Inclusive Business/Value Chain Development for Women’s Economic Empowerment

Sushila Kumari Thapa Magar

Feminization of agriculture and natural resource management is at the top of discussions in Nepal. The increasing trend towards out-migration, together with unequal access to and control over productive resources, information, technology, finance, and other economic opportunities, has necessitated a new modality for addressing growing concerns and key challenges. SNV piloted a high value agriculture and inclusive business approach supported by IFAD to encourage women’s economic empowerment as a coping strategy. The project examined whether this approach can reduce the poverty and vulnerability of women and improve their livelihoods. Value chain development of butter tree (chiuri), apple, and ginger were the subject of interventions, with market demand as the entry point. Key interventions were the identification of agribusiness and facilitation of joint planning, formation of producer groups, capacity building to develop business, facilitation of access to services, provision of organizational and technical support, and facilitating multi-actor dialogue. Key actors were government agencies as service providers/facilitators; I/NGOs as local capacity builders; and private companies as agribusiness promoters/embedded service providers. There was a paradigm shift through engaging women in agribusiness which transformed concurrent feminization issues. This market-led approach strengthened women’s institutions and improved livelihoods, upgrading their functionality within the value chains. It was effective in organizing, empowering, and increasing the confidence of women to access the productive assets and economic opportunities and proved a useful vehicle for social change and economic empowerment. Currently, key lessons are being captured in integrating gender issues in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating value chain development, for scaling it up in the larger high value agriculture project. Challenges exist to motivate agribusiness, upgrade functionality, and raise interest in agriculture.