

CULTIVATING PARTNERSHIPS FOR IMPROVED AGRICULTURE PRODUCTIVITY



An agriculture officer provides practical training to the women literacy graduates on how to effectively handle and transplant seedling on the field.

PHOTO: USAID

USAID's flagship Feed the Future project in Nepal, the Knowledge-based Intervention for Sustainable Agriculture and Nutrition (KISAN) project, is poised to impact the lives of 160,000 smallholder Nepali farm households. KISAN translates to 'farmer' in Nepali. Since 2013, the project is working with farmers in 20 districts across the Mid and Far Western regions to improve agriculture productivity and incomes through enhanced services and technologies along the high-value vegetable, rice, maize,

and lentil value chains. The project liaises closely with the Ministry of Agriculture Development (MOAD) and Departments at the national and field levels, and works to foster ownership of activities and mobilize government expertise to disburse GoN grants to KISAN beneficiary communities.

The project is a robust example of USAID's partnership with Government of Nepal institutions. By working through GoN systems and people – people who have the cultural knowledge and in-country expertise

to ensure assistance leads to sustainable growth – our goal is to also strengthen GoN capacity to eventually implement these activities independently.

Last month, we caught up with the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Development, **Dr. Rajendra Adhikari**, who was kind enough to share some of his thoughts on the USAID-GoN partnership and insights on the way forward for agriculture development in the country.

Excerpts from the Interview:

Although two years is a short time span to evaluate a project, the feedback I've been receiving about USAID's KISAN project and lessons learned has been positive.

What role do you envision for the private sector to help improve Nepal's agriculture productivity and how can organizations like USAID help facilitate the process?

The private sector is a key stakeholder in Nepal's agriculture development, but I hold the view that it can work efficiently only when it has the requisite capacity to perform. While the government needs to draw on the private sector's strength, the focus should also be on building and enhancing the private sector's capacity so that they can perform better and deliver their services. Second, as farmers also constitute the private sector, they should also be included in the definition of the private sector.

There is a saying: "A chain is as strong as its weakest link." Without empowering farmers who are undoubtedly the most important stakeholder of agricultural value chains, you cannot expect to strengthen the chain. The 'empowered' private sector and others need to focus on strengthening farmers so that the chain's collective strength is in a better position.

And third, we need to identify who the private sector partners to engage with are, assess their competencies, and leverage their specialization accordingly. For example, if someone is an input supplier, encourage them to specialize in that; build confidence in their strengths so that they do not wander horizontally and try to integrate as a producer and processor as well.

Nepal recently released its new Agriculture Development Strategy. How can external development partners like USAID best contribute to the implementation of the strategy?

The ADS is a national policy document drafted after extensive consultations with our many development partners. All development partners should own it as the national agriculture policy of Nepal. The first responsibility of external development partners is to commit the resources required for the implementation of that policy. Their second responsibility would be to ensure that their agriculture priorities for Nepal are in line with the ADS so that they're directly supporting implementation of the national policy.

Development partners like USAID can also support the implementation of a strategy like the ADS by sharing their expertise from across the world. Unlike us in the Government, who for the most part operate in and look at agriculture development from a strictly Nepal lens, development partners bring insights from having worked in multiple contexts (and not just Nepal). The lessons that a Nepali farmer eventually learns over many years through repeated trial and error can be significantly accelerated by the development partner because they've already done the exact same thing somewhere else.

USAID and MOAD have a longstanding history of close collaboration, especially at the



Dr. Rajendra Adhikari
Joint Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Development

What is your general perspective on agriculture and USAID support in this sector?

The government policy clearly lays down the agriculture development challenges and priorities of the country – we have no doubt that concerted efforts from the broad development community – government, private sector and the cooperatives, donor agencies, INGOs, and NGOs – is needed. Organizations like USAID, for instance, played a pivotal role in introducing and developing various developmental/technological packages, like the agriculture value-chain approach, of focusing on the demand-side of the market and not just on production. The approach to building market access and strengthening



HEERA KUMARI BHATTA, DAUGHTER OF USAID'S PROJECT FARMER PARBATI DEVI, PICKS TOMATOES FROM A PLASTIC GREENHOUSE IN ASSIGRAM, DADELADHURA. PLASTIC GREENHOUSES ARE USED TO GROW HIGH-VALUE VEGETABLES SUCH AS TOMATOES, CUCUMBER, AND LETTUCE DURING THE OFF SEASON. THE 5X10 METER GREENHOUSE WITH A DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEM PRODUCES ABOUT 600 KILOGRAMS OF HIGH-QUALITY TOMATOES PER CROP CYCLE, WORTH ABOUT \$250. HEERA IS A NURSING STUDENT AND HELPS ON THE FAMILY FARM WHEN SHE IS HOME.

PHOTO: FINTRAC INC.

all actors along the value chain brought a paradigm shift in the agriculture sector. USAID was central in these efforts.

Today, from what I've seen, USAID's focus is on increasing private sector strengthening/engagement in agriculture, while also working closely with the government. Through KISAN, USAID and the MOAD have worked together

to establish a common mechanism to coordinate planning, implementation and monitoring of a big agriculture project; this is important to reduce duplication of efforts and to maximize resources. Because of this, we have been able to broaden the scope and the scale of what we could have achieved only with the GON resources.