatives, and male family members begin to value women's economic contributions and perspectives. Over time, these changes have contributed to a broader restructuring of social hierarchies, where women's leadership is more readily accepted and respected.

4. What challenges persist in using community homestays as platforms for women's empowerment in Nagarkot?

- While the progress is significant, challenges remain. Homestays are often constrained by limited infrastructure, inadequate training, and inconsistent support systems. Women, especially those who are less educated or from marginalized backgrounds, may struggle to access digital booking platforms, marketing channels, or formal tourism training. There is also the risk that economic success may not be evenly distributed within communities, leading to tensions or jealousy among neighbors. Additionally, some traditional gender norms persist: women may still bear most household labor alongside their tourism

responsibilities, encountering double burdens without proportional support for domestic work. These structural constraints illustrate that while tourism can open doors, sustaining empowerment requires integrated policy support, capacity building, and inclusive community governance.

5. **How does CHN support women from Nagarkot in gaining skills and confidence beyond income generation?**

- CHN invests in training and capacity-building activities that go beyond hospitality basics. These include communication skills, cultural interpretation, community networking, and sustainable tourism practices. By involving women in seminars, peer learning circles, and cross-community exchanges, CHN helps women articulate their experiences, mentor other hosts, and participate in tourism planning. CHN's approach views empowerment not merely as economic independence but as enhanced agency and participation in civic life. For example, women trained through CHN often become community educators, mentors, or role models who support other women in starting homestays or participating in local governance.

6. **What broader societal impacts have you observed as women become more visible and economically active through homestays in Nagarkot?**

- Beyond individual households, women's economic participation has influenced community dynamics more broadly. In Nagarkot, women's leadership in homestay networks has encouraged collective action on community priorities such as sanitation, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. Children's educational attainment can improve when families prioritize schooling through homestay earnings. In a few cases, increased female visibility and leadership have even contributed to improved political participation at the local level, with more women running for local committees or engaging in community planning processes. However, these gains are not automatic, they evolve through continuous negotiation with male counterparts and local institutions, reflecting the complex interplay between economic change and social norms.

7. **How do you see the future of homestay tourism in promoting sustainable, gender-equitable rural development in Nepal?**

- CHN's long-term vision situates homestay tourism within sustainable, community-led development. This approach means aligning tourism with local values, ecological stewardship, and cultural authenticity rather than focusing solely on short-term profits. Sustainability and gender equity must go hand in hand: training, equitable governance, and reinvestment of tourism benefits into community infrastructure are critical. With ongoing capacity building and policy support, especially from government and development partner, homestays can continue to be engines of inclusive growth and women's empowerment across Nepal's rural landscapes.

Appendix H

Photos taken during interviews and taken by RA.
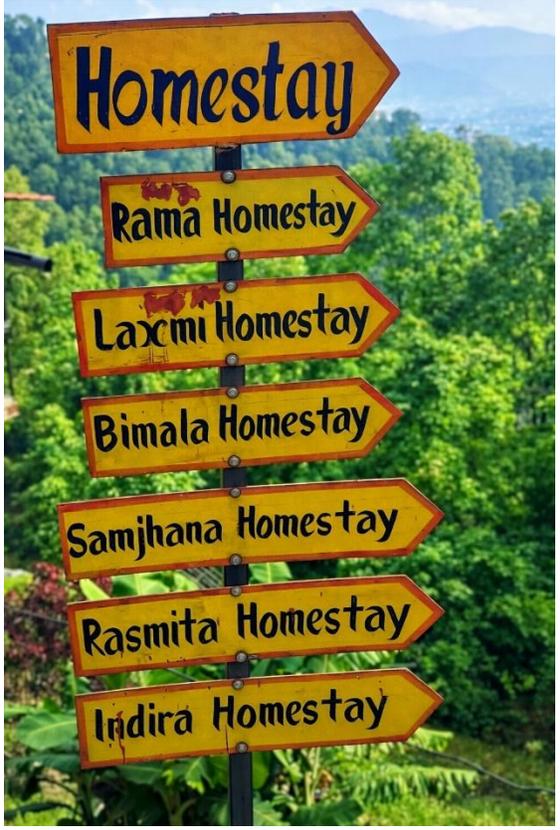
Appendix I: Declaration on AI

I declare that generative AI tools were used in a limited and supportive manner during the preparation of this thesis. The use of AI was restricted to assisting with language-related tasks, including improving clarity of expression, refining academic writing style, and checking grammar and sentence structure. These tools were employed to enhance readability and coherence, particularly where complex ideas needed to be communicated clearly in academic English.

All substantive aspects of this research, including the research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and theoretical engagement, are entirely my own work. Any use of AI tools was carefully monitored to ensure that intellectual ownership, analytical responsibility, and academic integrity remained fully with the author.AI tool Grammarly, was used in a manner similar to advanced proofreading or spelling and grammar checker.