

Rebuilding life from rubble

Earthquake affected women in rural areas of Nepal build their communities back better

Background

Within deeply rooted patriarchal societies in Nepal, women face gender based discrimination within and outside their homes. Women carry out traditional roles —taking care of most household chores, fetching water and animal fodder, and doing farm work. They have limited access to markets, productive services, education, health care, and local government. In most rural areas, youths have migrated within the country and outside the country, leaving behind elderly, children and women.

Earthquake: Following the peace agreement leading the country to post transition period after a decade long conflict, the development efforts in rural areas had started showing some indications of changes when a powerful earthquake in 2015 of 7.8 magnitude hit, followed by a series of aftershocks. It claimed around 9,000 lives, injured 22,000 people, rendered 500,000 homeless and left 1.4 million people without food, access to clean water or medical care. The 14 most affected districts include about 327,000 female-headed households (26.5 per cent of all households), 40,000 women and girls with disabilities, and over 163,000 women over the age of 65. More women and girls died than men and boys (55% women), partly because of gendered roles that disproportionately assign indoor chores to women and partly because of men migration out of the country.



A woman showing her house damaged by earthquake

Widespread loss of food stocks, loss in crop productivity, loss of livestock and small scale enterprises had a severe income shock for women who rely on this sector. Destruction of houses and household assets had a particularly negative bearing on women whose sources of income through activities within homes were destroyed. Similarly, the destruction of water supply and sanitation facilities had an adverse impact on women and girls, adding to their working hours for fetching water and leading to issues of protection in the lack of sanitation facilities. Human trafficking had increased mainly among socially and economically disadvantaged groups and majority of victims were women and girls.

Project name	Recovery Programme Nepal (RPN)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Dhading, Rasuwa, Nuwakot districts
Lead executing agency	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Local Development (MOFALD)
Duration	June 2015 – August 2018

Activities promoting gender equality

Relief: In the immediate aftermath of earthquake, RPN reached out to the earthquake affected communities with relief items. Since the very outset, RPN worked to ensure that the humanitarian response to the earthquakes in Nepal takes the specific needs of women into account. While blanket approach was used for distribution of relief items, women needs in emergency was considered and hygiene kits were provided, that included sanitary pads.

Livelihood support: For the farmers, agriculture based trainings, tools, seeds, and saplings were supported to start up. This helped them generate livelihoods as well as addressed the good deficit they face in remote areas in absence of conducive weather and transport facilities. Women were trained to produce candies out of 'lapsi', a locally available seasonal fruit. The candies were linked to urban market leading to much higher profit than if sold raw or thrown away as waste.

Health: The health facilities destroyed in the earthquake could not provide services to the injured and pregnant and new mothers. RPN constructed 37 health facilities with separate toilets for men and women as well as provision of grills and boundary wall for protection of health workers, especially women. In addition, 529 female community health volunteers (FCHV) were provided with motivational packages containing essential services and personal items to boost their morale. In response to the poor condition of sanitary hygiene of the women in project area, RPN in collaboration with Support to the Health Sector (S2HSP) project, supported production of

low cost, biodegradable sanitary pads, run by two women cooperatives in two locations with 1,200 women members. Meanwhile, school based menstrual hygiene management activities were carried in all working districts.

Flexible Funds: A special fund was created that supported 2,000 vulnerable target groups such as livelihood support for single women, and vocational training for youth, with a special focus on women organizations.

Reconstruction oriented vocational trainings on masonry, electrician and carpentry were conducted to reduce the vast gap between the available and the required workforce to support the huge reconstruction needs. In the initial trainings, very few women participated in these trainings as these occupations are considered to be for men. **Special training packages were designed for women with longer duration and on the job training** whereby women were encouraged to join by clarifying the potential job opportunities and possible income that they could generate. Consequently, 1018 women (48% of total participants) attended the trainings and are currently working in tandem with men building their communities with earthquake resistant homes.

Safer Learning Environment: RPN is currently reconstructing schools damaged by earthquake, following rigorous standards for maintaining quality of the buildings. Considering the needs of students and teachers, provisions for separate toilets are made.

Women's participation and voice: In all its construction activities, including social and productive infrastructure safeguarding measures, maintenance committees are formed with at least 33% of the women members. Women participation is not only encouraged, but also their voices are heard and taken into consideration while making decisions. RPN further conducted community dialogue through facilitators where issues on gender equality along with other issues are raised and addressed. This has helped to promote an enabling environment for women to increase their agency and access to resources.

RPN has taken holistic approach in addressing overall needs of communities, with special focus on women. (Figure 1)

Figure 1 : Holistic approach of RPN



Impact on gender equality

As more women are taking up work that were initially considered to be men's sphere as efficiently and effectively as men, they have become examples which has **lead to breaking down of rigid perception of communities on the capacities of women to perform in non-conventional work**. Since they are never without work and also earn more in these non-conventional work, more women are entering these sector breaking the age old perceptions. Women cooperative members trained as masons constructed their cooperative building. In their engagement in cooperatives, the women members have come together, supported each other, worked hand in hand and deepened their cohesion(Box1).

Many women are employed in the project supported rehabilitation of irrigation canals and drinking water supply systems and are reconstructing individual houses in their communities. Access to new kind of technology in agriculture allowed women farmers who were previously working only for self-sustenance to sell their production commercially. Nutritional needs, mainly of the pregnant and new mothers as well as children could be addressed. Following the various market-oriented trainings, women are able to earn additional income for their families, **women's work are valued and they control the income that they earn**. Women who had to borrow money for their livelihood after the earthquake have paid back and are generating further income. The decision to

Box1: For the women, by the women

Women in rural areas commonly use old worn out cloth rags during menstruation and reuse these after washing. After the earthquake everything was destroyed and women hardly had cloth to wear for themselves. Considering the menstrual hygiene situation of the women, GIZ supported hygiene kits for immediate use. For longer term, the project worked with Sana Kisan Cooperative located in a village within the project area that has 600 women members. **Meena Tamang**, chairperson of the cooperative, along with other members from community received training, machines and raw materials for start up. They are producing low cost and biodegradable sanitary pads, for which demand has increased in the village and beyond. In addition, Meena has also received agricultural support from RPN like different types of seeds and drip irrigation set. Last year, she sold vegetables and earned NRs. 20,000 per month, twice as much as she used to earn before.

When she had joined Sana Kisan Cooperative, her husband did not like it as he did not see any benefit to the family. Her discouraged her to attend program at times. She was facing financial problems to raise her children. However, things changed when she started earning NPR 25,000 per month from sale of agricultural products and working for production of sanitary pads. Her additional income was helpful to meet their daily needs and education of their children. Her husband has become supportive and takes up household chores as well as takes care of their children in her absence. She has also earned respect in her society by raising funds for social development of her village as a chairperson of Sana Kisan Cooperative from the district.

spend the income are made jointly by senior members of the families, but women have a say in the decision making process. Men in the families, where they have not migrated, are supporting women in household chores, taking care of the children as well as supporting women in generating income. With easier access to well-equipped health facilities closer to their homes, the health of women have improved over years. Women have started practicing hygienic practices with the sanitary pads produced close to their communities available in affordable prices. With better health, they can work actively to building not only infrastructure but also resilience of their communities. The project has helped foster the leadership abilities of women, including staff members, and helped them to realize their dreams. (Box 2)

Box 2: Journey from Teacher to Community Facilitator to Vice-President of Rural Municipality

Anju Acharya was only 13 and studying in class 8 when she got married. With support from her husband and family, she completed Master's degree on Sociology. She worked as a teacher in a local school in a remote area when the earthquake shattered her village and her life. She was nevertheless determined to work for the betterment of her community and worked as a volunteer in Karuna Foundation, one of a local philanthropy providing relief. She later joined GIZ RPN as a Community Facilitator, where she had to motivate different groups for conducting programme activities and unify them for conducting program. Her devotion was highly appreciated by the community people and eventually, she gained trust and respect. When local elections were announced following the state restructuring in Nepal, community people encouraged her to contest in local elections and proposed her as a candidate for vice-chairman to the political party. Locals said, "Anju has done so much for us as a community facilitator so she can do much more as a political leader." She won the local elections as a Vice-President and now that she has the authority to conduct development works and influence decision making, she is determined to bring change in the society, specifically work towards increasing women's participation as per government provision.

Her husband says "Even rich people do not get this opportunity of becoming vice-president of Rural Municipality and work for the community. We are very proud of her." Anju believes that she utilized her communication skills that she gained after working with GIZ where she got training on "non-violent communication". Also, she received training on Disaster Risk Reduction Management which she claims is helping her in contributing to disaster preparedness in the rural municipality.



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3

Success factors

1. The project is from 2015-2018. Despite short period, the project was able to create a sense of ownership creating linkages between people, with the project serving as a catalyst for improving community's condition and promoting inclusion of all groups, especially the most marginalized. Because of the community-led approach, which involved people in identifying priorities, effectively contributed as more effective at resolving urgent problems and thereby fostering ownership.
2. Building effective rapport with the community was key to achieve the intended outcome to support women. The strength of the project's rapport building led to effective negotiation with the communities, which provided the necessary space to bring in critical issues to influence the people to give space to women. Local government partners were involved from the very beginning of the implementation, this opened up good rapport building even with local representatives.
3. The adoption of an integrated approach was yet another key factor the project was able to address gender disparity. The project successfully addressed poverty reduction through its livelihoods and cash for work initiative. Further addressing gender equality in economic and infrastructure development through trainings that originally men practiced was helpful to create social change.

Challenges

1. The project's short term duration was a barrier for longer term capacity building of women through follow up advanced technical support. Though the project worked through community facilitators on supporting the trained women, the absence of technical advisory support and advanced training for women played major role in some women leaving the occupation.
2. Following the earthquake, a state restructuring process was initiated, followed by elections which significantly impacted the project activities. This political transition led to temporary closure of project activities. Communities were also busy with

the election which resulted in distraction of the stakeholders for promoting gender equality.

3. The project is implemented in remote areas of the most affected districts with limited access to transportation, water and other resources. This means that women have to invest more money and efforts and the benefits from income generating activities are lesser than that can be earned from regular situation

Further elements

Partners and Cooperation

GIZ works in close cooperation with District Disaster Relief Committee (DDRC) in the whole process of planning, implementation and monitoring of district level recovery activities. A DDRC Officer is placed by GIZ in the district who facilitated the preparation of District Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan. The plan is led by District Administration Office (DAO) and followed by all other Development Partners (DPs) and NGOs working in the affected districts. The plan takes into consideration gender issues and comprises of gender oriented approaches in activities such as search and rescue, emergency shelter, logistic, emergency health and nutrition, WASH and emergency education.

At the national level, GIZ cooperated with Ministry of Health in the beginning phase and Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development at later stage. Memorandum of Understanding was also done with Ministry of Education for reconstruction of schools. At district level, the cooperation was done with line agencies of these Ministries. The Government and non-government offices in the districts have recognized the recovery works done by GIZ without leaving gender issues behind. Especially protection cluster and District

Women and Children Department appreciated inclusion of dignity kits in the response plan for the women groups and further appreciated production of sanitary pads with the involvement of community.

Proving and Improving from Results

The project monitors the results towards achievements of its overall objectives with gender dimensions and takes actions to improve the situation. A gender analysis was done despite the project's short life, and crucial findings were acted upon to ensure gender equality in the project. For example, the gender analysis revealed that women were paid lower wages in construction activities than men for similar task. The project staff advocated with relevant stakeholders and ensured that women are given equal wages. The project collects gender disaggregated data and ensures that targeted activities are designed to include more men or women for rebuilding their communities. Case studies are collected to understand how these changes have happened and replicate this understanding to strengthen the positive results in more of the project areas. Two case studies are included with this concept.

The major learning for the RPN project has been the integrated community/ development oriented recovery approach considering gender dimensions to be most effective in rebuilding disaster hit communities and strengthening the resilience in longer run.

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Description of photos

Picture 1: Women working in reconstruction

Picture 2: A disabled woman is receiving relief

Picture 3: Women and men getting electrician/housewiring training



Women trained in masons working to construct their cooperative building