Empowering Women through Community-Based Promotion of Value Chains for High Value Products in Nepal

Min B Gurung, Dyutiman Choudhary and Uma Partap

About 70% of the world's poor are women, who mainly rely on forest and agriculture for their livelihoods. Despite an overall decline in poverty in Nepal, the level of inequality has widened, with the incidence of poverty becoming greater among lower caste people and ethnic minorities including women. This paper highlights how community-based value chain actions can be engendered resulting in gender equity and the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. The value chains of two high value mountain products namely, honey and bay leaf from Nepal were assessed in terms of the roles played by women and the benefits obtained from their involvement. Not only technical inputs women were facilitated to organize in groups for collective action where this can provide women with greater voice, negotiating power with traders, better linkages with external service providers, making market information available and help with economics of scale. Women in villages from Dadeldhura and Udayapur districts of Nepal were trained on sustainable management and harvesting techniques of honey and bay leaf production. The paper concludes that the community-based approach with multi-stakeholder involvement contributed to 1) increased income through recognizing the contribution made by both women and men; 2) increased access to information for poor women producers; 3) sustained management of local resources; 4) translated into greater decision making power and empowerment for the women who were earlier neglected in decision making and 5) increased resilience and social capital to adapt in the changing world. At the same time, it identifies challenges in the institutionalization of the initiative to function in the long run, maintaining functional alliances and linkages among the producers, traders, and processing companies, and increased women’s control over the productive resources.