

Conclusions

The project, though extremely short in duration, was very successful in motivating a group of at least 24 women who had previously never received training from any development agency or NGO, to learn new agricultural techniques that could increase their farm productivity while reducing their work loads. Participants in the Kathmandu seminar agreed that the time period was too short to expect these technologies to have been fully accepted, but they also stated that a tremendous amount of work had been accomplished in a short time.

The Gorkha women themselves have experienced a kind of transformation, from believing themselves to be ignorant women unable to do anything except traditional work, to thinking that they can lead their communities towards attaining better living standards. They have formed a village level women's organisation, after being inspired by other women's groups seen on the tour; through these, they have started their own savings' fund and have been motivated to undertake activities. By the end of the term, they stated that they would support the continuation of these activities with their own resources and did not need funds from outside agencies. But they did ask for someone who could provide them with technical knowledge. This will be necessary to support their confidence and skill-building for at least another six-months.

A few additional mechanical technologies were identified which could ease women's work significantly. Most important of these is a drinking water supply system which, when constructed, will allow them to undertake large-scale vegetable gardening and agroforestry activities. A water-run mill could put an end to the very arduous work of grinding, a daily chores, but only if it can be located near their homes. They have already appreciated the fuelwood savings generated by the smokeless stove.

We have learned some important lessons on how to adjust our extension techniques to accommodate the real life limitations of rural women. An extra dose of patience is required, along with the need to schedule trainings and meetings during their scarce free time. Printed materials cannot be relied on and are inappropriate for illiterate or neo-literate women. Also important is the necessity of involving men in the initiative; only with their support can women attend training and continue to develop their potential. Our combined male and female project team worked very well in convincing men that to upgrade the women's skills was to improve the lives of the whole family and community. The leadership training also provided a good opportunity to discuss this issue with the village men.

For ICIMOD, this project provided us with an excellent chance to conduct an experiment in this area of concern to mountain development facilitators, to learn what works, and what does not. From here, we will continue to support similar activities aimed to lessen the work loads of mountain women throughout the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, and we will document further lessons learned for the benefit of extension workers and development planners. This is of the utmost priority in a process to improve the conditions for rural women, so that they may develop themselves as fully as possible and, as the Gorkha women believe, lead their families and communities to a better life.