

EVENT REPORT

**MEETING WITH SIAS BOARD MEMBERS,
ADVISORS, PARTNERS AND PROJECT STAFF**

**CO-PRODUCING A SHOCK-RESILIENT BUSINESS
ECOSYSTEM FOR WOMEN-LED ENTERPRISES IN
NEPAL (CREW) PROJECT**

26TH JANUARY, 2022

Prepared By:

Avipsha Rayamajhi, Dipika Das, Dr. Mani Ram Banjade

Organized By:



EVENT DETAIL

Name of the event	Meeting- Advisors, Board Members, CREW Partners, and Staff Members- "Co-producing a shock-resilient business ecosystem for women-led enterprises in Nepal" (CREW)
Date	26th January 2022
Venue	Hybrid- Zoom and Physical
Time	9:00 AM-11:30 AM
Organizer	Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS)
Speakers	Presenters: Dr. Mani Ram Banjade, Dr. Meeta S. Pradhan, Ms. Dipika Das, Mr.Bibhor Kayastha, Mr, Khilendra Gurung, Mr.Shrabya Timsina Moderator: Dr. Dil Khatri
Support Staffs	Mr. Sushant Acharya, Ms. Avipsha Rayamajhi, Mr. Sujan Shrestha
Number of Participants	28

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CONTEXT

Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS) has initiated a project “Co-producing a shock-resilient business ecosystem for women-led enterprises in Nepal” (CREW) in collaboration with Aria Solutions, NIMS College, and Himalayan Bio-Trade Pvt. Ltd (HBTL). The project is funded by International Development Research Center (IDRC) and aims to co-produce workable solutions for financially sustainable and shock-resilient agriculture and forest-based enterprises for women’s economic self-reliance. It is initiated in light of the unfolding impacts of COVID-19 on women and their already dwindling socio-economic status due to climate vulnerabilities, especially in rural Nepal.

As part of the CREW project, on 26th January 2022, SIAS organized a meeting with board members, project advisors, project partners, and project staffs. The purpose of the meeting was to gather feedback from the project advisors and board members regarding the research design. It was also intended as a prelude to the National Level Inception Workshop organized later in the afternoon and aimed to solicit any necessary feedback that would be instrumental for the workshop preparation.

The meeting was attended by 28 participants, who included three board members of SIAS, three project advisors, representatives from project partners, Principal Investigator (PI), four Co-Principal Investigators (PI), two management representatives from SIAS, and 12 project staff members. The gender disaggregation of the event attendees showed that 35.7 percent were women participants. It was the project’s honor to have Nepal’s parliament member as an advisory member of SIAS participate in the meeting.

EVENT STRUCTURE

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis in Nepal, the meeting was conducted in a hybrid model- some of the key presenters physically attended the meeting from SIAS conference hall while most participants joined virtually via Zoom. The session was moderated by Dr. Dil Khatri, Executive Director, SIAS.

The event commenced with a round of introductions from each participants. It formally started with a presentation from Dr. Mani Ram Banjade, Principal Investigator (PI) of the project, regarding the project's introduction, objectives, research questions, study areas, expected outcomes, and impact pathway. Dr. Meeta Sainju Pradhan, Co- Principal Investigator (Co-PI) of the project, took the presentation forward with an explanation of the research's conceptual framework. This was followed by a round of feedback from project advisors. Ms. Dipika Das, CREW Postdoctoral Researcher continued with the presentation regarding the work packages. Further, project partners- Mr. Bibhor Kayastha from Aria Solutions and Mr. Khilendra Gurung, HBTL- presented on their specific roles and responsibilities in regards to the project. Mr. Shrabya Timsina, CREW team member presented the experimental design used in the wintergreen study. This was followed by additional feedback from the participants.

Dr. Netra Timsina, Chairperson, SIAS ended the meeting with a brief concluding remark.



Image: Dr. Bimala Rai Paudel, Project Advisor and Member of Parliament, providing her feedback

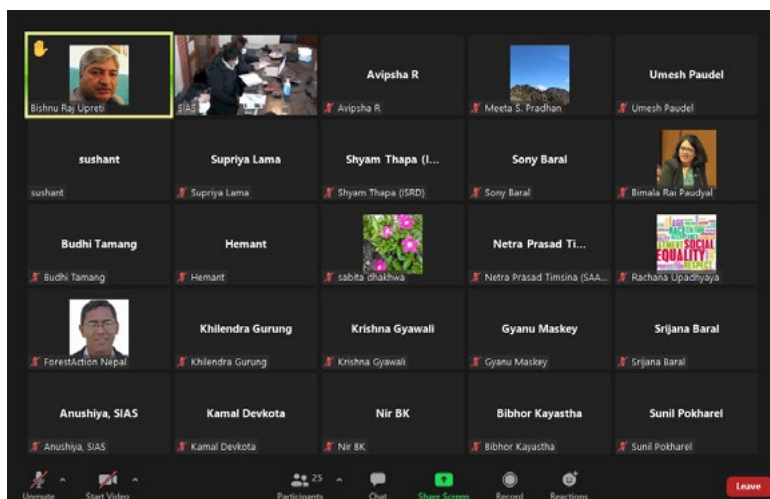


Image 6: Screen capture of the participants attending the meeting through Zoom

PRESENTATIONS

Dr. Mani Ram Banjade, Principal Investigator (PI), CREW Project

Dr. Banjade opened the presentation by providing a brief background on the exacerbating status of women in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research has been planned in the context of the impacts of climate change which has been worsened by the pandemic. He pointed out studies that mention how women are disproportionately bearing the brunt of climate change and with COVID-19, the situation has only worsened. He specifically highlighted that women in agriculture and forestry are at the lower end of the value chain and impacted by gender-based constraints and other socio-economic factors. He attributed a few reasons such as higher interest rates while taking loans from informal channels, lack of subsidies, access to financial resources and land ownership rights for women have contributed to their dwindling status. He added that with changing times, women in rural areas are getting exposed to digital technologies, particularly mobile phones, but they have not been able to reap benefits for their enterprises.

In this context, the project aims to determine what constitutes a gender-responsive and shock-resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem for women in Nepal. In regards to this, he discussed seven research questions pertaining to the impacts induced by COVID-19 on women's economic activities; climate risks, challenges, and coping mechanisms among women farmers and entrepreneurs; gender-based constraints at various nodes of the value chain; potential to enhance the relationship between women farmers/entrepreneurs and digital platforms; adoption of gender and climate-responsive policies and role models and local champions for further inspiration. Dr. Banjade stated the overall objective and connected it with four specific objectives meant to guide the research. He further explained about the three study areas and their commodities- wintergreens in Dolakha, legumes in Ramechhap and vegetables in Arghakhanchi.

Additionally, he mentioned about three strategies of the research design- research analysis consisting of baseline survey; policy and value chain analysis; and co-production which comprises the development of business support system in collaboration with women farmers/entrepreneurs and the cooperatives that involve them. Dr. Banjade wrapped up his presentation by briefing about Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach used in the research design. The approach integrates the basic idea of the action research cycle and intends to collectively identify gender-based constraints, formulation, and implementation of plans and strategies to overcome them. It also captures collaborative monitoring and constant improvement of the approach according to the reflections derived from it.

Dr. Meeta Sainju Pradhan, Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI), CREW Project

Dr. Pradhan continued the presentation with a comprehensive explanation of the conceptual framework. The framework centralizes shock-resilient women-led enterprises and determines the elements necessary to create an ecosystem of support. She highlighted that the framework is not linear but rather the elements have an interactive relationship and are built on each other.

According to various works of literature, resilience implies the ability to cope up and survive disasters with minimum impact and damage. For enterprises to become resilient, networking, resources and the ability to adapt are crucial. In regards to building resilience, the project envisions capacity building. Hence, the framework focuses on strengthening well-being, decision-making and risk management from an individual, community, and other broader levels.

She further added that to facilitate capacity building transformation is necessary. According to various works of literature, familiar elements that can aid this process are agency, resources and voice. Under agency, she discussed access and control over human, economic and social resources followed by informed decision making, freedom, and safety of movement, self-esteem and the will to transform aspirations into actions under agency. Additionally, voice covers the ability to listen to feedback and take actions accordingly. The presenter also highlighted the importance of bringing change in power dynamics followed by informal institutional practices such as norms and values.

In regards to the five key domains of the framework- socio-cultural, economic, policy, environmental and technological, she mentioned the socio-cultural domain to be the most difficult and time-consuming to change. She further added that changing gender roles is necessary to bring change in either of the domains. Although it is quite difficult to put equal effort in attaining all five domains in the project period of 30 months, the framework depicts how the project can possibly attain the objectives.

Dr. Pradhan concluded her presentation by recounting her field experience that women are proactively participating in many fronts and are open to learning about technology. Most importantly, they are ready to act and become mentors and leaders in their community. In addition, wards are open to supporting alternative programs to traditional skill development activities such as sewing and cooperatives are equally responsive and open to new opportunities and collaborations.

Ms. Dipika Das, Postdoctoral Researcher, CREW

Mr. Kayastha presented the roles and responsibilities of Aria Solutions to primarily achieve objective two of the project. Their work is heavily focused on Ramechhap-based lentil cooperatives and will work towards branding and exploring export potentials, strengthening lentil-based cooperative management, developing integrated value-chain decision support system and providing assistance as required for other objectives.

There are eight outcomes in line with the second objective of strengthening business model, market development and technology usage. The outcomes focus on training, curriculum development, periodic monitoring, strengthening leadership and management, cash-flow management, better maintenance of database in cooperatives and brand development of products. He further assured that Aria Solutions will provide support to cooperatives beyond project period for three years without any cost.

The presentation concluded with him highlighting major work approaches that include collaboration with community-based organizations (CBO), civil societies, government agencies; human-centered designing and prioritization on continuous capacity-building.

Mr. Bibhor Kayastha, Aria Solutions

Mr. Bibhor Kayastha talked about Aria Solutions role and responsibilities in line with achieving objective two of the project. They are more focused on the Ramechhap-based lentil cooperative and have designed necessary interventions to attain the key performance indicators set by the project. The first outcome is concerned with creating a strong brand for the product followed by enhancing production quality. This will be ensured through training, curriculum development and periodic monitoring. He shed light on the further outcomes- strengthening enterprise management through leadership and management training and drafting of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

He discussed there is a typical lack of priority placed on brand development and highlighted that the project's primary focus will be on establishing a brand for the products. He also touched upon other crucial outcome of the project which is the digital transformation of cooperatives through cash flow management and a well-maintained database to facilitate decision making. Mr. Kayastha assured that Aria Solutions will support the operations of the cooperatives beyond the project period for three years without any cost.

In regards to their approaches in attaining the outcomes, they will prioritize collaboration with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds- community-based organizations (CBO), civil societies, private sector, and government agencies.

Mr. Khilendra Gurung, Himalayan Bio-Trade Private Limited (HBTL)

Mr. Khilendra Gurung presented the plans for the value chain development of wintergreens in Dolakha. Wintergreen was considered as a mere waste but its value increased after 1996 when a small distillation unit was established to produce essential oil from it. The product started expanding into the international market since 2003 AD.

The primary objective of the partnership is to scale up the sourcing of wintergreens, fulfill the demands of the international market and create local employment. For this purpose, two nurseries will be established in Bhimeshwori Municipality. Each nursery will be provided with one lakh wintergreen saplings each and after their growth, they will be directly planted in community forests, private lands and marginal farmlands.

He added that owing to traditional technology used for distillation until now, the process has been time-consuming. Hence, a major part of the partnership is research to enhance the technology used for the distillation process. They eventually plan to move towards using stainless steel for the distillation process at least in Lakuri Danda and Boch.

Mr. Gurung also pointed out that the role of women collectors has been limited as collectors whereas men are more active in the distribution process. They will focus on capacitating women to help them expand their role beyond collectors.

Mr. Shrabya Timsina, CREW Team Member

Mr. Shrabya Timsina presented the propagation possibilities and plans of wintergreen. The intervention will mostly focus on artificial propagation either through seeds, stem cuttings or rhizome division. Although rhizome division is the easiest and fastest, scaling up is difficult through this method. Hence, the research is focused on propagation through stem cuttings and seeds.

He further added that the nurseries will also focus on experimenting with different soil, fertilizers, temperature, moisture, humidity and light to find the most conducive combination for better growth and germination. Additionally, they will also explore the most appropriate slope levels with respect to air temperature and forest density for the growth considering the canopy density such as very dense forest, moderately dense forest, and open forest. The research contribution has significant potential to enhance scientific knowledge in the field of wintergreen research and its sustainability, which is connected to the livelihoods of the high-altitude peoples.

DISCUSSIONS AND FEEDBACK

◆ **Dr. Bishnu Raj Upreti, Executive Director, Policy Research Institute (PRI) | Advisor, CREW**

Dr. Upreti expressed appreciation for the project and raised some of his concerns. He stated his concern on the project's timeline as it seems to be over ambitious at present. Additionally, based on the prior presentation which mentioned that 15% of business which collapsed during the COVID-19 were women-led, he suggested it would be good if the baseline survey could verify the women entrepreneur status. He further advised, it would be wonderful if the research can include some in-depth case studies of women-led businesses that have collapsed since it would provide direct evidence on developing appropriate plans for enhancing resilience.

According to him, the conceptual framework covers many aspects but they are not reflected in the research objective. He pointed out the imbalance between the conceptual framework and research objectives and suggested aligning them to make the research more manageable.

Lastly, Dr. Upreti stated the generalization of objective 4.2 in the impact pathway and advised on adding 'evidence-based policy recommendation' to make it more specific.

◆ **Krishna Gyawali, Member, Board of Directors, SIAS**

Mr. Gyawali stressed on the harmonization of the CREW project with its stakeholders, especially with the government and other related projects that are ongoing or are in the pipeline with similar objectives. He acknowledged the project's consideration of collaboration with the government and other local partners during the implementation phase and emphasized its importance. Further, he advised on the need to derive learning from other projects and focus on the possibilities of skill transfer.

He commented on the conceptual framework and claimed that interventions for the other three domains have been done through other approaches or even experienced organic growth. Hence, he suggested prioritizing technology and environment among the five domains.

Mr. Gyawali appreciated the structure of the research but suggested localization of the project narrative and familiarization of beneficiary women with the project vocabulary. In regards to the same, he also shared having a Nepali name for the project if possible. He further alerted on the possibility of local elite women coming at the forefront and depriving other groups of women from the benefit of the project and the need to deviate from this taking place.

Lastly, he put forward his concern about the project becoming different among the many similar projects and encouraged thinking about making it qualitatively different as well as sustainable.

◆ **Dr. Bimala Rai Paudyal, Member, National Assembly | Advisor, CREW**

Dr. Paudyal acknowledged the presentation as well as the project and put forth her queries and suggestions. She firstly pointed out that the background of the research must highlight climate risks and much as it highlights the challenges of the pandemic since the former issue can extend longer and wider than the latter. Citing that the pandemic has had serious impacts on women in the hospitality sector, she questioned if the research explores or plans to explore the context of women in sectors other than agriculture and farming as well. She further added that since the research focuses on COVID-19 and its impact, the service/ hospitality sector must be considered.

Drawing from her experiences of the earthquake and incidents of ownership transfer of women-led or managed entities, she cautioned about the possibilities of similar incidents in this project as well. Once support is provided, there are chances of ownership being transferred from women to men. Hence, such risks must not be overlooked.

She stated that the project would be conducted in three hill and mountain districts of Nepal i.e. Arghakhanchi, Ramechhap and Dolakha which is excellent, but it does not accurately reflect the study title which specifies women-led business in Nepal. It would be wonderful if the project could incorporate some sites from the Madhes/ Terai region. However, she acknowledged that expanding the study sites at this stage of the project might be difficult due to resource constraints and suggested that this may be solved by simply adding a few case studies the Terai region as appropriate.

She further remarked that digitization has brought many opportunities but questioned if women have been able to receive employment opportunities derived from the ongoing digitization trend.

At the end, she concluded her feedback by appreciating the approach of developing models and champions to demonstrate and inspire other communities in the longer term.

◆ **Dr. Naya Sharma Paudel, Forest Action**

Dr. Paudel highly appreciated the research design of the project and acknowledged its coverage of the ongoing context. However, he raised his concern about sustaining the effort and energy of the project in the long term. He suggested that intellectual curiosity alone is not enough and political commitment must be equally prioritized to ensure the project's sustainability.

◆ **Dr. Hemanta Raj Ojha, Advisor, CREW**

Dr. Ojha agreed on the prior feedback and questioned the possibility of attaining project objectives in the projected timeline. He agreed that several factors must be considered during the project but highlighted the need to identify a focus to attain a demonstrable result at the end. He emphasized suggesting policy interventions in line with the project's outcome to different relevant ministries.

Further, he added that participatory action research (PAR) must bring demonstrable changes in the three sites. Drawing from his own experiences and practice, he advised that methods and approaches must be localized to suit our context. The project should consider one critical aspect: after it is acquired, localize it to bring change. Dr. Ojha also acknowledged the women versus gender debate and how women are entangled in different kinds of gender relations. He questioned that although the framework integrates the issue, how will action research and analysis integrate the dynamics. Additionally, he advised on having a participatory approach and reflecting on how women's needs and wants can be integrated well.

Regarding the local women champions, the project may consider listing nationwide women-led business leaders in last 30 years and include them as motivators or mentors to the respective beneficiaries. He remarked that this can save the project's time and risk to identify the women local champions only in the project duration.

He raised a concern that the methodology might have been limited and advised on adding cross-sectional context and evidence. Concluding his remarks, he suggested that rather than focusing only on research, the project must prioritize innovation.

◆ **Ms. Sabita Dhakawa, Team Member, CREW**

Ms. Dhakawa suggested skilling beneficiaries to formulate business plans. She mentioned that while dealing with cooperatives or other financial institutions as entrepreneurs, having a good understanding of one's business is crucial. Hence, in regards to holistic enterprise development, the ability to create a business plan is equally important. She suggested its addition to the economic domain of the conceptual framework.

Her second feedback concerned with developing criteria to select women farmers/entrepreneurs for the project to enhance the project's impact.

◆ **Mr. Sunil Pokharel, NIMS College**

Mr. Pokharel put forth his concern that while production level is aimed to increase by 20%, revenue is targeted to rise by 100%. He questioned if it is possible to do so and whether the project plans to increase the price of the products. He further remarked the need to revisit the targets or not quantify them for now.

KEY SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- ◆ Mr. Bibhor Kayastha, Aria Solutions responded to the query and clarified the comment. He stated that according to the baseline, sales are not being directed through cooperatives but entrepreneurs themselves. Hence, the revenue of cooperatives is very low and targeted to be doubled. Since the baseline of production is recorded from the farm level, the production target is aimed to increase by 20%.
- ◆ Dr. Mani Ram Banjade expressed that the comments and feedback received are practical and will be integrated. He acknowledged the need for wider coverage and consideration of the project to integrate Madhesh and Eastern context but stated about resource constraints as a possible barrier. However, he assured that the issue raised is critical and the project team will consider the possibilities as much as resources allow.
- ◆ He further reiterated Dr. Upreti's feedback about gathering case stories of collapsed enterprises and also suggested collecting success stories that would help the project familiarize it with practices that help in keeping businesses afloat despite challenges. Further, he agreed about the need for collaborations and assured us that it is and always has been an integral part of the project. Dr. Banjade also mentioned the importance of skill transfer and claimed that the project will focus on that and support Aria Solutions even beyond the project timeline.
- ◆ He agreed that integration of climate-smart technology is a challenge but the team has been discussing and working towards its successful integration into the project interventions. Further, he supported the need for localization of project narratives and also mentioned that the team will be careful not to centralize project benefits to elite local women.
- ◆ Regarding the feedback on exploring impacts on the hospitality sector, he stated his skepticism since the project is inclined towards agriculture but mentioned the team would discuss on the possibility. Dr. Banjade further agreed with Dr. Ojha's statement about the need for real innovation brokering and stated that the project has always focused on that.
- ◆ Dr. Meeta S. Pradhan agreed with Dr. Banjade's responses to the feedback. She shed light on the women versus gender debate and claimed that the project's approach from individual, household and community levels is to explore gender relationships. She further claimed that a single project cannot change the existing power relations and gender dynamics. Hence, she agreed that harmonization with other projects is crucial. Additionally, she pointed out how women still lack liberty in decision making and it is vital to capacitate them in this aspect.
- ◆ Dr. Netra Timsina, Chairperson, SIAS put forth his concluding remarks by firstly thanking the participants for their valuable feedback. He agreed that the project has a complex organization that must be considered while implementing the project. Further, he claimed that although this is an action-research, it is different from other research done in the past. The project directly benefits the target group through its interventions and is different from the usual academic research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to all the key presenters, project advisors and SIAS board members for their valuable participation. .

ANNEX

ANNEX 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

S. N.	Name	Organization
1	Dr. Bimala Rai Paudyal	Project Advisor/Member of Parliament
2	Dr. Hemant Ojha	Project Advisor/ University of Canberra
3	Dr. Bishnu Raj Upreti	Project Advisor/ Policy Research Institute (PRI)
4	Dr. Netra Timsina	Chairperson, SIAS
5	Mr. Krishna Gyawali	Member, Board of Directors, SIAS
6	Dr. Naya Sharma Paudel	Forest Action
7	Dr. Srijana Baral	Forest Action
8	Dr. Dil Khatri	Executive Director, SIAS
9	Dr. Mani Ram Banjade	Principal Investigator, CREW/ SIAS
10	Dr. Meeta Sainju Pradhan	Co- Principal Investigator, CREW / SIAS
11	Ms. Sabita Dhakawa	CREW/ SIAS
12	Dr. Sony Baral Gauli	CREW/ SIAS
13	Ms. Rachana Upadhyaya	CREW/ SIAS
14	Mr. Kamal Devkota	CREW/ SIAS
15	Ms. Gyanu Maskey	CREW/ SIAS
16	Mr. Bibhor Kayastha	CREW/ Aria Solutions
17	Mr. Buddhi Tamang	CREW/ Aria Solutions
18	Mr. Shyam Thapa	CREW/ NIMS College
19	Mr. Sunil Pokharel	CREW/ NIMS College
20	Mr. Khilendra Gurung	CREW/ Himalayan Bio-Tech Pvt. Ltd. (HBTL)
21	Ms. Dipika Das	CREW/ SIAS
22	Mr. Sushant Acharya	CREW/ SIAS
23	Mr. Shrabya Timsina	CREW/ SIAS
24	Mr. Nir Bahadur BK	CREW/ SIAS
25	Mr. Umesh Paudel	CREW/ SIAS
26	Ms. Supriya Lama	CREW/ SIAS
27	Mr. Sujan Shrestha	CREW/ SIAS
28	Ms. Avipsha Rayamajhi	CREW/ SIAS

ANNEX II: PHOTOS



Image 1: Dr. Mani Ram Banjade during his presentation



Image 2: Dr. Hemanta Raj Ojha, Project Advisor, providing his feedback



Image 3: Dr. Naya Sharma Paudel, Forest Action, providing his feedback

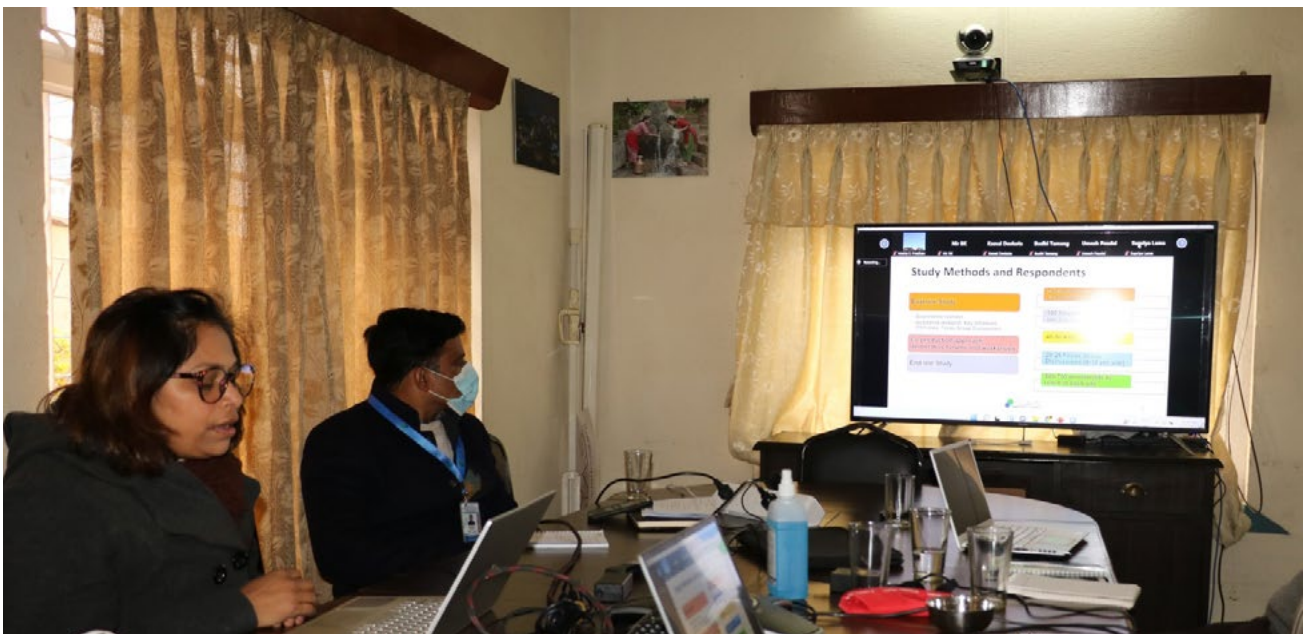


Image 4: Dipika Das during her presentation regarding work packages, study methods and respondents of the project

ANNEX III: POWERPOINT SLIDES

PRESENTATION I: Dr. Mani Ram Banjade, Principal Investigator (PI)



CO-PRODUCING A SHOCK RESILIENT BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM FOR WOMEN-LED ENTERPRISES IN NEPAL (CREW)

Mani Ram Banjade
Dil Khatri
Dipika Das

National Level Inception Workshop

26 January, 2022
Kathmandu, Nepal



Outline

- Background and rationale
- Opportunities
- Research questions
- Research objectives
- Research sites
- Research approaches and strategies
- Participatory Action Research
- Design considerations
- Impact pathway



Source: The Diplomat

Background and rationale

Women of Nepal had been disproportionately bearing the brunt of climate change effect (Mainaly and Tan, 2012)

The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the women's situation in Nepal

- Women's social and economic capabilities jeopardized (WB, 2021).
- Increased care work, and burgeoning cases of domestic violence
- Job loss: 41 percent women; 28 percent of men (IIDS, 2020)
- 15 percent of women-led businesses collapsed (TKP, 2021)
- Over 80 percent Micro, Small and Medium enterprises (MSMEs) suffered from a slump in sales



Background

- Higher interest rates through informal channels; often excluded from the government's economic relief packages.
- Most of the women work at lower end of value chain (production)
- Deeply rooted socio-cultural barriers and gender-based discrimination limit women's entrepreneurial capabilities
- The gender-based constraints (GBCs) intersect with other social identities such as age, caste/ethnicity, class and educational level
- Regulatory constraints creates additional restrictions for access to finance for women.
- Limited capacity in benefiting from digital technologies

Opportunities that can be harnessed

- Burgeoning use of smartphones in rural areas
- Readiness of women to participate and commitment of other stakeholders
- Federalism – empowered and resourceful local governments
- Emphasized by all stakeholder consulted: Marketing aspect and governance of cooperative are the two arenas requiring concerted effort to transform the agriculture and forestry sectors to empower women
- Some frameworks are there: WEE and Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)

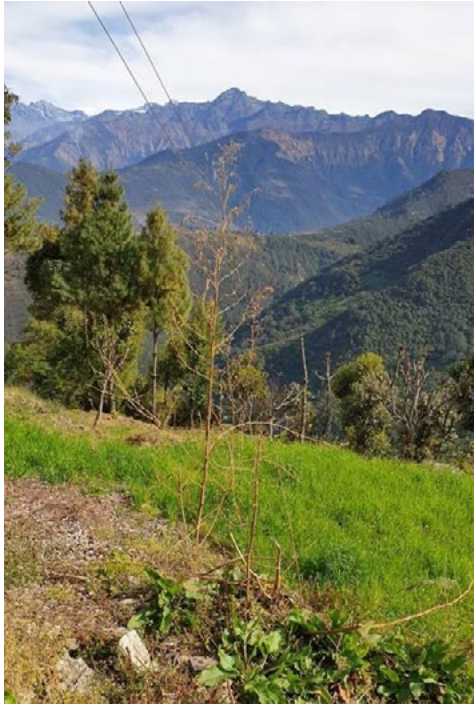
Research Questions

What constitutes a gender responsive and shock resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem for women in Nepal and how can such a supportive environment be created?

Specific Research Questions

1. What are the short/long term impacts/disruptions caused by COVID-19 on women farmers and women-led enterprises?
2. What are the climate risks and challenges women farmers and entrepreneurs are confronted with, and, if any, how are they coping with these risks and challenges?
3. What are the key gender-based constraints women face in the different nodes of the value chain of selected agriculture/forest products?





Research Questions...

4. How to increase access and capacity of women farmers/entrepreneurs to FinTech and digital platforms?
5. How do smart technologies (digital marketing platforms, climate smart technologies) help overcome women's gender role and time constraints and contribute to entrepreneurial competencies?
6. How does women's collective action help influence local governments to adopt gender and climate responsive policies to promote women's entrepreneurship?
7. How do women entrepreneur role models and local champions contribute to women's entrepreneurial aspirations?

Objectives

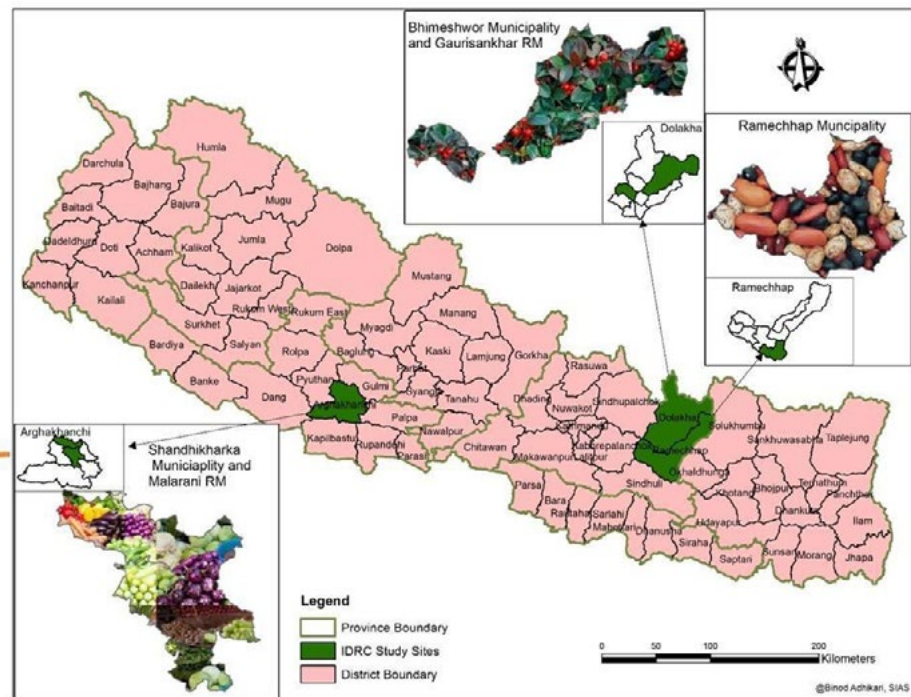
Goal

To "co-produce realistic solutions for financially viable and shock-resistant agriculture and forest-based enterprises that support women's economic self-sufficiency".

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.

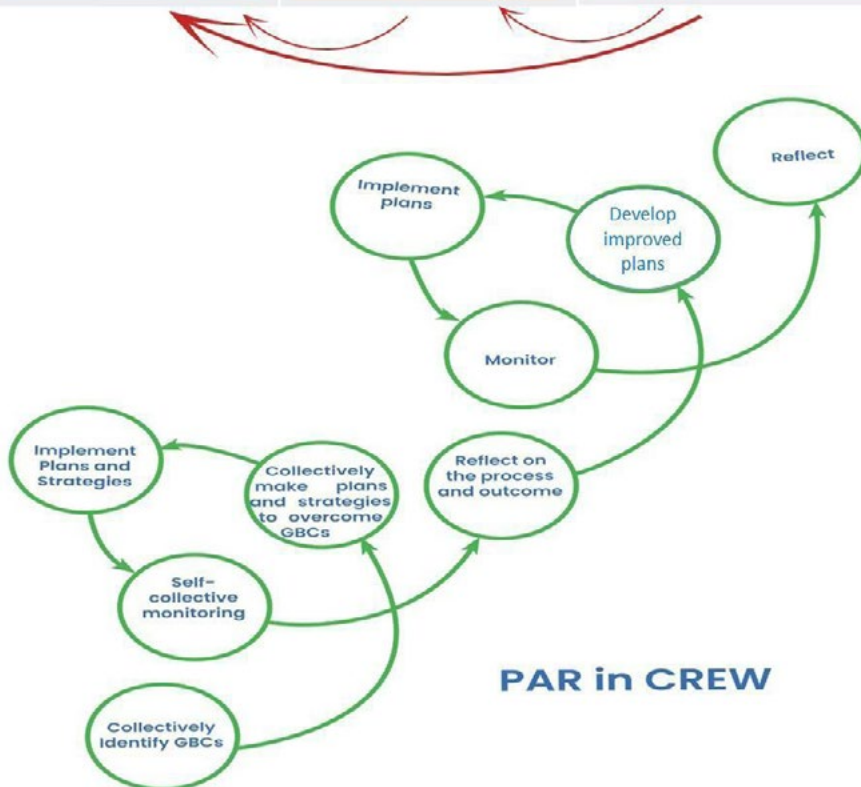
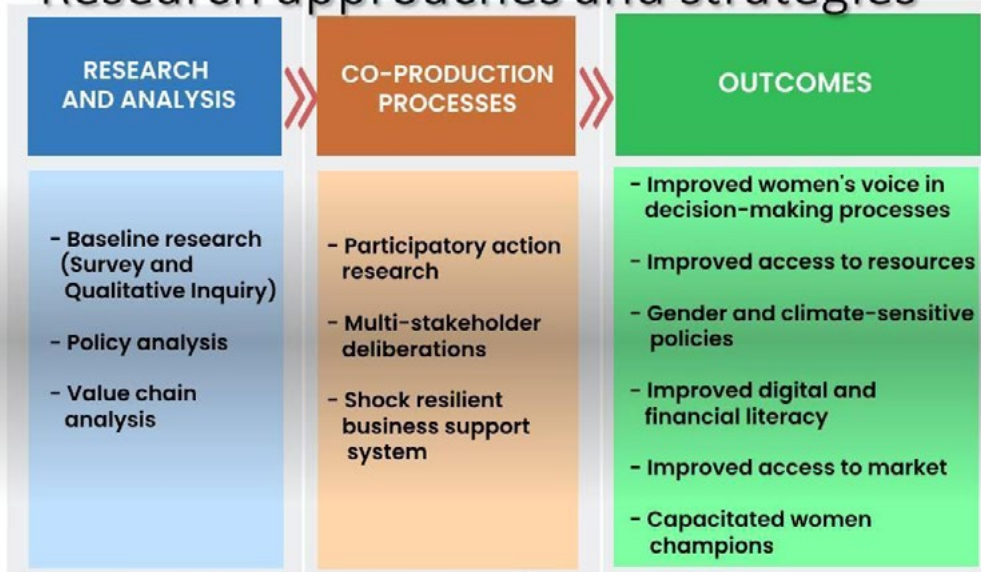
Study sites



Brief overview of working areas

District	Study Sites	Site Features	Targeted Beneficiaries	Interventions
Ramechhap	Ramechhap Municipality	Middle Hills, Semi-Arid region	400-500 women members of a cooperative	Market access, digital technology and access to finance, cooperative management
Argakhanchi	Sandhikharka Municipality & Malarani RM	Middle Hills, Irrigated and Unirrigated land	400-500 women vegetable producers and entrepreneurs	Improve access to markets, digital technology/ information system
Dolakha	Bhimeswor Municipality (Boch, Lakuri danda) & Gaurishankar RM (Jhyanku)	High altitude	200-300 women Wintergreen collectors	Experiment with propagation techniques, climate friendly distillation techniques, women's role in decision-making

Research approaches and strategies



Expected Outcomes

- Improved businesses of women engaged agriculture and forest-based enterprises through application of DigiTech and FinTech to improve decision-making, wellbeing, and risk management.
- Increased profitability and value of women engaged enterprises through increased access to local, regional and international markets.
- 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.
- Increased support of local governments in the working areas on climate-smart and gender-friendly entrepreneurial engagement plans and other WEE related activities.
- Increased political space and say of women in public forums and higher nodes of agriculture value chains.
- Improved governance of participating cooperatives and women engaged enterprises in project sites.
- Increased uptake of research results into local government's policies and programs.



Research design: key considerations



Understanding both subjective and objective dimensions of WEE measures

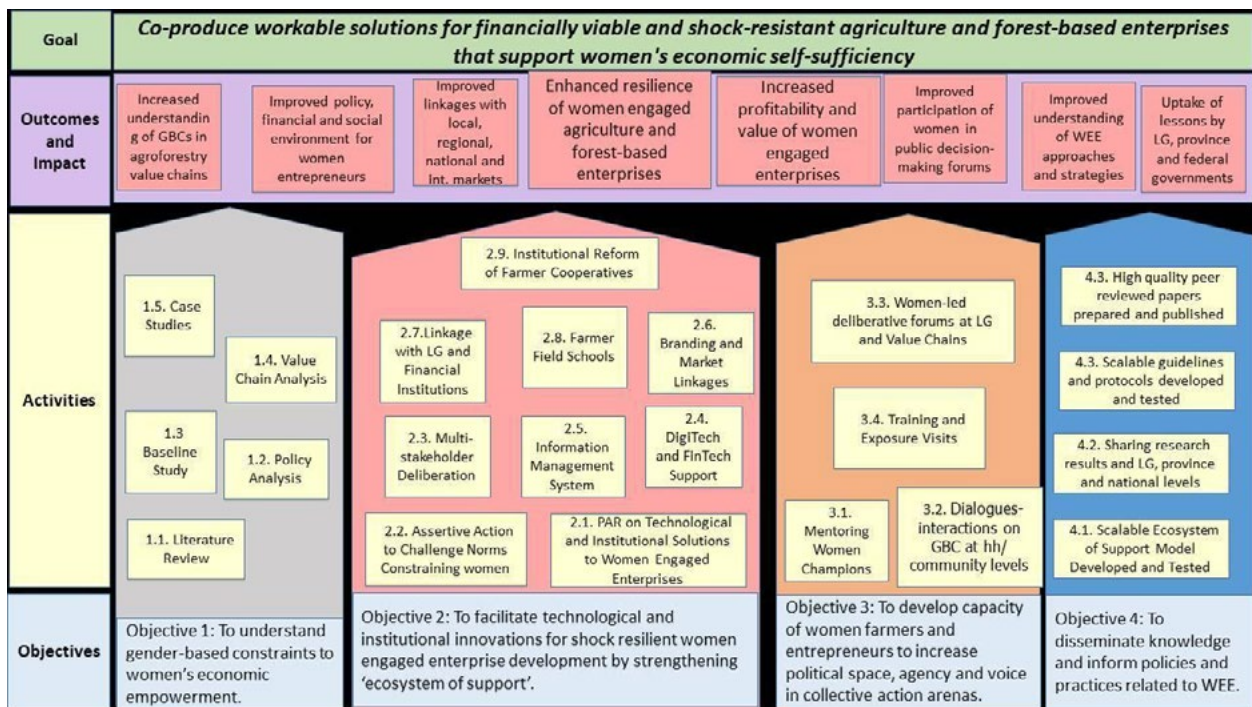
Intersectional approach

Co-production of business ecosystem for shock resilient women-led enterprises

Mix-methods: combining quantitative and qualitative tools

Sustainability- collaboration with local governments; governance reform of women engaged cooperatives; continuous support on digital technology

Impact Pathway



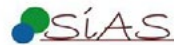


Conceptual Framework The CREW Project

The Project Inception

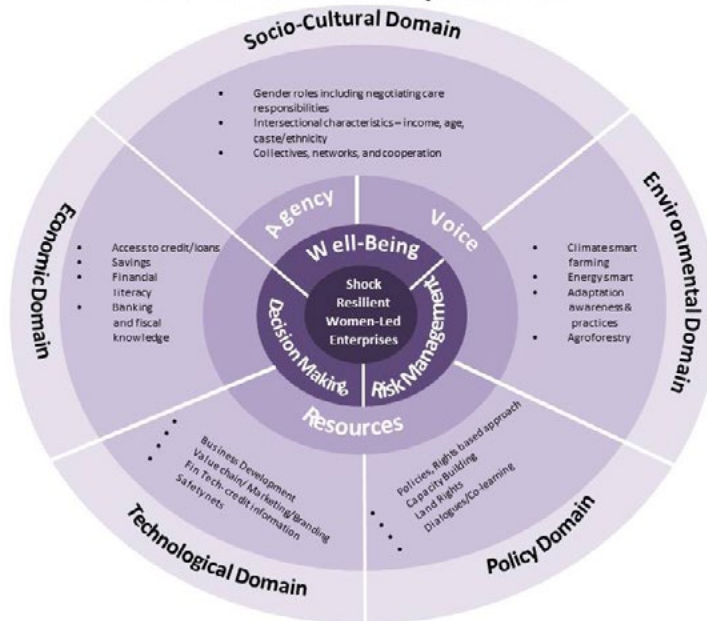
Meeta S. Pradhan, Dipika Das, & Rachana Upadhyaya

Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies
26th January 2022



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A Conceptual Framework for an 'Ecosystem for Support' Approach in Women's Economic Empowerment



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The Core: “Shock Resilient Women’s Enterprises”

These are enterprises or initiatives:

- Led by or co-managed by women
- Formal (co-operatives or CFUGs) or informal (farmer’s groups)
- In the agriculture sector and forestry (NTFPs)

They are resilient to shocks (such as climate change or COVID)

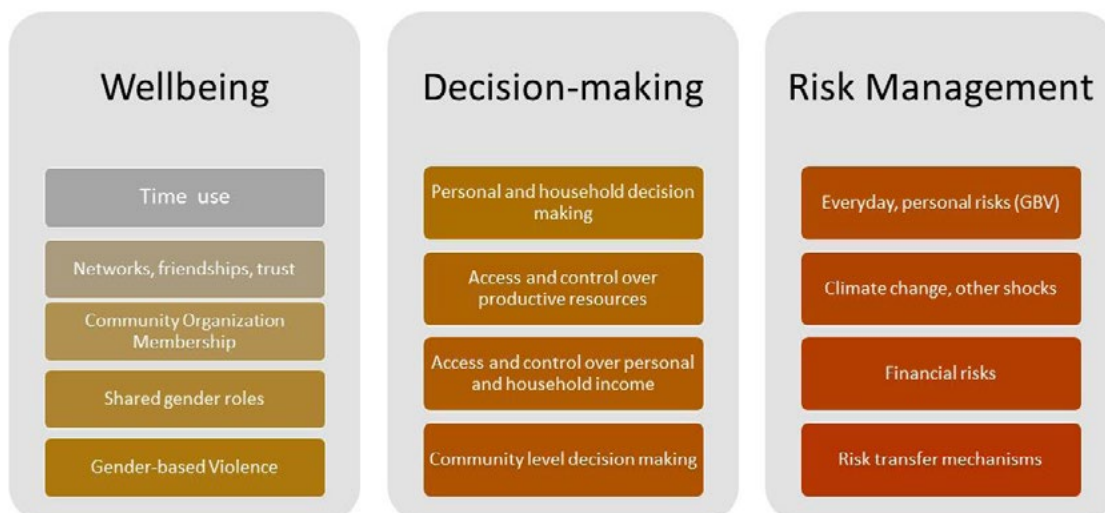
- “...the ability to survive and cope with a disaster with minimum impact and damage”*
- “... the women have entrepreneurial characteristics, resourcefulness, networking, adaptability and continuity...” when facing a disaster**
- they have “cognitive preparations, continuous learning, and the generation of social capital” (networks, shared understanding and trust)***

Thus the key issue is strengthening women’s capacities and capabilities.

[*Cutter et al., 2008 ** Matharu & Juneja, 2021 *** Prasad et al., 2014]

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Strengthening Women’s Capacities



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WEE: What needs to be transformed to increase capacities?

❑ RESOURCES

- human, economic, social - leading to Material Changes

❑ AGENCY

- household/community decisions, freedom and safety of movement, skills, knowledge, self esteem/confidence, aspirations, actions and resistance - leading to Cognitive and Perceptual Changes

❑ VOICE

- meaningful participation, individual/collective feedback that is valued

Closely related.....

❑ RELATIONS

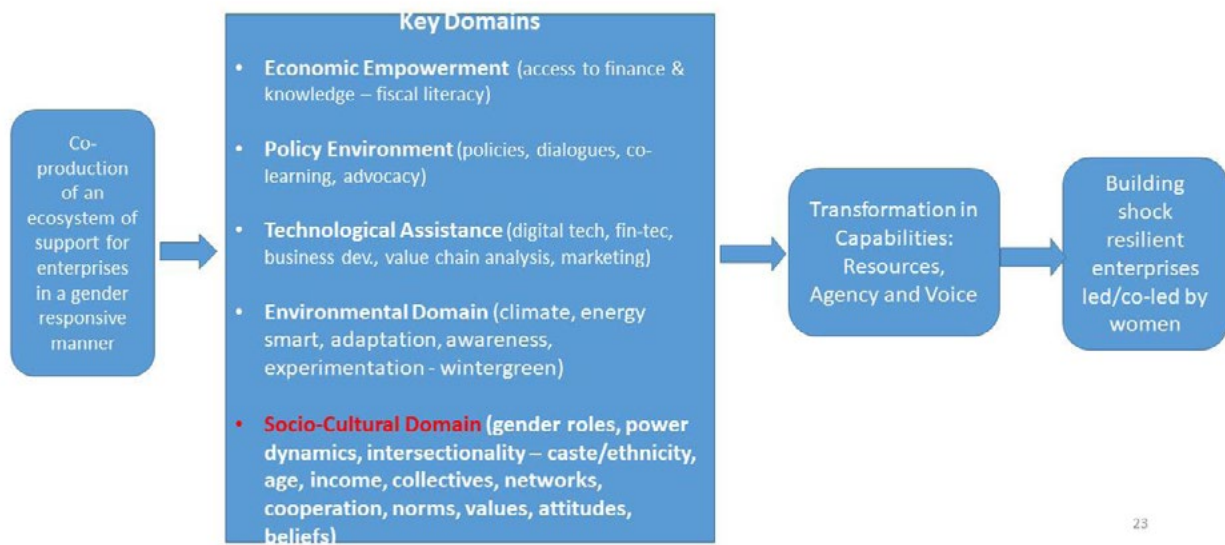
- power dynamics within households/community, networks

❑ STRUCTURES (or "Rules of the Game")

- laws, policies, norms, institutional practices, including informal institutional practices (norms, values, attitudes and beliefs)

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Strengthening Capacities, Improving the Context



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Elements within the Contextual Domains

Economic Domain

- Access to credit/loans
- Savings – household and collectives
- Financial literacy - banking and fiscal knowledge
- Mobile banking
- Increased access to land ownership

Policy Domain

- Review of Policies – identifying opportunities and gaps
- Rights based and GESI approach
- Deep listening, Dialogues and Co-learnings
- Policy advocacy – especially with local governments

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Elements....

Environmental Domain

- Climate smart farming
- Energy smart farming
- Adaptation awareness and practices
- Experimentation with cultivation of NTFPs

Technological Domain

- Production empowerment
- Business development including risk management
- Value chain analysis
Marketing/Branding
- Fin Tech - credit information
- Safety nets

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The Socio-Cultural Domain

- Gender roles including negotiating sharing of care responsibilities
- Intersectional characteristics – income, age, caste/ethnicity
- Collectives, networks and cooperation
- Traditional and discriminatory norms, values, attitudes and beliefs

Opportunities we have seen:

- Women active in production and some leadership in marketing
- Increasing access to local savings and credit – cooperatives
- Increasing voice for wanting enhanced capacities
- Women leading, questioning and ready to act
- Women (and some men) ready for becoming leaders and mentors
- Women ready to experiment with cultivation of wintergreen and its management
- Increasing access to and use of smart phones and openness to learn new technologies
- Receptive local governments to meaningfully support development of women's enterprises
- Receptive members of cooperatives (women and men) to bring changes in gender responsive management structures, processes and capacity building

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Thank you!

“As women achieve power, the barriers will fall. As society sees what women can do, as women see what women can do, there will be more women out there doing things, and we’ll all be better off for it.”

- Ruth Bader Ginsburg



Photo Credit: LI-BIRD

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Work Packages for CREW project

National level Inception Workshop

26th Jan 2022

Kathmandu, Nepal

**Southasia Institute of Advanced
Studies**



Overview of the work packages

Altogether 4 work packages will deliver the project.

1. **Understanding Barriers and Constraints**
2. **Enterprise development through technological and institutional innovations**
3. **Capacity Enhancement to amplify voices and agency**
4. **Knowledge dissemination and policy uptake**



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1. Understanding Barriers and Constraints

- Baseline inquiries- quantitative & qualitative studies, policy analysis, value chain analysis
 - Impact of the COVID-19 on women engaged enterprises
 - Smooth operations of legume cooperatives
 - Smooth operations of Wintergreen collectors
 - Vegetable produces access to market access.
 - Policy Analysis – governance and institutional analysis
- Gender analysis
- Intersectionality approach
- Deliberation approach



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Study Methods/Respondents



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2. Enterprise development through technological and institutional innovations

- Informed from the WP1, the WP2 will design interventions and implement it to the target group.
- Coproduction
- Participatory Action research



3. Capacity Enhancement to amplify voices and agency

A. Capacity enhancement

- Business information system - climate smart agriculture technology, digital technologies for business management and market access.
- Resource availability- increased access to financial institutions government agencies leading to access subsidies and refinancing recovery packages for shock relief such as COVID induced impacts.
- Identifies local champions (successful women entrepreneurs at local level) or role models; and mentored through linkages with the Agricultural Enterprise Center (AEC).
- Mentor support- local champions will be the mentors to provide information related to available financial services locally.
- Access to the market, brand development activities i.e. developing and implementing brand strategies for women's economic empowerment.





Amplifying voices and agency...

- Women entrepreneur's confidence and competence will be enhanced through collective action.
- Agriculture and forest-based women entrepreneurs forums will be created at local and provincial level.
- Women farmers/entrepreneurs will have their voice in the local/provincial/ national government and other stakeholders such as AEC/FNCCI for informed decision making.
- Women farmers will feel confidence to be vocal about individual/collective level gender-based constraints in operating an enterprise.
- Improved linkages with district or sub-district chapters of the Women Entrepreneurs' Association of Nepal to expand women entrepreneurs' space in value chain and other public spaces.



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Study Approach

- Empowerment process to enhance the capacity of women based on the study's conceptual framework
- Deliberation approach – informed and participatory information gathering



4. Knowledge dissemination and policy uptake

At least 5 high quality international peer-reviewed journals will be published to share scientific and policy-relevant knowledge	Impact of COVID on women engaged enterprises; Intersectional analysis of GBCs in agriculture and forest enterprises; Local government's role in improving women's access to technologies; and contribution of technological solutions to WEE
A conceptual paper -- Ecosystem of support model	For gender responsive and shock resilient enterprises.
Key findings and case studies of the project	New Angle Journal's special issue hosted by SIAS.
Key policy insights	High level policy dialogues, policy paper shared focusing on transformative environment for women engaged agriculture and forestry enterprises.
Two other policy briefs and 3 Op-ed/blogs	Published in Nepali or (or translated) to reach a wider audience within Nepal.
Video documentary	Capturing struggles and success of women entrepreneurs targeting for scale-up



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Thank You!

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PRESENTATION IV: Mr. Bibhor Kayastha, Aria Solutions

Co-producing a shock Resilient Ecosystem for Women-led enterprises in Nepal

CREW

INCEPTION WORKSHOP



Project Interventions



Bibhor Kayastha,
Founder Director



About Aria

Since 2019 April.

Vision: Building a better tomorrow, together.

Working in sectors of financial inclusion, humanitarian cash and vouchers, enterprise development, education management.

Provide management consulting services, technology products and services and branding related services.



Introduction

- Major responsibility to achieve Objective 2 of the project
- Heavy focus on Ramechhap based lentil cooperative – ensuring achievement of key performance indicators set by the project
- Building a well positioned brand of local lentils in national market (explore export possibilities)
- Strengthen lentil cooperative’s management
- Developing integrated value chain decision support system connecting information from “farm to fork” – with data points required for project’s research component
- Provide support as required to consortium lead and other partners to achieve other Objectives



Objective 2

- To strengthen business model and management with technology and market development for shock resilient women-led agriculture and forest based enterprises.





Outcome 2.1

- Improved production, quality and productivity by training, accessing and utilizing climate smart, women friendly production and post-harvesting techniques, tools and technologies

KPIs:

- Improved production by 20%
- Improved productivity by 20%
- Reduced post harvest losses by 10%



Outcome 2.2

- Strengthened enterprise management (Operations, Finance, Human Resource, Supply Chain and Logistics, Sales and Marketing) with internal policies, business processes and procedures conducive to women producers, business owners and managers enabling the balance between economic activities and unpaid care work.

KPIs:

- Gender-sensitive business policies developed.
- Women friendly Standard Operating Procedures for all business processes developed and implemented.





Outcome 2.3

- Strengthened women-led enterprises' capacity to provide its members and producers with production inputs, tools, financial intermediation, market assurance and extension services

KPIs:

- Supply and market network developed
- Enterprise management and leadership teams have capacity to manage supplier and customer relationship



Outcome 2.4

- Established distinguished brands of products (highlighting women's leadership and environment friendliness in the business model) with strong market presence through digital marketing; e-commerce; mass media exposure; and innovative distribution and retail channel development

KPIs:

- Brand recognition increased among target customers.
- Sales revenue increased by 100% during the project period.





Outcome 2.5

- Increased number of women involved in higher nodes of value chain

KPIs:

- 100% increase in women business leaders in the enterprise and business owners in supply chain (logistics companies, distributors, wholesalers and retailers) during the project period.



Outcome 2.6

- Enhanced women-led enterprises' resilience against adverse effects of climate change; COVID-19 and other shocks

KPIs:

- Capacity built on resilience-building
- Contingency funds established
- Pre-crisis market assessments carried out
- Resilience indicators set
- Crisis response strategies developed and implemented





Outcome 2.7

- Digitally transformed women-led enterprise/value chain management and decision-making processes through adoption of user-friendly state of the art information technology.

KPIs:

- Women friendly IT systems for business management (farmers, cooperative, e-commerce) and decision-making developed and implemented.



Outcome 2.8

- Increased access to finance and subsidized financing provisioned by the Government and Financial Institutions for women entrepreneurs and climate change adaptation in addition to COVID-19 recovery packages.

KPIs:

- Established women-led cooperatives' linkages with at least 1 A or B class banks for wholesale lending and linkages with women business owners for direct financing.
- Established linkages with government agencies to receive subsidies and recovery packages.





Approaches

- Working together with community based organizations, civil societies, private sector and government agencies
- Human centered designing
- Interactive and continuous capacity building, learning and improvement
- Indirect messaging to establish brand





Co-Producing a Shock Resilient Ecosystem for Women-led Enterprises in Nepal *Interventions in Dolakha District*

Himalayan Bio Trade Pvt. Ltd (HBTL)
January 26, 2022

Wintergreen Nursery Development in Dolakha

1. **Experimentation on nursery techniques in Bhimeswor Municipality, Dolakha**
 - Formation of Wintergreen collectors' Women's Groups in Lakuri and Bonch
 - Development of 2 Wintergreen nurseries from seed and stem cuttings
 - Target production of 200,000 Wintergreen seedlings



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Transplantation of Wintergreen Saplings

2. Transplantation of Wintergreen saplings in CF, marginal fallow lands and private lands in Bhimeswor Municipality and Gaurishankar Rural Municipality, Dolakha

- Plantation of 200,000 Wintergreen seedlings in CF lands from nurseries in Lakuri and Bonch
- Plantation of 100,000 Wintergreen saplings from new regeneration in private lands and marginal fallow lands in Lakuri and Boch
- Plantation of 50,000 Wintergreen saplings from new regeneration in private lands and marginal fallow lands in Jhyaku



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Development and Installation of Efficient Distillation Systems

3. R&D of climate friendly and energy efficient Wintergreen distillation systems

4. Fabrication and installation of climate friendly and energy efficient Wintergreen distillation systems in Lakuri



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Capacity Development of Women Entrepreneurs' Groups

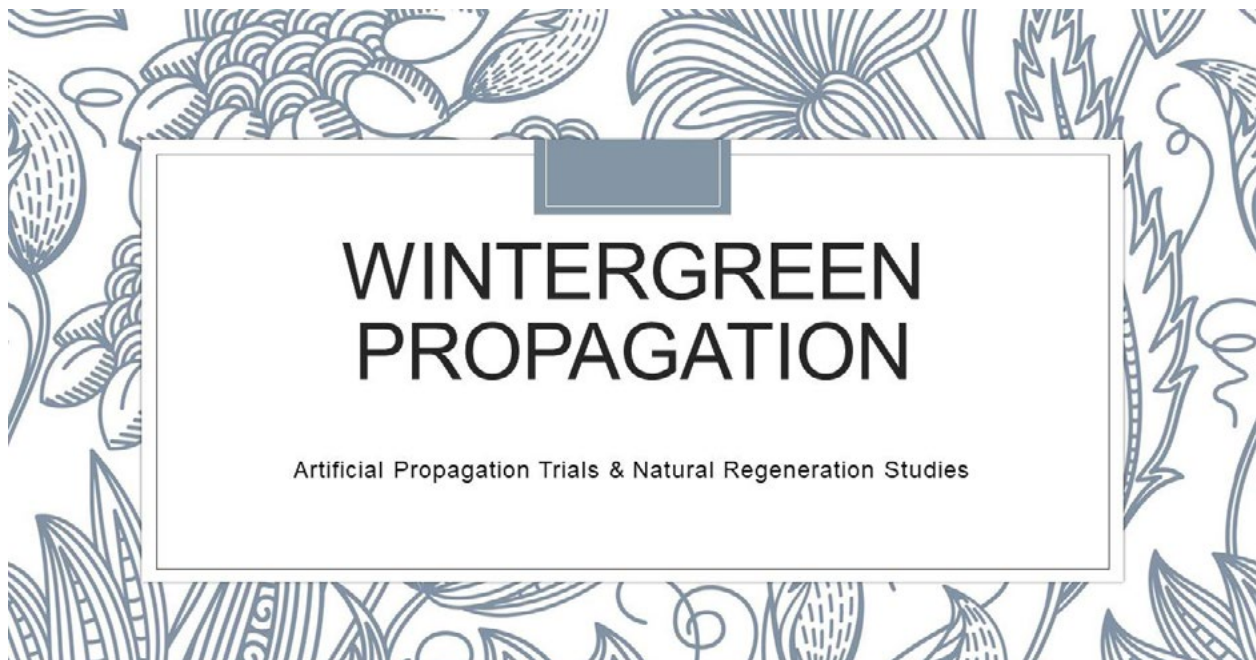
5. Training to Wintergreen Collectors Women's Groups on:

- Entrepreneurship development
- Financial management and record keeping using digital technology
- Sustainable harvesting, management and good practices
- Operate distillation system

6. Replication of this model in other parts of Dolakha



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Sources of Propagation



Seeds

- Direct Seeding
- Transplanting of nursery-hardened seedlings

Stem Cuttings

Induce rooting and transplant



Rhizome Divisions

Nursery Development



Aspects to consider and experiment with:

Soil Properties

Fertilizers

Plastic Coverings

Moisture/Temperature/Humidity

Planting/Seeding Experiments

Objectives:

Plant over 2,00,000 stem cuttings / seedlings

Directly sow seeds in the forest

Transplant rhizome divisions

Variables considered:

Overstory Canopy Density



Slope Aspect

