

INTRODUCTION

In 1992, an 'Information Kit on Regenerative Agricultural Technologies for Nepali Hill Farmers' was produced by the Nepal Rural Reconstruction Association (NERRA) in collaboration with the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction of the Philippines and a few other international organisations, including ICIMOD. This Kit was widely disseminated to government agencies, NGOs, and individuals working in the extension of agricultural technologies in Nepal. To date, the effectiveness of the Kit has not been evaluated on a large scale.

However, in light of the fact that over 50 per cent of the agricultural work done in the hill regions of Nepal is carried out by women, it was deemed useful to evaluate the technologies of the Kit through women's eyes to learn of its practicality to them. Also, although it was realised that numerous factors constrain women's access to knowledge and the adoption of new agricultural practices, few efforts have been made to specify those constraints and find ways to overcome them. Many traditional ways of performing agricultural tasks are full of drudgery, consuming women's time and energy needlessly while alternative methods exist of which they are unaware or are unable to access. An interest in searching for technologies that could ease the drudgery of women led to the development of an action research project to assess the technologies of the Kit and other practices, while developing methods of extending new knowledge to women who are mostly illiterate and have little spare time for training.

In June 1994, ICIMOD initiated the project on Agricultural Technologies for Farm Women in Nepal in two villages of Gorkha District, in the mid-hills of central Nepal. Through training workshops and intensive personal follow-up instructions, 24 women learned of new technologies.

A total of 30 topics from the Kit and elsewhere were pre-selected for introduction to the women farmer participants, based on the project team's familiarity with their needs and priorities. In addition to 18 topics from the Kit, other new topics were included. These were introduced in Workshops I & II, held in the village, and through discussions with other women farmers while on tour. After being introduced to the topics - techniques and rationale - the participants were given the option to choose which topics they would be interested to try, with follow-up training and resources provided by the project agriculturalist. After a period of less than six months allocated for trials, the women selected 18 topics that they felt were acceptable to them, based on feasibility and usefulness. Some of the technologies selected by women were again explained and observed during a farmers' tour to other areas of west Nepal, namely Champaphant in Tanahu District and Lwang in Kaski District.

The lists of topics introduced, tested, and accepted are given below with reasons for the women's likes or dislikes of the technologies. A minikit of technologies selected for testing by the women participants has been assembled, hoping that it may be of use to government and NGO development workers in Nepal in their efforts to bring new practical knowledge to farm women and government and NGO projects.