POLICIES, PROJECTS AND IMPACTS

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An overwhelming majority of active women in Nepal, 93.7 , work in agriculture. Recently, the contribution of women to irrigated agriculture is gaining recognition through the efforts of bilateral agencies working for gender equity and empowerment. In view of this, the Agriculture Perspective Plan (APP) has recently accorded gender issues a high priority and recognized gender as one of the important implementation strategies. Not only does APP give explicit consideration to gender issues in all aspects of its plan, but also specifies how women can be brought into the mainstream of accelerated growth. Specifically, the APP aims to improve access of women to production inputs and credit, bring women actively into income generation and marketing activities, and ensure that both women and men have access to the development opportunities being promoted.

Similarly, the significance of research work to generate technology that helps reduce the workload of women in household and farm activities are explicitly recognized by the Ninth Plan. It also emphasizes the need to identify and recommend such technologies that will be easily accepted by women farmers. In order to address the issue of mainstreaming gender in agriculture, APP has formulated the following specific strategies:

- Inclusion of women in water users' groups
- Increment the number of women in training directed at the organization and management of irrigation systems
- Design technology that will help reduce the workload of women for household and labor activities
- Increase employment of women extension agents and professionals to reach women farmers
- Provision of a high rate of subsidy on irrigation loans to women

International Development Enterprises/Nepal (IDE/N), is a unit of a US based international non-profit organization which develops and markets low cost technologies that help farmers to enhance their income by increasing farm productivity. IDE has been working in villages of Palpa district of western Nepal since 1998 with a view to helping small farmers, particularly women, to improve their lives by increasing their income through high value vegetable production. IDE motivated farmers to form

self-help groups for cultivation of micro-irrigation technology. IDE promoted the idea that each family member's contribution should be valued and benefits should be equitably shared. Keeping these strategies in the frontline, IDE focused on three major activities: capacity building of farmers, particularly women, groups; promotion of increased vegetable production; creation of linkages between private entrepreneurs and commercial groups for marketing purpose. Working with several women groups, IDE motivated them by providing several training. A courses including the installation of kits, seed preservation, vegetable cultivation and protection with a special focus on organic farming.

Mainly due to scarcity of water, there were very few households that used to cultivate vegetables before the intervention of the IDE project. There was a massive boom in vegetable production after the IDE intervention, as spring water was channeled to the villages due the project. Women adopters of the micro-irrigation technology are now regarded as commercial vegetables producers. Earlier, they had no productive work to do and used to assist in household agriculture as unpaid laborers. With the help of IDE, villagers are able to irrigate land that was previously rainfed and, as a result, used to remain fallow outside the monsoon.

In depth analysis of a daily routine diagram revealed that women's workload has been reduced due to adoption of technology. Previously, women used to fetch water from long distances. They used to spend 1.5-2 hours fetching water and another 1.5-2 hours irrigating fields. Now, up to 75% of this drudgery has been reduced because of the nature of the technology. They no longer have to irrigate manually due to the new technolosy. Women can utilize this saved time for productive purposes, as these women did in reality, by forming self-help groups and operating saving-credit accounts. This kind of innovation will help rural illiterate women to move forward, know their rights, realize their potentials and raise voice whenever necessary.

With the help of vegetable production, not only have these rural women been able to secure their own and their family's nutritional intake, but also they have become financially strong. Organic cultivation practices, improved cultivation with the use of better seed quality, proper use of fertilizer among other innovations, have led to better productivity and better food security. Better cultivation practices, and improved water savings through the use of micro-irrigation leads to a more sustainable use of natural resources.

In my view, here is no longer a need to do more paperwork in formulating policies or creating attractive programs or strategies for implementation. I believe enough work has been done in this respect. The key to success relies on proper implementation of these policies and programs. This experience gives us a lesson that if a cost-effective, easy-to-operate and maintain, less labor intensive, gender sensitive and environment-friendly technology is introduced, it can have positive impact on both human livelihood and sustainable use of natural resources.