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Helping Accelerate Poverty Reduction in Asia and the Pacific

PILOTING PRO-POOR, TARGETED AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE SERVICES IN NEPAL

A technical assistance in Nepal was designed to enhance the participation of poor and disadvantaged women and men in two districts in the Western Development Region in development and empowerment process.

Poverty in Nepal fell from 42% to 31% between 1996 to 2004.¹ Yet with an average per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of \$260 (2004), it is still the poorest country in South Asia and ranks as the 12th poorest country in the world.² While poverty remains concentrated among the rural poor, women, and various disadvantaged ethnic and caste groups, access to basic services—including primary education and health care—has increased significantly, as have the number of households with access to electricity and sanitation. About 80% of Nepal's primary-aged schoolchildren are enrolled in schools. The infant mortality rate has dropped from 101 (per 1,000 live births) in 1990, to about 61 in 2003.³

Around four fifths of the working population live in rural areas and depend on subsistence farming. Rural poor households have limited access to primary health care, education, clean drinking water, and sanitation services. For the most vulnerable groups such as those belonging to the lowest social castes, indigenous peoples, and women⁴, life is a constant struggle for survival.

The highest concentration of poor rural people is found in the Mid- and Far Western regions. While the overall poverty rate for Nepal is 31%, this figure increases to 45% in the Mid-Western region and 41% in the Far Western region.

Nepal's gender empowerment index at 0.191 is one of the worst in the region. The country also has one of the highest indices of son preference in the world.⁵ Nepalese women have lesser access to health, education, and livelihood opportunities. They are excluded from decision-making processes at home and in the community. The situation of women belonging to disadvantaged ethnic groups and castes is even worse.

While Nepal's 1990 Constitution prohibits discrimination based on caste, religion, race, sex, and ideology, there has been considerably little progress in addressing caste- and ethnicity-based exclusion.

In 2001, *Dalits*⁶ or the lowest caste group comprised 12.9% of the total population of Nepal (2.9 million). Despite the wealth

of skills related to their traditional occupations, dalits almost invariably work at these trades under discriminatory and exploitative conditions. The transition from traditional to modern market economy has marginalized their knowledge, skills, and products without creating alternative occupational opportunities for them.⁷

Reducing Poverty by Eliminating Gender, Ethnicity, and Case-Based Discrimination

Gender, ethnicity, and caste discrimination—mainly in rural communities—have been a particular constraint on Nepal's socioeconomic advancement. Nepal's 10th Five-Year Plan (2002–2007) recognizes discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and caste, while reiterating that gender equality and the empowerment of women are critical elements in reducing poverty.

Technical Assistance (TA) 4353 (NEP: Promoting Pro-poor and Gender-Responsive Service Delivery⁸) was designed to enhance the participation of poor and disadvantaged women and men in Lamjung and Nawalparasi Districts in the Western Development Region in development and empowerment processes.

TA 4353 was a constant interactive learning process for the Department of Women Development (DWD) and other stakeholders at the central, district, and community levels, and was targeted to pilot new approaches to institutional linkages and partnerships with nongovernment organizations (NGOs). The TA intended to identify target groups, assist them in forming community-based organizations (CBOs) by providing required training and support, and develop replicable income-generation activities with financial support from qualified local NGOs.

A group management and coordination committee was established for each district, chaired by the District Women Development Office (DWDO), with representation from district offices for livestock and crops, from the district development committee and concerned village development committees (VDCs), and partner NGOs.

For TA implementation, 14 NGOs (six in Lamjung and eight in Nawalparasi) were engaged, which facilitated the forming of 16 CBOs (eight in each district) comprising 800 households in eight VDCs. Each CBO consisted of 50 households. Women comprised about 80% of the CBO members; nearly 74% came from disadvantaged ethnic groups and castes.⁹

Capacity development workshops and activities were conducted for district-level stakeholders, NGOs, and CBOs. Income-generating skills training on raising goats and pigs, vegetable cultivation, and fish farming were provided to CBO members. Training on savings mobilization, financial management, and record keeping were also provided and group savings and loan schemes were set up for the CBOs. Gender-mainstreaming trainings were likewise conducted for key stakeholders at the central and district levels.

At the time of TA completion, the average incremental income per beneficiary household was NRs3,000 (about \$47.17), with potential for further increases. Beneficiary groups utilized the income for food, child education, and family health care. CBO members collected NRs5–30 (about \$0.08–0.47) as group savings per month and mobilized the funds for meeting their incidental expenses.¹⁰

Social Mobilization and Capacity Development of Very Poor Women and Men

The targeting of the very poorest members of a community distinguishes TA 4353 from other projects and programs, including other ADB-supported projects such as the Community Livestock Development Project and the community-based projects supported by the Government's Poverty Alleviation Fund.¹¹ Some NGOs that were for the TA commented that the approach targeted poorer households than they have generally reached through their other projects.

Apart from honing the capacity and technical skills of the CBOs, TA 4353 improved their capacity to solve problems and to act collectively through group activities. Key stakeholders viewed the TA as contributing to the development of social capital in very poor and marginalized communities and empowering individuals and households to pursue more diverse livelihood strategies and to access resources and services.

In terms of the desired gender outcomes, partner NGO representatives and facilitators noted dramatic changes in the confidence level of women in their partner CBOs, both in terms of participating in group meetings and in interacting with outsiders. Some women also mentioned proudly that because of their participation in the group activities, they had learned or relearned how to sign their names.¹²

Strengthening Institutional Linkages on Service Delivery for the Poor and Disadvantaged

TA 4353 provided an opportunity for DWD and its field offices to practice new approaches and tools for improving the livelihoods of poor and disadvantaged communities. Among

the useful tools cited were the participatory wealth/well-being ranking method—to target very poor and disadvantaged households, and in working with mixed groups (i.e. gender, ethnicity, and caste)—social mapping, and the procedures for evaluating and selecting partner NGOs.

Through the TA, DWD was able to strengthen institutional linkages with other departments, NGOs, and CBOs and performed as the focal organization for gender mainstreaming. More importantly, the TA experience has provided the basis for DWD to replicate broadly the approach to cater to the poorest not covered by usual development projects.

Endnotes

- ¹ Available: www.worldbank.org.np/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/NEPALEXTN/0,,contentMDK:21130476~menuPK:148707~pagePK:2865066~piPK:2865079~theSitePK:223555,00.html
- ² Available: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSAREGTOPPOVED/0,,contentMDK:20574069~menuPK:493447~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:493441,00.html>
- ³ Available: www.worldbank.org.np/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/NEPALEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20094195~menuPK:286943~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:223555,00.html
- ⁴ Available: www.ruralpovertyportal.org/english/regions/asia/npl/index.htm
- ⁵ Available: www.undp.org.np/publication/html/nhdr2004/Chapter4.pdf
- ⁶ A Dalit is often called an untouchable or an outcast. Nepal's National Dalit Commission defines Dalit as those communities that, by virtue of caste-based discrimination and untouchability, are most backward in the social, economic, educational, political, and religious spheres. They are also deprived of human dignity and social justice. Traditionally, they were treated as pariahs in South Asian society and isolated from their communities. Discrimination against Dalits still exists in rural areas in the private sphere, in ritual matters such as access to eateries and water sources.
- ⁷ Endnote 5.
- ⁸ TA 4353 (NEP Promoting Pro-poor and Gender Responsive Service Delivery); executing agency – Department of Women Development; approval date – July 2004; completion date – December 2006; and TA amount of \$200,000 was financed by the Poverty Reduction Fund (contributed by the United Kingdom Department for International Development Fund and administered by ADB) and \$50,000 from the Nepal Government. The TA was designed to be implemented jointly with Loan 2071–NEP: Community Livestock Development Project (CLDP).
- ⁹ Asian Development Bank. 2007. Technical Assistance Completion Report Promoting Pro-Poor and Gender Responsive Service Delivery (TA 4353–NEP). Manila.
- ¹⁰ Endnote 9.
- ¹¹ McGill, Eugenia. 2006. *Assessment of Institutional Linkages, Initial Impacts, and Lessons Learned*. TA4353–Nep: Promoting Pro-Poor and Gender-Responsive Service Delivery.
- ¹² Endnote 11.

This case study was written by Social Development Direct (RETA Consultant) under the Regional TA 6270: Facilitating Knowledge Management for Pro-Poor Policies and Projects with inputs from Govinda Gewali, Project Officer of TA 4353, and Sonomi Tanaka, Senior Social Development Specialist, ADB. The views and assessments contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of ADB or its Board of Directors or the governments they represent. ADB does not guarantee the accuracy of the data and accepts no responsibility for any consequences of their use.

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