



Women, Energy and Water in the Himalayas

Project Learning



Bikash Sharma
Kamal Banskota

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**Incorporating the Needs and Roles of Women
in Water and Energy Management
Project Learning**

**Bikash Sharma
Kamal Banskota**

**United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
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and
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Foreword

Increasing numbers of gender awareness and development interventions are helping to increase opportunities and improve the lives and well-being of women and rural communities across the Himalayan region. Nevertheless, in many areas women continue to bear a disproportionate burden in meeting their household water and energy needs. Increasing chemical pollution and ecosystem degradation often exacerbates their daily plight.

Fortunately, there are an increasing number of technical solutions available. A number of good practices in energy and water management are able to reduce the need for fuel, provide alternative energy sources, and increase water availability close to the home. However, such technologies and approaches are only accepted and used in practice if women are directly involved, and their special concerns taken into account in the decision-making and implementation processes. Unfortunately, the failure to recognise this has meant that many water and energy initiatives have been much less effective in the long-term than originally hoped.

ICIMOD, with its long experience in diverse mountain communities, recognises that any new interventions for improving the well-being of mountain women need to focus on ways to free women from the long hours and drudgery of work to enable them to engage in income-generating and other activities. This is accomplished by bringing them into the technology choice and decision-making process from the outset. This approach has the added benefit of contributing to women's overall empowerment and status.

In 2002, UNEP and ICIMOD initiated a project on 'Incorporating the Needs and Roles of Women in Water and Energy Management in Rural Areas in South Asia – Capacity Building of Women in Rural Areas of the Himalaya' with financial support from the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA). The project focused on enabling women to participate fully and effectively in the planning and implementation of household water and energy initiatives by building their capability to organise themselves and to identify and prioritise their own needs. The project was carried out in partnership with the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) in Bhutan, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in India, and the Centre for Rural Technology (CRT/N) in Nepal.

In less than two years, the project made a marked difference in the lives of the women, their families, and their communities. Women developed their own solutions to their water and energy needs, and many were able to use the time saved to generate income. Women have operated a technology demonstration centre from the technologies they adopted for the benefit of other women. Some have emerged as energy entrepreneurs, for example, as liquid petroleum gas depot managers, and producers and sellers of solar dryers and improved cook stoves. The impact was further broadened by coordinating with different development partners to provide additional inputs and training to the women, providing the basis for mainstreaming good practices at district and national levels.

The project has demonstrated that the issue is not merely which technologies best serve the needs of women, but also how to enable them to choose the options that meet their needs

and improve their livelihoods. The major challenge now is to translate such experiences into gender sensitive policies that can extend the impact across the Himalayan region.

The experiences and lessons learned from the project have been encapsulated in three publications and a film: a Policy Guidelines publication, a Training Manual, and this report with details of the overall project experience.

Policy makers and rural development practitioners can pick from these experiences those that are useful or suitable to their particular needs for replication and upscaling.

I hope that the Guidelines will be of use to policy makers, planners, and development specialists in national institutions, NGOs, and donor agencies engaged in engendering development and empowering women, especially in mountain areas. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to UNEP-Nairobi and SIDA for the financial support, without which this important work would not have been possible.

Dr. J. Gabriel Campbell
Director General
ICIMOD

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And last but not least we would like to offer our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the participants from our regional member countries for their contribution in the regional workshops, and to all the women's group members, whose hard work and active participation contributed so much to the project's success.

Executive Summary

Water and energy are two essential resources for human survival and well-being. Once believed to be abundant and relatively free, these resources are becoming increasingly scarce in the Himalayas as a result of poverty, increasing population, and inappropriate development interventions. Women are finding it more and more difficult to meet their daily water and energy needs in a sustainable manner. With increasing water- and fuel-related work burdens, women are often forced to keep their children, especially daughters, out of school to assist with household chores – perpetuating intergenerational poverty, drudgery, lack of education, gender discrimination, and ill-health. Both water and energy uses are intrinsically linked with the degradation of the environment in the Himalayas and the poverty that goes with it. Women must play an important role in the management of energy and water in the rural Himalayas if the problems are to be addressed successfully, for it is they who are responsible for, and affected by, these two critical resources.

If one is concerned about the well-being of women in the Himalayas and about reducing poverty and environmental degradation here, it seems natural to focus on interventions that empower women to meet their water and energy needs in a way that frees them from excessive, time-consuming drudgery and allows them to increase their income and improve their status in society. However, conventional development interventions in energy and water with their focus on investment into large capital-intensive infrastructure have largely overlooked projects and activities which women can take charge of themselves. The development process has traditionally selected projects which by their nature further strengthen the entrenched dominance of men and take resources away from alternative interventions that could empower women. The numerous smaller-scale technologies which women can take control of and manage themselves to meet their needs continue to remain largely overlooked in government planning and donor investments. The few examples of approaches that have stressed the central role of women in water and energy management remain fragmented and the learning from them has yet to be assembled coherently.

The project, 'Capacity Building of Women for Energy and Water Management in the Rural Areas of the Himalayas', supported by UNEP and SIDA and executed by ICIMOD from January 1992 to December 1994, tackled the question of how women can be empowered to meet their water and energy needs. The project was carried out in three Himalayan countries – India, Nepal, and Bhutan. The learning from the pilot projects is being consolidated into a Policy Guidelines publication and a Training Manual, together with this publication which sets the project in context and describes the overall implementation, response, impact, and lessons learned in more detail. Policy makers and rural development practitioners active in the Himalayan region can immediately take these experiences, adapt them to their needs, replicate them, and scale them up. The major findings of the project are as follows.

First, the project concludes that the pertinent question is not merely which technologies best serve the needs of women, but more importantly, how to enable women to choose which options meet their needs and improve their livelihoods. The project distinguished

between the practical, productive, and strategic needs of women in the context of energy and water. Practical needs might be met by technologies that reduce drudgery, save time, and improve health through improved access to energy and water. Productive needs would be met by technologies that provide an income to women, utilising the time saved by improved access to water and energy. Strategic needs would be fulfilled by processes and technologies that empower women to choose their own technologies and improve their standing in society. The project demonstrates how women can be enabled to access improved energy and water services through empowerment and enhancement of their entrepreneurial and technical skills. Focusing on women's needs and roles in water and energy management can contribute significantly to meeting a number of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets.

Clearly, technology is not neutral. The choice of technology determines who benefits from a particular intervention. This project demonstrates how women can choose technologies that specifically benefit them through a participatory process. Within the project period, participating women's groups selected technologies that met their particular needs. In addition, pilot interventions strengthened their roles in water and energy management through the mobilisation of self-help groups made up of local women. Women have been careful to select technologies that do not increase their financial burden or increase their workload. What is striking is that a few simple technologies in the water and energy sectors had a substantial impact on the lives of the women even within the short time frame of the project. These technologies are decidedly different from those normally seen in conventional government-supplied water and energy projects.

A second interesting feature of the project is that the time saved after adopting the technologies was used for income generation at most sites. Since women in the rural Himalayas are so heavily burdened under current gender relations and resource conditions, reducing their heavy burden of work is an essential first step towards making it possible for them to participate in any new livelihood opportunities. Time saving and reduction of drudgery are valuable impacts in their own right. Women can use the saved time to spend with their children, to rest, for leisure, or for other pending tasks. When the use of simple technologies can save time which can be used to enhance income it becomes additionally attractive for the women participating.

A third important feature of this project, and a departure from the norm, is that women themselves participated as entrepreneurs and leaders, particularly in the supply of energy and in establishing and operating technology demonstration centres. This allowed the women to take ownership of the technologies and to expand their application as opportunities arose. The formation of women-only groups clearly helped this process. In such groups women felt comfortable enough to take charge of the technology instead of handing over control to men and being relegated to passive 'beneficiaries'. Once their level of confidence has been adequately enhanced through the initial women-only initiatives, these leaders and entrepreneurs will, it is believed, continue to provide leadership in their communities in mixed groups as well.

A final feature of the project is that the beginnings of the mainstreaming of good practices at the district or national level could already be seen even with the project's limited duration. The immediate benefits of the technologies, the clear potential for their replication, and the enthusiasm of the women participating has led to significant interest

from local government to expand their coverage by incorporating these technologies into their own programmes. This is a positive sign as it shows the way to scale up the positive outcomes of this project. A major limitation of the time-bound nature of the project was the lack of sufficient time for further deepening and expanding the project activities to make an impact at the policy level. A second phase would allow further testing of the Policy Guidelines, the establishment of demonstration models highlighting entrepreneurship, technology options, credit, and women-centric institutional mechanisms, structured advocacy and outreach activities, and the scaling up of the models through collaboration with local and central government.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AEPC	Alternate Energy Promotion Centre
CRT/N	Centre for Rural Technology, Nepal
CSID	Cottage and Small Industry Development
DASP	Diversified Agriculture Support Project
DDC	district development committee
DEEP	Society for Development & Environment Protection
DOC	dimensions of organisational capacity
DPO	district partner organisations
GAD	gender and development
HKH	Hindu Kush-Himalayas
HOPE	Himalayan Organisation for Protecting Environment
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
IDE	Integrated Development Enterprise-Nepal
IGG	income generating group
ITDG	Intermediate Technology Development Group
LPG	liquefied petroleum gas
LSU	livestock standard unit
MANUSHI	MANUSHI (Energetic Women of Nepal) for Sustainable Development
masl	metres above (mean) sea level
M&E	monitoring & evaluation
MDGs	millennium development goals
NADEP	Naryan Devrao Pandri Pandey
NGO	non-government organisation
NRCS	Nepal Red Cross Society
NRs	Nepalese rupees
NWAB	National Women's Association of Bhutan
O&M	operation and maintenance
PCAP	Phobjikha Conservation Area Project
PDDP	Participatory District Development Programme
PRA	participatory rural appraisal
REDA	Rural Economic Development Association
RSPN	Royal Society for Protection of Nature
SHG	self-help group
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SOLVE	Society of Local Volunteers Effort

TDV	technology demonstration village
TERI	The Energy and Resources Institute
TOT	training of trainers
TU	Tribhuvan University
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
VDC	village development committee
WDD	Women's Development Department
WEAN	Women's Entrepreneur Association of Nepal
WECS	The Water and Energy Commission Secretariat
WHO	World Health Organization
WID	women in development

Approximate rates of exchange in 2004

Bhutan

Nu. 46.50 = \$US 1

India

IRs. 46.50 = \$US 1

Nepal

NRs. 71.00 = \$US 1

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