



## Social Capital in Rural Settlements

REDP considers enhancing the capability of the rural communities to plan, implement and manage rural energy systems in particular and rural development activities in general. It is an essential vehicle for sustainable development of the rural areas. Emphasis is given on self-governance and 'genuine' participation of local people from planning to successful operation of micro hydro and other rural energy schemes.

**N**atural resources like land, water, forest, etc. are the physical capital of a community. Likewise, the capabilities and skills of each individual are the human capital. On the other hand, social capital of a community is the social norms that it uses to solve common problems or to undertake activities for common good. Mutual trusts, reciprocity and collective actions are the attributes of social capital. In rural Nepal collective actions are the way of life. Rural communities have been working together be it for community forestry, share cropping or construction and operation of irrigation systems. However, since 1950s, when the country embarked on modern development path with assistance from international donors, the state took over the jobs performed by the communities in the past. This top-down development weakened the social capital and the environment of cooperation in the rural areas. Fortunately,

lately it has again been realized that the development activities have to be built up on the social capital existing in the villages rather than by ignoring it.

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A comprehensive community mobilization package has been developed by REDP to build social and human capitals at the community level to take advantage of their physical capital to enhance livelihoods. The REDP Community Mobilization Package has been prepared to encourage local people to form Community Organization (CO) to promote self-governance and to initiate development work through self-help approach the process encourages the CO mem-

*Photo above : A weekly meeting of a male CO in Suri VDC, Dolakha*



*Community members of Tangram VDC, Baglung rehabilitating a foot trail*

bers to mobilize resources from within the community and outside to undertake micro-hydro schemes and other community development initiatives. For sustainability, REDP community mobilization emphasizes on organization development, capital mobilization, skill enhancement, technology promotion, environment management and women's empowerment.

### Organization Development

People living in close proximity share common interest and have similar aspirations and common problems. If a conducive atmosphere is created, they get organized to perform a number of social activities beneficial to all. External catalysts can create such a situation, especially by providing forum for public discussion among the local people. Keeping this in view, REDP has emphasized on sensitizing the community members to get organized through self-governing and broad based community organizations (CO). Fifteen to thirty persons living in the same vicinity or sharing some common interests form a CO. It is mandatory that at least one male and a female of all beneficiary households be represented in one of the CO. Each CO meets every week to discuss issues and problems concerning its members and finds its own solutions. All CO decisions are made through consensus. Transparency in all actions have been emphasized to build up mutual trust among the community members. Though very time consuming consensus decision making has been

able to break traditional animosities between members and the people with long festering political and social differences have come together to work for the common good.

So far, 28,484 men and women representing 17,546 rural households of 70 VDC of 10 districts have formed 1,557 COs. The COs are involved in diverse activities – from regular tol cleaning to rehabilitation of trails and taps.

Once the COs are 'mature' i.e., meet regularly, undertake saving and credit activities, make decisions and minute them and implement their collective decisions and evaluate their activities, they form Functional Groups to undertake specific activities like micro hydro, community forestry,

vegetable farming, etc. A FG is responsible to oversee the planning, implementation, operation and management of specific activity it is related to. More than 250 FG related to micro hydro implementation, community forestry, biogas installation, adult literacy, off-season vegetable farming, Vitamin 'A', etc. have been formed by the CO members in 70 VDCs.

### Capital Mobilization

All CO members practice weekly savings and credit operation. The members, in consensus, determine the amount. The weekly savings thus create an asset of the organization that is used for supplementing the credit need to start micro-enterprises at household level. CO members themselves determine the amount to be lent, interests rate and pay back time. More than Rs.



*Community members of Dolkha participating in training on ICS making*

3.1 million has been saved by 28,484 CO members since REDP initiated its community level activities in middle of 1997. Similarly, the cumulative investment of all CO has exceeded Rs. 6 million. Poultry, goat raising, provisional shop, fertilizer purchase, etc. are some of the most popular areas of investment. Experiences have shown that weekly saving and credit programme has 'freed' the community members from the scourge of moneylenders and the bureaucratic hassles of the conventional banks for micro credit. Trust among the members and the 'peer pressure' ensures right investment areas and timely return of the money.



*A turbine installed for Dajung Khola MHDS  
Okharbot VDC, Myagdi*

Communities are also encouraged to approach DDC, VDC and other agencies working at the district level to access financial as well as other resources for undertaking development activities. The communities generate resources also locally, by raising equity and providing required labor for the installation of micro hydro schemes and other community development endeavors. So far, financial resources worth more than Rs. 74 million has been mobilized from various sources like REDP, HMG, DDC, VDC, ADB and communities for installation micro hydro demonstration schemes.

### **Skill Enhancement**

The community is encouraged to identify training required to run organizations smoothly, manage and operate rural energy systems and to undertake income generating activities. The communities are sensitized that each household should engage in at least one income generating activities, so that the benefit is reaped by all households and not limited only to traditionally powerful ones. The communities not only identify the training requirement but also select the right persons to be trained. Active involvement of community in identification of training needs and participation ensure that the training are not wasted. Once completed training villagers put 'pressure' on the trainees to start the activities they were trained in. Initial assessment has shown that more than 80 % of the trainees have started one or the other business. Furthermore, trained operator and managers are obliged to go back to their villages and do the works they were trained for. More than 1600 men and women have participated in various training on income generation and enterprise development so far. Likewise, 75 persons are trained as micro hydro plant operators and 43 persons as managers.

In most of the cases, communities have taken advantage of the training opportunities provided by district level line agencies related to forestry, agriculture, cottage industry, soil conservation and veterinary.

### **Technology Promotion**

Importance of introduction, adoption, operation and, finally, internalization of appropriate technologies in community development process can not be denied. Different energy technologies, such as, micro-hydro, solar photovoltaic, biogas and improved cooking stoves will either increase productivity, reduce drudgery of women and children or help conserve the natural environment. On the other hand, small-scale electricity based enterprises add value to the rural products and help supplement the income of rural people. Under REDP community mobilization process, communities are sensitized on the various resources available at local level and the appropriate technologies suitable to them. Functional Groups mobilize resources from various sources to install different technologies. The technologies adopted by the villagers' range from improved variety of vegetable seeds to installation of improved cooking stoves and micro hydro schemes. By the end of December 1999, 1000 ICS, 300 Solar Home Systems (SHS), 300 biogas plants and 25 micro hydro demonstration schemes generating about 400 kW have already been installed. Besides, end-uses like photo shop, rural bakery, broiler raising, agro-processing mills, sawmills, etc. have also been installed and are in operation in different villages.

### **Environment Management**

Rural energy development is a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary initiative, in which proper environment management is a major factor for sustainability.

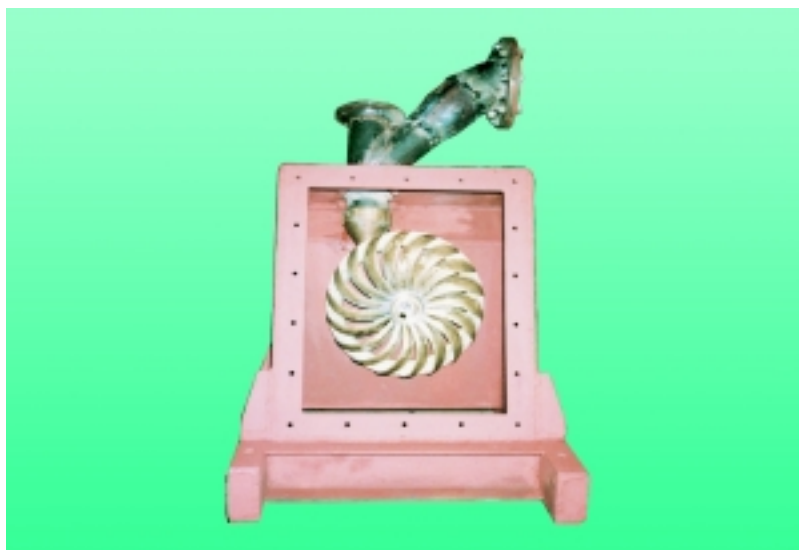
Though Nepal's environmental policy has considered micro-hydro as an environment-friendly energy technology, the implication of it on the environment cannot be ignored. REDP has given foremost priority to sensitizing and educating not only the community members but also the officials of DDC and VDC on the importance of the preservation of the micro-hydro watershed and other natural resources. Environment education classes for school children are conducted in the VDC where REDP is working.

Besides, emphasis is also given to better health and sanitation conditions in the program villages. Communities are encouraged to keep their households and streets clean, make pit latrines and use rubbish bins. A total of 4,012 low cost toilets and 1,503 rubbish pits have been constructed by the villagers in 70 VDCs. All these have resulted in cleaner and healthier villages.

### Women's Empowerment

The labor put by women in household chores, like cooking, cleaning, raising children, fetching water, collecting fuelwood, rearing domestic animals, kitchen gardening, etc. is taken for granted, as these activities are not monetized. As the society is patriarchal, the community-level activities seldom address the hardship and drudgery faced by women. REDP sensitizes the community members in recognizing the central role played by women in the family economy. The community mobilization process encourages women's participation in the public life and provides them a platform in the affairs of the community. These actions instill confidence, increase self-reliance and self-esteem, encourage leadership, demonstrate women's management capability and enhance the credibility of women. Over the time, men have realized and accepted them as equal partners in family affairs as well as development activities.

Segregation of women and men into separate COs encourages women to discuss and analyze specific problems faced by them in their COs independently. A formal forum to look into matters related to women has been created for the first time in many villages. Experiences in earlier efforts by various programmes have shown that in mixed groups women only tend to nod their heads in unison rather than genuinely participate in discussions and decisions. Literacy classes and saving and credit schemes are taken as prime



*The manager of a female CO of Bhoksing VDC, Parbat reading out the decisions made in a weekly meeting*

movers to mobilize and organize women. This has given them a voice in the community affairs, integrate them into the decision making process, and put them into the mainstream of the development initiatives building women's self-confidence and capability for independent action. It is mandatory that all concerned CO have equal representation in the Functional Groups.

All these efforts are resulting in the formation of positive attitude of men towards their women folks. In Dadeldhura district in the Far Western Development Region, which is notorious for low level of women development in the entire country, women head two of the five installed micro hydro schemes as chairpersons of MHDSs. In Myagdi district in Western Development Region, all four managers of micro hydro schemes are women. During the managers' training the husbands were looking after their babies while the women were taking classes, which is something unheard of in the patriarchal Nepalese society. In some villages, women have also successfully campaigned against rampant alcoholism among their men.

*"REDP has been successful in bringining about the great changes in lives of the communities"*

Mr. Uday Raj Soti  
Secretary  
Ministry of Local Development