

Improving Women Entrepreneurship Skills Through Business Literacy

Enhancing Livelihoods of Smallholder Farmers in Central Terai District of Nepal- ELIVES

Enhancing Livelihoods of Smallholder Farmers in Central Terai Districts of Nepal (ELIVES) project is a 3 year project funded by DFID and co-funded by ADRA UK and is implemented in four districts of Central Terai region (Bara, Rautahat, Sarlahi and Mahottari) from April 2015. The ELIVES project combines key strengths of project partners - ADRA Nepal, iDE and FORWARD Nepal and district based partners (LNGO) to enhance livelihoods and income for poor and marginalized smallholder farmers with a focus on women and socially excluded groups in particular, Dalits, Janajati and Madhesi.

The project aims to bring tangible change in poor people's lives through interventions on goats, vegetables/lentil and market access/promotion. The project worked with 600 farmer groups comprising over 13,000 HHs. The project's work in developing local service providers and building market systems has ensured that the beneficiaries continue to get services and access to market and also benefitted the wider community. The end line survey revealed that skill enhancement in vegetable and goat production, coupled with increased access to services and markets increased annual income by £80 for 66.5% of beneficiaries.

Background

Women living in the Central Terai region of Nepal are vulnerable to economic shocks as many of them are illiterate or have low literacy levels with little to no income generation activities. Men from this region tend to migrate for work and women are left to undertake small income generating activities to support the day-to-day needs of their households. Women in the Central Terai undertake labour intensive work as they are the ones who are engaged in agriculture activities full time, yet their contribution to the sector is invisible. Rural women have little exposure to any kind of business related activities and limited skills in numeracy skills, record keeping and developing business plans. Very few partake in marketing and business activities, but have a limited knowledge about business management skills. Empowering women and equipping women with the skills and supporting structures will enable them to increase their income and create sustainable livelihoods that will address poverty and improve their quality of lives for themselves and families. Business literacy classes in ELIVES aimed to influence the behavior of 4,800 women farmers by improving their knowledge and understanding in business skills using a non-formal adult education approach which are required to start new or improve their existing goat management and vegetable farming businesses. The classes were run

by 160 business literacy facilitators who increased the participation of women farmers to engage in business activities and demand services in input, services and output supply chain.



Methodology

1. A six-month course entitled “Business Literacy” course is designed and manual prepared. The manual prepared by ADRA has two volumes: The first volume deals with enhancing the literacy skills of participants (e.g. letters, words, numbers) and simple mathematics, including addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, use of calculator etc. The second volume comprises topics on business management skills, accounting and financial management skills, record keeping skills, business establishment procedures and knowledge, etc. The books are reviewed and approved by Non-formal Education Centre (NFEC) of the Ministry of Education.



2. Interested women farmers from vegetable producer and goat rearing groups were assembled in 160 business literacy classes with about 30 members in each class.
3. Master Training of Trainers (MTOT) is conducted among local women with at least School Leaving Certificate (SLC) qualification, who are then made responsible for facilitating business literacy classes. All Business Literacy Facilitators (BLFs) were women and mostly selected from within the village by participants themselves.
4. A class conduction guideline for facilitators was also prepared as a reference guide to conduct the class. It's a step-by-step guideline for facilitators to conduct each session e.g. what resources to use, which technique to follow.
5. Classes were run 6 days a week for 2 hours a day during the day or in the evenings. The timings were flexible and worked around the beneficiaries' availability. The project supported for books, copies, pencils, white boards, salary of facilitators and solar light in the group running class in the evening.
6. BLFs were provided refresher training to reflect their experiences and bridge the gaps after 3 months. Supervisors who were also provided MTOT along with BLFs regularly monitored the classes and provided back-up support to BLFs.

Fact and Figures of BLC classes

- # of classes = 160
- # of enrolled = 4,738
- # of participants completed class = 4,112 (86%)
- # of women started/improved their business = 3,677
- %age of women starting new business activity= 10%
- %age of women improving existing business = 70%

The project added 2 innovative approaches, which was not included in the original project design to support the most vulnerable groups within the project.

- The Start and Improve your Business (SIYB) game was introduced in the classes to make it more practical and interactive, especially for the illiterate participants.
- For the ultra-poor households who attended BLC but were unable to participate due to the unaffordability of inputs, the project supported them with small revolving fund for 80 groups and helped 40 HHs to start vegetable farming on leased land.

Outcomes and Initial Impacts

Improved knowledge, skill and self-confidence

The business literacy classes have given women farmers the opportunity to learn new knowledge and skills which has contributed to their empowerment and self-confidence. Previously illiterate participants have learnt to write their names and signature, write simple sentences, do calculations using calculators, record income and expenditure, and develop a simple business plan. They are more confident than the past in raising their voice on community issues and dealing with traders, mainly fixing or negotiating with price. Many illiterates were unable to write their names before attending the class but now they can. Participants have built their confidence and can express their voices in meetings and contribute to decision making within their groups.

Strengthened saving and credit mechanism in farmer groups

Case study 2: I don't own any farm land. My husband and I used to work as farm labourers for big farmers to feed 6 family members. It was very difficult to meet our food and children's education expenses. After the project started, 22 farmers from my village formed the Chameli Mai Goat Producer Group. I participated in business literacy classes and my motivation to start my business increased. I borrowed money and started a small grocery in front of my house. I am now earning around NPR 12,000 (£83) per month and repaid the loan. We are now able to meet consumption expenses and pay child education cost. I am planning to upscale the business and also renovate the house." -Maya Devi Shah, Ishworpur-8, Sarlahi

Case study 1: We had to make living with a small income of my husband who used to work as wage labourer. I lost my left hand due to burn injury and there was little I could do to earn money. I was not taken seriously by many people and was often humiliated. After the project started, I joined Dev Ashram Women Goat Group and also joined business literacy class. I was motivated to start a business after I learnt how to operate the calculator. I borrowed NPR 40,000 (£275) from a cooperative and decided to open a grocery shop in the village and also started goat rearing. I now have 4 goats and already sold a he-goat for NPR 8,000 (£55). I earn at least NPR 300 (£2) daily. My life is much better now - Nirmala Khadka, Simara, Bara.

The knowledge and skills gained by women farmers through business literacy has been instrumental in strengthening saving and credit mechanism run by farmer groups. Through monthly savings, the farmer groups have accumulated NPR 22.48 million (£155,000) and mobilizing within groups to meet their loan need. Farmers utilize the loans to invest in IGAs such as vegetable farming, goat production and small businesses.

Economic empowerment of women farmers

The business literacy classes conducted by the project has increased the literacy levels of all graduates and equipped them with basic business skills to start new businesses or grow existing ones; women farmers have been given a new confidence. Approximately 70% have improved their existing vegetable

Case study 3: I am a member of Unnatishil Goat Producer Group. I used to raise 2 goats owned by others on a lease-share arrangement. After participating in business literacy class and goat management training provided by the project, my confidence grew tremendously and I took a loan from the group saving and credit fund to buy my own goats. Within two-year time, I am an owner of 15 goats (9 mother goats, 3 kids, 3 he goats). I have already earned Rs. 25,000 (£172) by selling the goats. 3 he goats are ready for sale which are worth around Rs. 50,000 (£ 340)". -Kesh Kumari Poudel,



and goat enterprises either by expanding area of land or herd size, preparing basic business plans or keeping records of income and expenditure. Approximately 10% have started new businesses such as small-scale village groceries, snacks shop,

tailoring and vegetable trading. Women farmers' dependency on their male counterparts for petty cash has decreased and they can now use the added income for their children's schooling and nutrition. In case of illness, they can also take their children to hospital or clinics so that child receives immediate health care so as not to worsen the situation.

Social capital development

160 Literacy Facilitators have emerged as a local leader and resource person for the community. These facilitators have a mentorship capacity to drive a can-do attitude amongst the marginalized women. Women's solidarity, trust and helping attitude have improved. Development of leadership skills through business literacy supported the emergence of new local leaders with potential to influence the local political landscape. Several of the women farmers associated with the project were elected in the election of local bodies. More than 40% executives in collection center management committees and cooperatives are women.

Key Learning

- Since, this intervention targets mostly women members, sometimes they find it difficult to manage times for participation in BLC. Daily class for 6 months was too long and infeasible as evident from the drop out. The BLC Curriculum should be revised in such a manner that is much shorter and practical and can be completed in a short duration and still have a big impact on the participants. Alternately, courses can be condensed or split into a number of modules or spread in a longer period of time.
- Women literacy level is also low in Terai, so if only semi-literate women farmers were focused, a majority of women farmers would have been excluded. Moreover, it was difficult for facilitators to run the classes for a mix of illiterate and semi-literate women. Therefore, different curricula for those two different groups would have been more effective.
- Incorporation of relevant game tools such as Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) was useful to improve learning outcomes. Developing play tools and techniques to make the classes more interactive and interesting should be prioritized. Use of pictures, posters, audio, visuals should be introduced in non-formal classes too make it more interactive and practical from the onset.
- The project did not have a provision to provide skill training other than related to goat and vegetable farming. Linking skill development activities with business plan of literacy participants would have been more effective.

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