

Increasing Livelihood Opportunities through Road Projects

By Rajani KC Shrestha



Leela Adhikari saves about Rs.1,500 per month from Dhaka weaving

"I do not have to ask my husband for money to buy my make-up," says Leela Adhikari, a mother of two girls, from Jhapa district of eastern Nepal. "I can now do so with my own income. In fact, I also contribute in household expenditures."

Adhikari, who was born with an abnormal positioning of her right foot, never thought she would ever be able to contribute to the family income. But when opportunity came knocking in the form of training provided by Sahara Nepal, a nongovernment organization (NGO), she grabbed it and enrolled herself in *Dhaka* (traditional Nepali

cloth) weaving training. Upon completion of the training, Adhikari borrowed Rs. 2,500 from the NGO's microfinance program and purchased a weaving machine and started selling handkerchieves at Rs. 25 per piece. Even after paying a monthly installment of Rs. 265 and paying for the raw materials, she manages to save at least Rs. 1,500 every month. Her current income augments her taxi driver spouse's income of Rs. 4,500. Adhikari does not demur from saying that she can now support her husband, especially when there are *bandhs* (general strikes), during which he is not able to drive the taxi. She is now planning to try her hand at weaving other apparel.

Equal Distribution of Benefits

All this was made possible for Adhikari by the ADB-assisted technical assistance (TA) for Enhancing the Poverty Reduction Impact of Road Projects. The TA, financed by the Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund, is a supplementary component to the ADB-funded Road Network Development Project that is upgrading Nepal's strategic roads in 16 districts.

The TA, approved in January 2006, is helping the Government to implement a pilot project and to develop the capacity of the Department of Roads for enhancing poverty reduction impact of road projects. To ascertain that an inherent mechanism is established to distribute the socioeconomic benefits arising from road projects, the TA prepared necessary guidelines for the Government. The guidelines, approved on 7 September by the Government, will be adopted by the Department of Roads for all of its road projects.

To implement the pilot project, partner NGOs of the Rural Microfinance Development Center (RMDC) were mobilized for three road sections (Damak-Gauriganj, Pauwa-Phidim, and Biratnagar-Bardanga-Urlabari) in Jhapa, Panchthar, and Morang districts. The NGO formed groups according to RMDC criteria comprising five households in each

group in a 20-25 km road section, provided skills training for income generating activities to 705 persons from all road sections, and enrolled the women members of the households in microfinance. The NGOs used RMDC funds to cater to the microfinance needs of the target groups, wherein loans could be availed by any member of the household through the women members of the family.

Skills for Income Generation

Like Adhikari, Dhana Kumari Katwal is experiencing a new facet to life. A single mother with one daughter, she had no requisite skills to support her family. Upon hearing of the TA and its intended target audience, she decided to learn a skill that involved a minimum investment and quick income. Hence, she opted to take a simple training to make puffed rice—a snack item, which is a favorite particularly among school children. She sells these for as little as Rs.2–5, but these menial amounts add up to a sale of Rs. 200–350 per day. She feels rewarded as she undertook the training despite criticisms from neighbors on her choice of training. "They repeatedly



Through simple snack items, Dhana Kumari Katwal generates daily sales of Rs. 200-350.

told me that this was not a suitable occupation for my caste and I would never master the art," she shares, with eyes that reveal the indignity she has endured, even as her voice now exudes pride that she proved them wrong. To make herself more mobile and to get easy access to the raw materials, Katwal has already purchased a bicycle costing Rs.5,000, for which she is required to pay a monthly installment of Rs.500. In addition, she makes a deposit of Rs.10 per day at a local cooperative, which has now accumulated to savings of Rs.1,500.

As his wife coddles their one-year-old daughter, Tek Bahadur Tajpuriya, of Govindapur VDC, Morang district shares his story of starting out with nothing, to now owning a motorbike repair shop with one staff working as an adjunct. "Despite working in Delhi for three years, I hardly managed to save anything to send back home and, therefore, decided to return to my hometown to try something out here," he says. But this was easier said than done; he tried his hand in a few jobs until he undertook a motorbike repair training provided by the NGO Jeevan Bikas Samaj. To set up a shop at the main junction of the road and to gather required materials, his wife availed of a loan of Rs.10,000. With his plans to now take up motor repairing training, which he feels is even more lucrative, Tajpuria shows off a welding machine that cost him Rs. 15,000. After setting aside the monthly installment of Rs.1000, salary of Rs. 1,200 for his staff, and Rs. 1,000 rent for the shop, Tajpuria is still able to save at least Rs. 3,000 per month. His wife, Rita Devi, content with their achievements, feels that she is an equal part of this venture as she played the critical role of "financier" in this joint investment.

Similarly, Tapa Kumari Darji, challenging the mores of society, successfully completed a driving training. This would certainly be considered a peculiar choice for a woman not from the capital city. Darji, 24, from Gauraddha VDC, Jhapa district, took a one-month training course at a local driving institute. Upon completion of the training, she found a job as an instructor at the centre itself and has ensconced herself well drawing a salary of Rs 3,000 per month over the last 5 months. Not having earned a single penny prior to the current job, Darji now dreams of owning a taxi someday from her own earnings. "Initially, people found it peculiar, but that never bothered me and once I was through with the training, my confidence had reached a new height," she says.#