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# Gender Development for Equity

The role of women is crucial for the sustainable development of RETs. Therefore, their role should not be limited to be the consumers of energy, but should be developed to play the role of the equal partner in planning and management of rural energy systems. Keeping this in view, REDP has adopted the strategies that help to provide conducive environment for women to come forward and participate in the holistic development.

Development programmes initiated in the recent years by the Government, NGOs and donors are focused primarily to the poverty alleviation. The thrust is to reduce the poverty through modernization of agriculture sector, rural development, community participation, women's empowerment, creation of employment opportunities and development of social and economic infrastructures. In order to manage and utilize the scarce resources optimally for growth and enhanced livelihoods, all have given the top priority to the human resource development. Gender development has been recognized as a cross cutting theme in the development paradigm both at national and international levels. Lesson learnt in the past development efforts have clearly indicated that unless the capability of both men and women are enhanced equally, the sustainable development is not possible. This is more so in a developing country like Nepal where the majority of people live in rural areas that are plagued with social dogma, illiteracy, poverty and dominance over women. Though not adequate, both policy makers as well as development

workers have started, in recent years, to plan and implement programme aiming to enhance livelihoods through promotion of the gender equality. The Rural Energy Development Programme (REDP) is one such programmes that emphasizes for the balanced development from the gender perspectives.

## Approach and Strategy

The promotion of rural energy technology in villages has a direct and positive relationship with women. The role of women is crucial for the sustainable development of rural energy systems. Therefore, their role should not be limited to be the consumers of energy, but should be developed to play the role of the equal partner in planning and management of rural energy systems. Keeping this in view, REDP has adopted the strategies that help to provide conducive environment for women to come forward and participate in the holistic development. They are mentioned as below

1. Mandatory requirement to have one male and one female from each household of the community to join with others to form Community Organizations (COs) for male and female members separately.

*Photo Above : A weekly meeting of a female CO in Shyama VDC, Dolakha*



*A female CO member signing a book of record in a weekly saving meeting in Khopachagu VDC, Dolkha*

2. Formation of Functional Groups (FGs) for any endeavor such as the installation and operation of micro hydro scheme from equal number of benefiting male and female COs.
3. Capacity building of COs and FGs for organizational strengthening, management, leadership, group dynamics and collective decision making through training and orientation to the members.
4. Mandatory requirement to make women members able to read and write through adult literacy classes.
5. Social capital formation in the settlements through community mobilization consisting of weekly meeting, saving and credit scheme, collective decision making and undertaking of socio-economic activities at individual and community levels.

### Achievements and Experiences

Working for the equitable development of women in the patriarchal society is not an easy job. It is not only the working with women alone, but more so with whole community who oppose women to do other than their traditional household chores. In order to achieve its objective, REDP has first made the community, specially men, aware and convinced, through mobilization process, about the needs and benefits of involving women in development process. Although reluctant in the beginning, villagers became convinced and allowed women to participate equally in the programme activities aimed at their socio-economic upliftment.

In a very short time period, women in the programme villages have made themselves capable to participate equally, if not more, along with men in all activities.

The social activities that are participated actively by women include the construction of toilet, renovation of tap, trails and road and the plantation and management of community forests. Women also participated equally in providing labor for canal construction for micro hydro, collecting locally available materials like sand and stone and transporting turbines, cables and machines from the nearest road head to the sites. Similarly, women have started to earn cash income by undertaking different economic activities such as poultry raising, goat and pig raising and vegetable cultivation. As the result, the male members have become convinced about the benefits of women's involvement in the development process. It is gratifying to see two husbands from Myagdi district had accompanied their wives to look after their newly born babies while their wives were attending the classes in the Micro Hydro Managers' training held in Kathmandu in 1999.

### Some Important Observations

1. Provision of institutional mechanism for equal participation based on transparency and accountability encourages women to come out of their traditional roles to be the active and equal partners in the development.
2. Involvement of women in rural energy development is high. Women are not only the consumers of energy, but also the manager of the rural energy resources. Because adaptation of any rural energy technology has a direct positive impact on women's lives.
3. Though a slow process to convince male members to make them agreeable to permit women to participate in the programme, once convinced they become supportive for the women's development. This requires a proper social guidance.
4. More efforts are required to create the conducive policy environment to encourage rural people, both men and women, for the rural development from the gender perspectives.
5. Implementation of rural energy systems in a holistic manner in integration with other socio economic sectors have demonstrated to be instrumental in poverty alleviation in rural areas, from gender perspective.

## Organization Development

One of the first few important activities that is required by the villagers to avail of REDP supports is the formation of Community Organization (CO) separately by male and female members. Statistics show that participation of women to form COs are higher in programme VDCs. Out of 1557 COs formed as of 31 December 1999, 784 (50%) are female COs consisting of 15-25 members in each.

Members of each CO select its own manager and chairman unanimously to manage the group for performing the socio-economic activities. Upon maturity, these women group join together with male COs to form functional groups. So far 233 FGs have been formed for various purposes including the micro hydro schemes. In each FG, members select chairperson and manager to plan and implement works related to the Group. It is encouraging to note that as expected, some FGs have started to have women members as their chairperson and manager. It is observed that experiences of working in COs have raised the confidence of women members to participate fully in discussion and decision making process with male counterparts in the functional groups.

This is for the first time in Nepal that there is equal gender representation in the group formed in the rural areas for the development process. Generally women are organized in the mixed group or specifically targeted women groups.



*Female CO members of Managaltar actively participating in a community development work*

## Capital Formation

Capital is essential for undertaking any developmental work to be initiated by CO members both individually and collectively. In each CO, members make weekly saving of a fixed amount, agreed unanimously by all members. The saving thus accumulated is given as credit to members to meet their specific needs at predetermined term and conditions including the interest rates. However, priority is given to provide loan to the economically weak members and for undertaking productive activities. As of 31 December 1999, the total saving of women COs have accumulated to Rs. 1,422,625 which accounts for 45.69 % of total saving in programme VDCs. Various income generating activities initiated with loan by women members include goat raising, poultry farming, fertilizer purchase, weaving and vegetable farming. The earning from these activities are utilized first to pay back the loan with interest and the rest are utilized to meet their household expenditures including the school fee of their children.

As the members of FGs, women are also required to meet and convince many organizations to support the specific schemes like micro hydro. They are also responsible in mobilizing fund both as grant as well as loan from various sources such as DDC, VDC, bank and line agencies. In some villages, the enthusiasm of women members to motivate and convince other members to put their lands as collateral to obtain loan from bank to fund the installation of micro hydro schemes is praiseworthy.



*Female CO members of Dadeldhura participating in a rally organized to mark the World Environment Day*

## Skill Enhancement

Another important component of the community mobilization is the skill enhancement. The programme has supported villagers through training, exposure visit, orientation and one to one consultancy to enhance traditional skill as well as new skill in different areas ranging from management and operation to production and marketing of the products. A total of 4503 people have benefited under this component, of which about 37 % are women.

Traditionally participation of women in the technical and managerial training used to be nil. But this is no more true in REDP areas. The mobilization has started to show the results. More and more women are getting prepared to go for the training of Micro Hydro operators and Micro Hydro managers, traditionally the men's domain. After attending the weekly meeting, they have realized that the literacy is needed for being able to read and sign the minutes of the meeting and the passbooks of saving and credit. Some of them have even asked for advance literacy (basic business skills) to be able to do numerical in business transactions related with their income generating activities.

## Technology Promotion

REDP believes that for the efficiency and sustained economic growth in the rural areas, the technology appropriate to local skill and resources is essential. The technology encompasses both hardware and software. Areas of technology application range from agriculture and livestock to environment and micro enterprises. Emphasis is given to technologies that are deemed essential to increase productivity, reduce drudgery, save labor and conserve environment.

After the introduction of programme, villagers played active role in the technology promotion in the villages. They have constructed pit latrine, introduced off-season vegetable cultivation and cardamom farming, started incense stick making and thanka (Tibetan Buddhist painting) painting, established agroprocessing mill, electric bakery, mechanical workshops, photo studio and raised poultry, goats and pigs. Most importantly, they have been very active in installation of rural energy technologies, namely micro hydro, biogas, solar and improved cooking stoves.



*Female CO members of Khopachagu VDC, Dolkha workshipping god before commissioning of the MHDS*

## Environment Management

Generally women are responsible to maintaining the cleanliness in and around rural households. They collect the fuelwood and fodder, cook foods for family members and animals, fetch water, clean house and look after the children. REDP gives equal importance to environment issues and thus supports to conserve and maintain the environment through various interventions.

The participation of women in this area is praise worthy. Even without any funding supports from REDP, they have initiated a number of activities towards environment management. The activities include the construction of pit latrine, cleaning in and around the households, nursery establishment, plantation in public and private lands. They are also actively involved, through Forest Functional Groups, in the management of Community Forest in the vicinity.

"Initiation of REDP has shown a positive symptom of sustainable development in the district."

Mr. Lal Kumar KC  
Chairperson  
District Development Committee  
Dolkha