



Making Karnali Employment Programme More Care-Responsive

Programmatic notes for Women's Economic Empowerment Policy and Programming



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The Karnali Employment Programme (KEP) was launched by the Government of Nepal in 2006 under the then Ministry of Local Development (MoLD) (now known as the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD), with the slogan of ‘ek ghar ek rojgar’ (one household, one job) (Vaidya 2010). The aim was to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to households living in extreme poverty without any other source of income in five districts of Karnali zone. A further objective was also to create local public assets that would contribute to enhancing local livelihoods in the longer term. The employment projects include public work programmes (PWPs) such as roads, drinking water projects, irrigation canals and micro-hydropower projects. KEP also encourages women’s participation by targeting female-headed households and making provisions for equal wages. The programme is currently being implemented in all five districts of Karnali zone namely Dolpa, Humla, Kalikot, Jumla and has also been extended to an additional adjoining district Bajura.

Context of the research

This note examines the KEP programme’s potential to achieve women’s economic empowerment that generates a ‘double boon’ – paid work that empowers women and provides more support for their unpaid care work responsibilities. The research was conducted in two sites in Jumla, namely Chandannath and Depalgaon. Chandannath is the first and only municipality in Jumla district. The municipality was established in May 2014 by merging four Village Development Committee (VDCs). Depalgaon is located at a distance of 4km from the district headquarters. In both sites, the main source of livelihood for low-income households was subsistence agriculture and non-agricultural wage work, especially related to masonry and construction related work. Women from poor households are also engaged in multiple low-income paid work such as agricultural labour, breaking stones and vegetable farming.

The research adopted a mixed-method approach, with primary data consisting of quantitative and qualitative data, which was collected from women from low-income families who were engaged in paid work, and had at least one child under the age of six years, and their families. Besides this, 19 participatory tools designed from a care lens were conducted with the community, and data was also collected through interviews with key informants in the community and the programme.

What works for a ‘double boon’

1. Targeting female-headed households

KEP has included female-headed households as one of its target groups. The targeting has encouraged women from low-income households with no alternative source of paid work to gain access to income and contribute to household care expenditure. Although KEP has only been able to provide employment for a short period of 35 days, the guarantee of work and income for more than a month is valued by the low-income households in the context of Jumla where regular employment, especially for women from low-income households, is not easily available. While the Programme formally targets female-headed households, the programme documents highlight that the overall participation of women goes beyond female-headed households owing to male-migration and a preference for men for other paid work options. The overall participation of women was reported to be more than 60 per cent in the pilot and demonstration projects which were implemented with the direct support of Karnali Employment Programme Technical Assistance (KEPTA) in the year 2014-15 (KEPTA 2015).

2. Equal and direct wage payment

KEP has made provisions for equal wages for both women and men for the same kind of work that has encouraged women’s participation. Further, the Programme also makes provisions for direct payment to

the workers. The authorised representative from VDC withdraws money from the bank and hands over the money directly to the workers in the VDC premises in the presence of KEP staff and social mobilisers. One of the Programme staff notes that this has resulted in the improved access of women to income as well as a say in household expenses:

If men take it [wages], they spend it on a glass of alcohol unlike the women. They also think about buying children the much-needed clothes or shoes or buy goods. The money is spent for the family instead of being misused. There is a difference in asking money from men to buy it and earning by oneself and buying it.

Programme Officer, KEP, Chadannath, March 2016

KEP Implementation Manual, issued in 2014 by MoFALD, recommends the disbursement of payment through banks in the coming years. However, this may pose difficulties for women if it is not also combined with financial inclusion initiatives ensuring that women access banks without the tedious process of withdrawing money (MoFALD 2014).

3. Pilot and demonstration projects

The pilot and demonstration projects implemented with the direct support of KEPTA in four VDCs of Jumla in the year 2014-15 demonstrated improved working conditions with a substantial focus on worker's welfare as well as women's childcare needs (Beazley 2014, KEPTA 2015). Through these projects, basic facilities such as drinking water, toilets, primary health services and safety equipment, as well as accident insurance, were provided to the workers. Similarly, crèche facilities were provided for women workers with small children at the worksite in the four VDCs. KEP should prioritise the rolling out of the reformed working conditions in all its programme areas as demonstrated in the pilot and demonstration projects.

What hinders a 'double boon'

1. Childcare provision

Lack of childcare provision is one of the biggest hindrances to both women's participation in the programme and in enabling a double boon for women through KEP. The Programme excludes women with children under one year old from working (MoFALD 2014). Among those who are selected, the absence of childcare facilities either discourages women with small children from continuing to work or forces them to take small children to the worksite which on one hand, slows down their work and on the other, puts children's health at risk. Menuka Dhital, a KEP worker from Depalgaon, either leaves her one year old son with her mother-in-law in the village or takes her to the worksite. She shares,

It takes two hours to reach there... if it were nearer; I could leave the child on the ground. But there are rivers around where we work. How could we work there? If there was someone who would hold my son, thinking it is difficult for me to work carrying the son, it would have been easier for me

Menuka Dhital, Depalgaon, May 2016

Even in the pilot and demonstration projects where crèche facilities have been provided, as KEPTA staff have pointed out, this was only partially successful as a majority of small children refused to part with their mothers, given that they 'were not used' to such arrangements. This points to a need not just to provide childcare facilities but to engender trust amongst the community to use them.



2. Long distances to worksite

Similarly, the long distances to the worksites have also affected the ability of the programme to enable a positive balance for women with their dual responsibilities. Although the KEP Implementation Manual (MoFALD 2014) specifically mentions that the worksite should be within one hour's walking distance of the village, most of the women respondents in the two sites shared that it takes them 2-3 hours to reach the worksite, 'It is very far, it takes 2 hours to reach 2 hours to come back. The road is difficult with steep hills. I am always scared of getting injured or dying' (Rimkala BK, Depalgaon, May 2016). As women have to simultaneously take care of household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of children and livestock along with paid work, having the worksite faraway leaves them with little time and a greater burden to balance both types of work, especially in households where there is no redistribution of unpaid work.

3. Working conditions

The working conditions in the KEP worksites are problematic and should be given serious attention. The workers spend eight hours in the worksites; however, there is no provision of drinking water and toilets. Absence of toilets especially becomes an issue of safety for women. Furthermore, safety equipment such as helmets, boots, gloves and goggles are not provided in most of the areas which increases health and injury risks to the workers. In addition, the drudgery and intensity of some of the work provided under KEP, particularly manual work such as carrying stones or cement, leads to physical depletion, especially of the women who already are burdened by the drudgery of unpaid work:

The impact of labour-intensive social protection programmes such as KEP on the physical capacities of women (as well as men) from low-income households, who have to depend largely on their bodies to survive and earn, should be seriously taken into account.

We sometimes carry the stones, sometimes the mud, sometimes we throw the mud. Sometimes our hands would get injured, sometimes our legs would. It is exhausting for the body. I did not even have energy to walk because of the tiredness

Radhika BK, Depalgaon, May 2016

What could be done to engender a ‘double boon’

Given the high participation rate of women in KEP, it is imperative for the programme to adopt a more gender-responsive approach to facilitate women’s participation as well as garner empowering outcomes for them. The following recommendations would help achieve this, working within the resource constraints that the programme faces.

- KEP has identified female-headed households as one of the target groups; however, the percentage requirement of women’s participation is not set in the KEP Implementation Manual (MoFALD 2014). It is imperative for KEP to specify the percentage so that women’s participation is institutionally guaranteed and specific provisions related to women’s care needs at their workplaces could also be ensured. Guaranteeing women’s participation will provide a safeguard against KEP losing sight of women’s participation, and recognise their contribution.
- The KEP is considered to be demand-driven. The projects are selected and targeted-households are identified through community engagement with the active role of Ward Citizens’ Forums, groups representing various stakeholders within wards, playing an active role. The participation of women in these forums should be made mandatory so that women’s opinions and needs are also represented in the proposed project. In many cases, women respondents were not aware of the selection process or the wages they were entitled to. Therefore, increased communication as well as transparency should be maintained so that the workers are aware about their rights and entitlements.
- In addition, women’s participation in the various monitoring bodies of KEP at the central (Central Coordination Committee), district (District Coordination and Monitoring Committee) as well as VDC (VDC Coordination and Monitoring Committee) level should also be ensured. Furthermore, the monitoring processes mainly emphasize the progress of infrastructures and general issues faced by the workers. Specific indicators related to working conditions as well as care needs such as childcare should be incorporated in the monitoring process.
- Lack of human resource is another major constraint in the implementation of KEP that also has implications for the recognition and priority given to issues of care and decent working conditions. At present, KEP has employed only four staff (one engineer and three overseers) for the technical aspect in Jumla district. Staff support on the social development aspect was provided through KEPTA from the year 2014-15. More human resources focused on working conditions and care-responsiveness are needed as without understanding the context of women’s lives, and seeking to improve their working conditions (without the human resources to attend to such an analysis), the Programme may not be able to fully tackle issues relating to the double boon.
- More importantly, KEP needs to significantly improve its working conditions and should give priority to basic service provisions at the worksites. All the workers should be provided with safety equipment such as boots, goggles, helmets, etc. Similarly, provisioning of drinking water and toilets should be made mandatory in order to reduce the safety risks, especially for women.
- Furthermore, it is imperative that KEP mandates the provision of quality child crèches at worksites at the policy and implementation level to encourage lactating women and women with small children to be able to participate in the Programme without increasing their work burdens, and thereby redistributing care to the state. Moreover, it is important to engender women’s trust in these services. At present, the KEP Implementation Manual highlights the provision of crèche facilities as and when required (MoFALD 2014). However, specific conditions for the provision of quality crèches and women’s buy-in should be laid down so that such decisions are not taken on a subjective basis.
- The criteria of the location of worksite to be within one hour’s walking distance should be strictly followed to prevent time poverty and the physical depletion of women.
- KEP should also envision and give priority to less arduous employment avenues to reduce drudgery; which would not necessarily diminish the physical capacities of women as well as men, and particularly put women, especially pregnant and lactating women, at a disadvantage, hindering their participation in KEP.
- As the projects are mostly demand-driven, coordination between KEP staff, VDC as well as the Ward Citizens’ Forums to think of new avenues of employment opportunities for low-income households is required. This coordination will also ensure linkages between KEP and other programmes, and be a positive step towards ensuring accessible infrastructure (like roads, water sources and electricity) such that women’s time burden and drudgery are reduced.

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Credits

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Balancing unpaid care work and paid work carried out qualitative and quantitative research in India, Nepal, Rwanda, Tanzania across 16 sites. This research explores how women's economic empowerment policies and programmes can take unpaid care work into account, in order to enable economic empowerment to be optimised, shared across families and sustained across generations. It focusses on the social

organisation of care in low income households, and at the role of families, state, private sector and not-for profit sector.

Ultimately it aims to identify measures that can lead towards a 'double boon', creating paid work that empowers women and provides core support for their unpaid care work responsibilities.

The Balancing unpaid care work and paid work project explores the successes, challenges and lessons for Women's Economic Empowerment programmes and policies.



Research was undertaken in 2016 in four sites in the Surkhet and Jumla regions of Nepal

- 📍 Mehelkuna
- 📍 Chandannath
- 📍 Maintada
- 📍 Depalgaon

PROJECT LEAD:



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Oxfam Nepal

For more project background information, publications and access to datasets and case studies, visit interactions.ids.ac.uk/wee

Balancing unpaid care work and paid work is part of the global Growth and Equal Opportunities for Women programme (GrOW) bit.ly/1PbKwAd



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