

carpets, the women were making very small profit rates and sometimes they would even lose money. Moreover, most of them were working individually, because they were not aware of the benefits of having a common weaving enterprise.

The project encouraged eight women entrepreneurs to start up collective marketing of their products. For this, the project mentors and the EUC facilitated an agreement between the group and Jambu Carpet Udhyog, a manufacturer and exporter in Kathmandu. The women received support and mentorship to improve on consistency of quality, quantity, pricing and regular supply of their products. According to the agreement, Jambu Carpet Udhyog provides raw materials upfront and deducts this cost from the final price of the carpet—which depends on the design—afterwards. It also bears the transportation costs of raw materials and weaved carpets.



Now, thanks to regular weaving and proper utilization of the yarn, the women have doubled their earnings. The EUC’s role in the process has been crucial. The Cooperative actively facilitated for effectiveness and sustainability of this initiative. In the negotiations with Jambu Carpet Udhyog, the EUC adamantly demanded incorporation of procedures that maintain transparency in transactions and decision making.

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Linkages with anchor companies

Poultry is one of the few self-reliant sectors in Nepal. Commercial poultry farming is growing rapidly because of an increasing consumption rate of chicken meat products and eggs. It is even more popular among rural women, as it does not require hard physical labor and has immediate return on investment. The project supported a significant number of women entrepreneurs, raising flocks that range from 200 to 8,000 chickens.

Poultry business is gaining popularity in rural areas, as it seems a fairly easy and cost effective business to engage in. However, when starting a poultry (or any other) business just by copying others, without understanding market opportunities, investment needs and technical capabilities one will soon enough face numerous challenges. Because of this, most of them are facing challenges in procuring regular and quality input supply, acquiring technical support, accessing secured markets for poultry products and fetching fair prices. To address these challenges, the project implemented two different approaches. At the central level, the project worked with one of the leading agribusiness companies in Nepal, Shreenagar Agro Farm Pvt Ltd. (SAF), by signing an agreement for promoting women entrepreneurs in the poultry business. Following the signing of this agreement, SAF has started to provide women entrepreneurs in Kavre, Lalitpur, Dhading and Chitwan districts with technical assistance,

supply of chicks, chicken feed, medicines and other necessary materials. Additionally, SAF has supported women entrepreneurs in Baluwa and Kavre to obtain a subsidized agriculture loan from Global IME Bank Ltd.

At the local level, in Sindhuli, an agreement was made between the Kalpabrikshya EUC and Kamala Mai Hatchery Pvt. Ltd., for promoting 13 poultry producing women entrepreneurs. Within the EUC a Management Committee was formed from this group of 13 women, to support and ensure that each entrepreneur produces at least 500 chickens. Kamala Mai Hatchery in turn, provides inputs and technical support as well as buyback guarantee to the women. The EUC, through the Poultry Entrepreneurs Management Committee, ensures that the hatchery timely provides inputs, technical support and payments. The local government monitors effective execution of the agreement.

Linkages with local aggregators and collectors

The Fisling village in the Icchakamana Rural Municipality of Chitwan district, is known for vegetable farming. A great majority of the households is engaged in commercial farming because of easy access to national markets and favorable climate conditions. However in spite of a conducive environment, farmers are unable to fetch fair prices for their products. Behind this challenge, there is a number of reasons, such as unplanned production, limited market information and lack of consistent connections with the collectors. Seven women entrepreneurs from Chepang Community (one of the most deprived communities) were also facing these challenges. The GESI project stepped in and supported these women, all of whom were part of the local Marsyangdi Multipurpose Cooperative Ltd. The project facilitated an agreement between the Cooperative Ltd. and the Icchakamana Vegetables and Fruits Collection Centre. According to the agreement, the Cooperative provides necessary support to the women, such as technical training for production and post-harvest management, access to finance, collective production and marketing to ensure quality and quantity. The Collection Centre in turn, ensures market access with appropriate pricing along with advance payment and provision of packaging and transportation materials, such as crates. This agreement has even become useful in the context of COVID-19. The Collection Centre has regularly purchased the products from the entrepreneurs, while many other farmers are struggling to sell their products.

Conclusion

The market system in Nepal lacks competitiveness due to limited collaborative practices and value chain integration. Transparency, mutual trust, collaboration and communication among market actors are the key factors for a thriving market system. The project has worked towards a more cooperative, transparent and open market system through facilitating linkages and agreements with buyers and collectors, thus creating a more conducive environment for women entrepreneurs to access markets and grow and flourish their business.



CASE STUDY

Agency based empowerment: A necessity for women entrepreneurship

The notion of economic empowerment is fundamentally linked to two interrelated components: 1) resources, and 2) power and agency. According to the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW)¹ *'Resources are the building blocks women can draw on to succeed economically or to exercise power and agency. They are more than financial or monetary in nature'*.² Resources include extrinsic supports such as skills, training, loan linkages and building networks. Power and Agency refers to psychological states (on an individual level) and is strongly tied to self-esteem, sense of control, and power or self-reliance.

In order to achieve economic empowerment among 500 women, the project supported them with business and skills training, linkages with eco-system stakeholders (financial institutions, market actors, enablers, input suppliers and other support service providers) and business counselling.

Agency based empowerment concept was integrated in the entrepreneurship and business management training package. Half-day empowerment sessions were conducted using stories, audio-visuals of real success and struggles, and simulation exercises for participants' clear understanding. The sessions focused on knowing oneself, recognizing hopes and dreams, understanding and overcoming self-limitations, understanding self-acceptance and self-esteem in relation to success and growth, and the importance of one's good health for

¹ ICRW is a global research institute whose mission is to empower women, advance gender equality and fight poverty. It is a non-profit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., United States.

² ICRW Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment (2011) p. 4