



# **Economic Empowerment of Women through Forest Solutions**

Economic Empowerment of Women through Forest Solutions is a 30 months' action research project funded by International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada and implemented by a consortium of ForestAction Nepal, The Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI), Association of Family Forest Owner's, Nepal (AFFON) and Federation of Forest-based Industry and Trade, Nepal (FenFIT-Nepal). The project aims to develop business models and scalable solutions to increase women's access and control over forest resources and forest-based enterprises, enabling them to make economic decisions.

Economic Empowerment of Women through Forest Solutions is a response to the deep rooted patriarchal society that restricts women's access to resources and opportunities. Women in the country have little access to productive resources such as land, forests and capital as well as associated opportunities such as education and employment. Their daily household activities are often considered unproductive. Impacts of climate change and COVID 19 pandemic has further triggered the pre-existing sufferings of women, especially of rural smallholders, land-poor and those working in the informal sector. In addition, increasing rural outmigration, remittance and changing livelihood patterns have either left agricultural lands fallow or have converted them into forests. Forests are one of the most accessible, stable, low-carbon economic resources for women in the context of a feminized economy and COVID-19 recovery since: (i) forests are one of the most accessible economic resources for women in Nepal and (ii) there are more women (57.19%) engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishery than men. Tapping women's roles, leadership and economic opportunities through private forestry, leasehold forestry, and community forestry modalities would provide stable income to women, and increase their safety nets, to absorb climate shocks and build resilience.

Despite huge opportunities, forestry sector is not free from masculinist norms of decision making. Several policies, capacities and structural barriers to women's access and control over income and employment opportunities e.g. CFUGs houses 40% women representation in leadership roles, however, the women's priorities fail to be reflected in community forestry provisions due to elite men's control in



decision making processes (Giri et al., 2021). The lack of scale of economic benefits for women in leasehold forestry, continue to disempower them. Women face legal hurdles to register private forests, register forest based businesses, finance their enterprises, and sell their products (Shrestha et al. 2020). Additionally, the narrow focus on timber fails to account for diverse forest-based needs of women like non-timber products, medicine, water, food, space, and identity. In this backdrop, this action research project is designed to economically empower women through improved nature-based solutions.

## **Project Objectives**

The main goal of the project is to fill the knowledge gap pertinent to women's economic empowerment through improved management of private, leasehold and community forestry regimes in Nepal.

- i. To understand constraints and opportunities for women's economic empowerment in a forested landscape in Nepal by undertaking gender and intersectional analyses of policies, institutions, and practices in the forestry sector.
- ii. To generate innovative approaches and strategies that increase and sustain women's income and economic resources through enhanced collective agency, entrepreneurial capacities, and transformative power relations.
- iii. Develop and pilot inclusive models of sustainable, low-carbon, nature-based solutions through forest management and forest-based businesses.
- iv. Contribute to an enabling policy and institutional environment that supports women-led forest management, trade and enterprises and communicate knowledge products to wider stakeholders and epistemic communities.

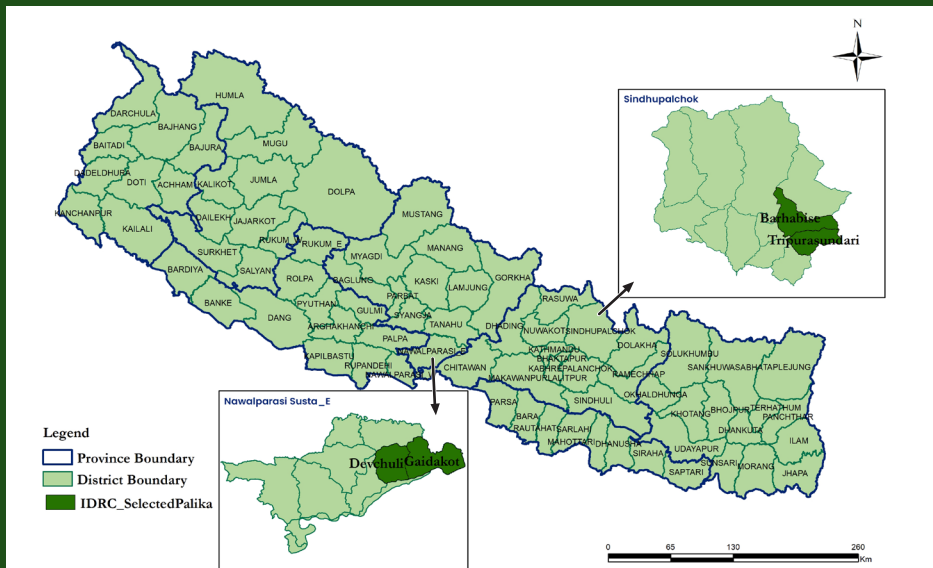
## Approaches

- i. Inter-sectional approach: Intersectional approach will be used to assess intersecting factors and sub-groups of women that often face compounding forms of discrimination including gender-based violence.
- ii. Participatory Action Research: Participatory Action and Learning (PAL) approach with feminist lens will be employed via (i) power-sharing between project team and targeted stakeholders; and (ii) a conscious strategy of mitigating unequal power relationships and risks through critical reflexivity and consciousness in project design, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.
- iii. Women's Economic Rights approach: Women's Economic Rights approach will be central to this project's methodology that will focus on removing structural barriers that hinder women's access to and control over resources and opportunities.



## Working Areas

The project is implemented Devchuli and Gaidakot Municipallities of Nawalparasi (Bardaghat Susta Purba) and Barhabise Municipality and Tripura Sundari Rural Municipality of Sindhupalchok district. All these LGs have more than 50% forest



cover. The LGs are rich in floral species such as Sal, Saj, Asna, as timber species in Nawalparasi and Pine, Uttis, Chilaune in Sindhupalchok. Non-timber forest products include broom grass, Thakal, Bamboo, Harro, Barro, Amala etc in Nawalparasi and Allo, Lokta, Argeli, Chutro, Dhasingare, Sisno Lapsi, are major species in Sindhupalchok.

### **Expected outcomes**

- Forest-based income and employment of women increased
- Access and control of women to forest-based income increased
- Establishment or strengthening of pre-existing of women-led institutions
- Improved forest management intervention in terms of area/size in hectares by and active management
- Municipality plans constitute of prioritized women's economic roles
- Increment in business capacity and skills (business and managerial)
- Action verified working models of women led forest management and forest-based businesses.
- The experiences and the proposed models appreciated by the policy actors and internalized at least in their procedural guidelines.
- Opportunities of women's economic empowerment expanded in the forestry sector



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