



Co-producing a shock resilient business ecosystem for women-led enterprises in Nepal

Background

Co-producing a shock-resilient business ecosystem for women-led enterprises in Nepal is a 2.5 year participatory action research project funded by the International Development Research Centre, Canada and led by Southasia Institute for Advanced Studies (SIAS) in collaboration with Aria Solutions, NIMS College and Himalayan Bio-Trade Pvt. Ltd. (HBTL).

This project is envisioned in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly impacted people's socio-economic situation, with women experiencing the worst impact, within the home and beyond. Care responsibilities increased, women lost jobs, women-led enterprises collapsed, entrepreneurial sales declined - all aggravating gender-based violence. This disproportionate impact on women cut across different ages, castes, ethnicities, income and educational levels. As a result of the constricting environment at the socio-cultural, political and economic domains, women's entrepreneurial capabilities, productive work, and financial resources have been constrained. This has been further compounded by the stressors and shocks brought on by climate change. Against this backdrop, the central question arising is *'what constitutes a gender responsive and shock resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem for women in Nepal and how can such a supportive environment be created?'* To address knowledge gaps and contribute to women's economic empowerment, this project aims to develop an 'ecosystem of support' model that is scalable for developing shock resilient, women-led agriculture and forest-based enterprises.

Project Objectives

The overarching objective is to *"co-produce realistic solutions for financially viable and shock-resistant agriculture and forest-based enterprises that support women's economic self-sufficiency"*, further supported by four specific objectives:

1. To understand gender-based constraints to women's economic empowerment in the context of agriculture and forest-based enterprises in Nepal.



2. To facilitate technological and institutional innovations for shock resilient women engaged enterprise development by strengthening 'ecosystem of support' (through interventions on improving production environment, value addition and branding, technological support, linkage with financing and market).
3. To develop capacity of women farmers and entrepreneurs to increase political space, agency and voice in collective action arenas.
4. To disseminate knowledge and inform policies and practices towards enhancing women's economic empowerment.

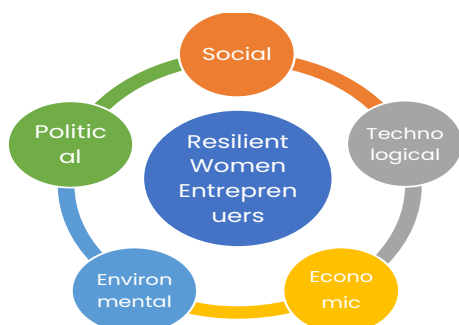


Figure 1. Resilience Framework

Research Framework

Five key domains of a resilient women-led enterprise are identified, namely social, political, environmental, economic and technological (see Figure 1), that have been adapted from Oxfam's Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Framework and International Food Policy Research Institute's Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index.

Research Approach and Strategies

The project adopts a diagnostic and participatory action-research approach to understand and steer interventions to overcome gender-based constraints and policy barriers for women engaged in agriculture and forestry value chains, and develop an 'ecosystem of support' model for women's economic empowerment (see Figure 2). The interventions include corrective and assertive measures which address barriers and builds enabling environment for the shock-resilient enterprises and inform policy and practices.

This action research process comprises four work packages:

1. Understanding barriers and constraints through diagnostic research and analysis (e.g. baseline study, policy analysis and value chain analysis) aims to explore the context, constraints, barriers and opportunities of WEE. It employs an intersectional approach to understand the differentiated impact of shocks and resilience of diverse groups of women (age, ethnicity, class) engaged in agriculture and forestry enterprises.

2. Enterprise development through technological and institutional innovations, focuses on the development of an 'ecosystem of support model' by intervening in the development of business information systems, branding, and linking this to the e-commerce platform so that women farmers and entrepreneurs benefit from easy access to finance, agri inputs, production, value addition, and trading.

3. Capacity enhancement to amplify voices and agency, focuses on interventions such as digital

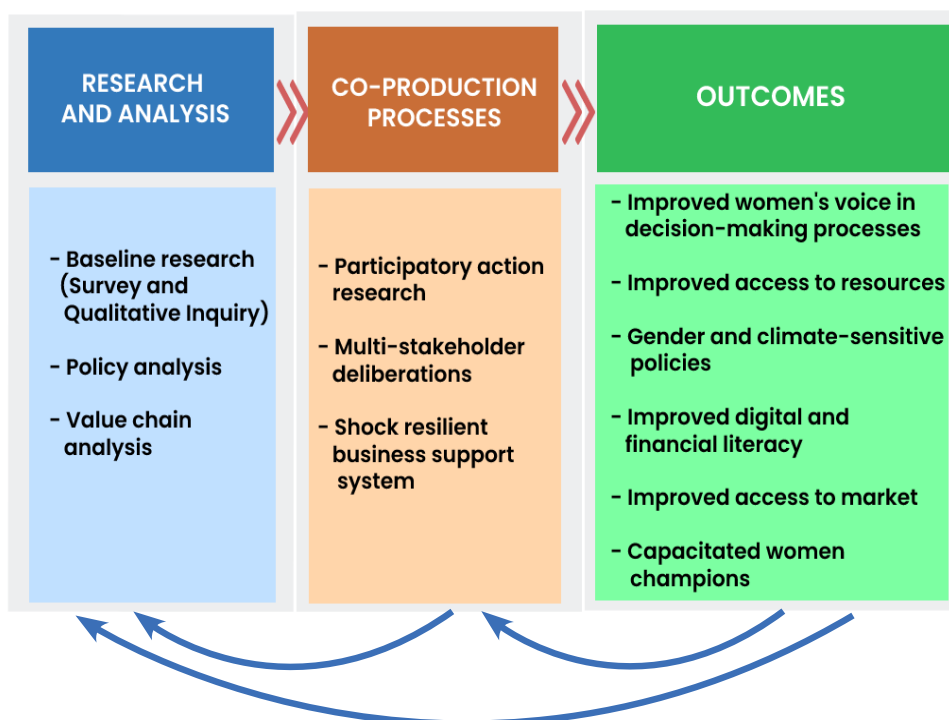


Figure 2: Research Approach

and financial literacy, business handling strategies and climate-smart technologies. In addition, leading women farmers and entrepreneurs will be nurtured as role models.

4. Knowledge dissemination and policy uptake, focuses on knowledge products (journal articles, policy briefs, media Op-Eds/Blogs/Vlogs), policy uptakes and evidences for scalable 'ecosystem of support model'.

Working Areas

The project's working areas are two economic corridors of Nepal representing high altitude and middle hills-Terai geographic regions as in map (see figure 3) and product types. The Dolakha-Ramechhap corridor focuses on wintergreen and legumes, and the Arghakhanchi-Rupandehi corridor on vegetables (see Table 1).



Table 1: Brief overview of working areas

Districts	Study Site	Target Groups	No. of Targeted Beneficiaries	Interventions
Ramechhap	Ramechhap Municipality	Legume producing women and the cooperatives involving these women	400-500 women members of the legume cooperatives	Market access, digital technology and access to finance, cooperative management
Argakhachi	Sandhikharka Municipality & Malarani Rural Municipality (RM)	Vegetable producing women's cooperatives and groups	400-500 women vegetable producers	Improve access to markets, digital technology/information system
Dolakha	Bhimeshwor Municipality (Boch, Lakuri danda) & Gaurishankar RM (Jhyanku)	Women engaged in Wintergreen collection	Around 200-300 women Wintergreen collectors	Experiment with propagation techniques, climate friendly distillation techniques, women's role in decision-making

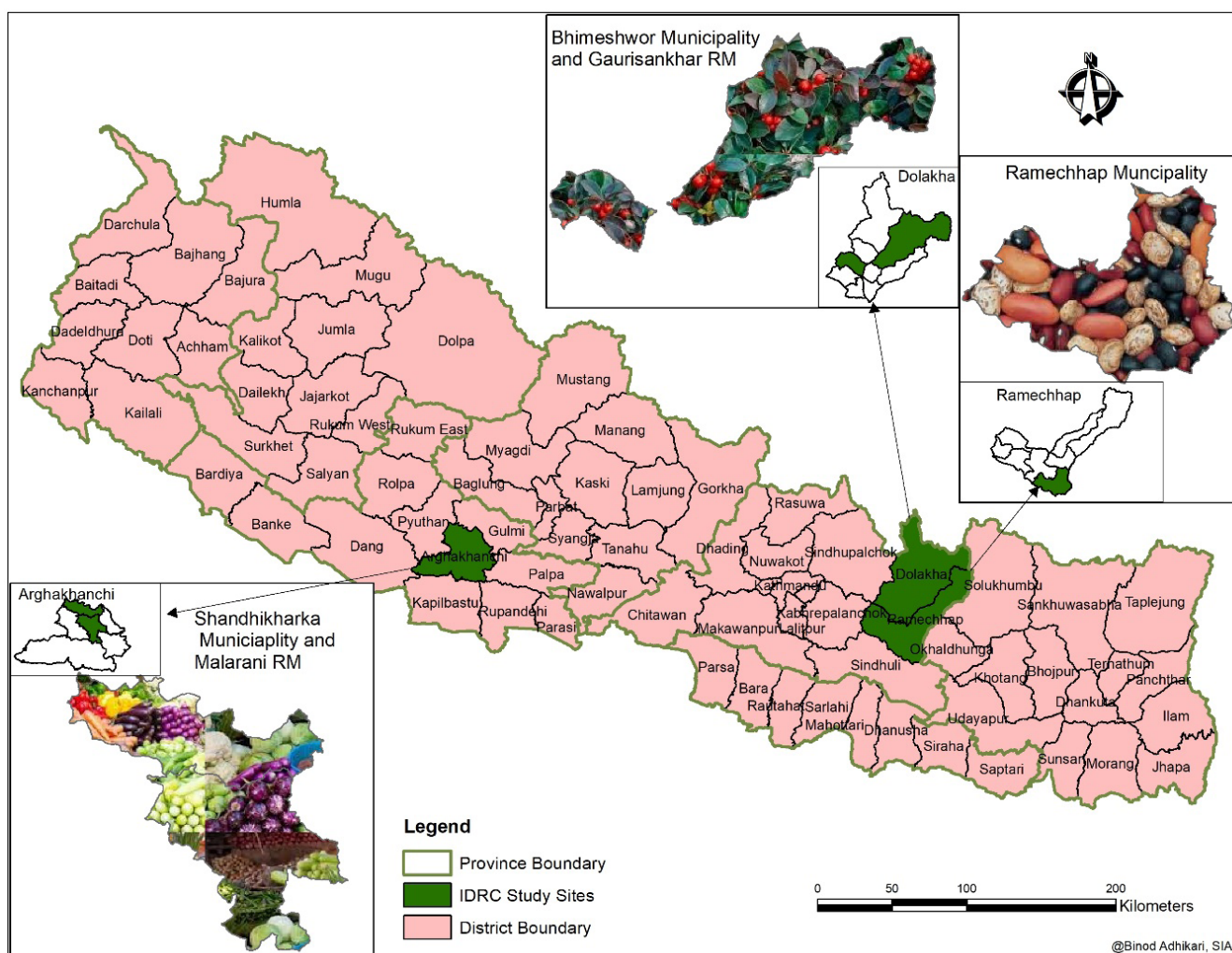


Figure 3: Map highlighting the Study Sites

Expected Outcomes

1. Improved businesses of women engaged agriculture and forest-based enterprises through application of DigiTech and FinTech to improve decision-making, wellbeing, and risk management.
2. Increased profitability and value of women engaged enterprises through increased access to local, regional and international markets.
3. Enhanced resilience of women engaged agriculture and forest-based enterprises based on improved environment for production, value addition and branding, technological support, linkage with financing and market for women engaged agriculture and forest-based enterprises will be developed.
4. Increased support of local governments in the working areas on climate-smart and gender-friendly entrepreneurial engagement plans and other WEE related activities.
5. Increased political space and say of women in public forums and higher nodes of agriculture value chains.
6. Improved governance of participating cooperatives and women engaged enterprises in project sites.
7. Increased uptake of research results into local government's policies and programs.

