

Success Story (9): “Integrated Development Endeavors for Socio-economic and Environmental Changes in Nepalese Villages“

by Ms. Amira Dali / Nepal

Ms. Amira attended the AOTS Technical Training immediately after finishing her study at a Japanese university in 1981. It was during this time that she was much influenced by equality awareness in the Japanese society, work ethics, work discipline, commitment towards work, quality awareness and the Japanese style problem solving. After returning to Nepal, while working in a Japanese company she took the initiative in establishing a NGO, “Love Green Nepal (LGN) in 1991 for the purpose of uplifting rural communities with the primary focus on the development of women. She points out the problems of Nepal being gender inequality in education, depletion of trees and lack of income generating activities. To cope with these, LNG has achieved a number of fruitful results such as construction of public schools in the rural areas,

supply of scholarships to female students, forestation for soil conservation, saving of firewood and reduction of carbon gas emission by construction of biogas plants, increase of income through organic farming and promotion of sustainable agriculture as well as community infrastructure development including construction of health centers. Establishment of a ‘Friends of Japan’ group in the village to facilitate acceptance of Japanese volunteers gives impetus to understand Japan, and functions as a grass-roots level bridge between Nepal and Japan. She attributes indispensable factors leading LGN to success to planning system based on data collection and research, teamwork with stakeholders, continuity, gender equity in the decision-making and participation of local women.

Ms. Amira Dali

A resident of Kathmandu, Ms. Amira participated in AOTS technical training courses after studying at a college in Japan. Through her studies and training she was greatly influenced by the consciousness of equality, work ethics and problem-solving methods prevalent in Japanese society. Upon returning home, while working at a Japanese-affiliated company, in 1991 Ms. Amira founded an NGO “Love Green Nepal” and since then has been engaged in promoting rural development and women’s education.

Past experience of AOTS training:

Technical Training in 1981 [provided at Mitsui & Co., Ltd.]



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Story submitter: Ms. Amira Dali
Country: Nepal
Field of activities: Social Contribution



1. Background

I need to explain a little bit about my background because my case is a bit different from the average AOTS trainee's case. Before undergoing AOTS training in 1981, I had lived four years in Japan, primarily studying Japanese language and completing a graduate degree at a Japanese university. Therefore I did not have to attend the general orientation course like average AOTS trainees and I was permitted to commute to my training company from my own *Geshuku (digs)*.

2. Training in a Japanese software company

As for the AOTS technical training in a Japanese company, it was my first time to experience Japanese corporate culture, hence I had a chance to undergo the training with other fresh Japanese recruits of the company, myself being a regular 'staff' of the company. This period of undergoing training like a regular Japanese fresh corporate recruit in fact molded my personality with the great influence of the following:

- Equal educational background for both men and women.
- Japanese style of working, Japanese work ethics, work discipline as well as
- Commitment towards the work.
- Japanese style of problem solving and quality awareness.

3. Starting work in Nepal

After returning back home to Nepal in 1982, I chose the private sector rather than working for the government so that I could practice what I had experienced in Japan, and to apply what I had learnt during AOTS training. I joined a Japanese company in Katmandu.

As I started working in Nepal in development projects assisted by the Japanese Government, I found big social, economic and educational disparities in the society of Nepal. The 'homogeneous society'

that I had experienced in Japan was a dream for me to be accomplished. I believed that the strength of Japan was this 'homogeneity' in education, in values, in discipline and in language that led Japan to be an economic superpower while maintaining its traditional values and splendor.

While working in a Japanese company full time, I took the initiative in establishing a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) called Love Green Nepal (LGN) in 1991, to uplift rural communities in Nepal with the primary focus on the development of women through an integrated approach by utilizing locally available resources in a sustainable manner. For the last 2 years, I have been heading LGN as its President.

4. Challenges

4-1) Gender inequality in education

- The girls are given the last priority in quality education. In extreme cases, they are not sent to schools at all.
- The girls (of school going age) have to undergo various hardships at home such as collecting fuel wood for cooking, fodder leaves for cattle, fetching drinking water, cooking in smoke filled kitchens everyday, etc.

4-2) Depletion in number of trees making Nepal more susceptible to natural disasters.

- The vast majority of rural Nepalese people depend on fuel wood for everyday cooking. Therefore the felling of trees in nearby forests to the village or community is a common phenomenon. People do not yet understand the concept of sustainable harvesting of trees and its byproducts for their cooking purposes.
- All rural households own cattle for two purposes: First one is for milk production and second for their waste (dung or droppings) to be used as manure on the farm. But again, the village people largely depend on the forest for fodder for cattle rearing.

4-3) Lack of income generating activities

- Collecting fuel wood and fodder, as well as fetching drinking water are some of the time consuming household chores of women in rural communities.
- Cultivation of traditional crops with low productivity and yield is common.

5. Solution

5-1) Education

- Equal education opportunities to for both genders: Construction and reconstruction of school buildings with toilets and drinking water facilities. (It is a social handicap for the girls to go to school if toilet facilities are not there or if they have to use the same toilet as the boys.)
- Scholarships and financial aid to girl students.
- Capacity building of girl students.

- Environmental education of the rural population.

5-2) Environmental conservation

- Planting of trees: Distribution of three kinds of trees – forest, fodder and fruit (3F) to each household, after careful examination and socioeconomic analysis of their needs. The forest trees are to be harvested as fuel wood and timber, the fodder trees are for feeding livestock and the fruit trees are a part of income generation.
- Construction of biogas plants: Biogas is a clean, odorless and smokeless gas produced especially from cattle dung through the process called “digestion” in a biogas digester or plant. It helps to reduce the rate of deforestation and environmental degradation by providing an alternative source of energy. Methane gas is produced which is used instead of fire wood to cook instead of fuel wood. Besides, among the many benefits, it reduces cooking time, releasing extra hours for income generating activities for village women.

6. Activities of Love Green Nepal

6-1) Educational development in the rural areas

- Construction/reconstruction of 26 public schools as of today, benefiting 20,000 deprived groups of students.
- Establishment of a ‘Girl Child Education Scholarship,’ benefiting 199 female students in marginalized groups.
- Establishment of a network among the scholarship recipient students and ex-students for capacity building.

6-2) Environment conservation

- Million forest, fodder and fruit (3F) seedlings planted in 4,500 farming households, 20 community forests, 15 schools and other local institutions in the project sites of eight villages in the Kabhre and Katmandu districts
- Construction of 605 biogas plants (using the animal waste as a main input/raw material) for household cooking purposes.

6-3) Sustainable agriculture development

- Commencement of organic farming (especially of high value added crops/vegetables) by 300 village women and 50 male lead farmers.
- Promotion of high quality agro products like Japanese variety pears, persimmons, and kiwi fruit.
- Conservation and cultivation of orchids for the income generation of marginalized groups of women in natural orchid growing and occurring areas.
- Operation of a sales outlet to help the farmers under the umbrella of LGN to ensure market availability for their high value products.

6-4) Community infrastructure development

- Construction of 2 multipurpose women centers.
- Construction of 1 community health center.
- Community drinking water and irrigation facilities.

6-5) Miscellaneous

- Establishment of a 'Friends of Japan' group in the villages giving orientation to the village groups about Japan, Japanese people, Japanese culture so that they can without difficulty welcome and understand the manners of the Japanese volunteers arriving for home stays in the villages.
- Organizing the visit of leader farmers of the villages to Japan for their exposure and understanding of efforts and systems of organic farming.
- Organizing free health camps in the villages.
- Organizing events like World Environment Day, Earth Day, etc., to create awareness among the villagers of the environment and ecology.

7. Direct effects

7-1) Contribution to the local community

7-1)-(1) In the education sector

- Construction/reconstruction of 26 new school buildings has had the direct result of for increasing the enrollment capacity of the schools with more opportunities for the new students. Although 20,000 students are the direct beneficiaries, the indirect beneficiaries are all the households in the communities.
- The 199 female students, who could not have attended the school if not given the scholarships, do create a favorable environment in the long run to promote female education, which eventually helps to uplift society, creating gender equity and decreasing gender biasness due to lack of education.
- The networking among the students and the 'Friends of Japan' group undeniably has become a good support system to strengthen the Nepal-Japan relationship at the grassroots level by drawing the interest of Japanese people.

In the environment sector

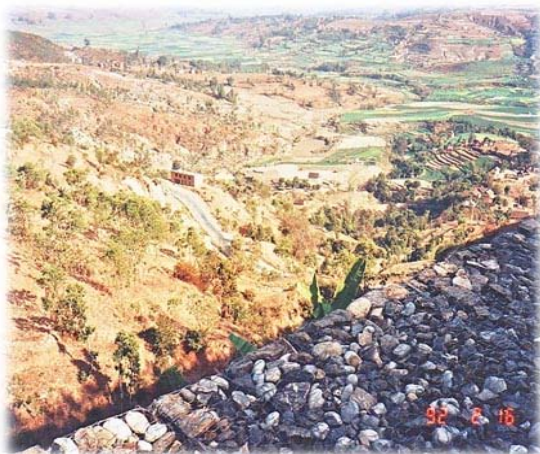
- It is a fact that a tree having a life span of 50 to 60 years with 10 ton of weight has a value of US\$1,000.00 in its environmental impact by releasing oxygen, by increasing groundwater deposits, by reducing soil conservation, and by saving water and balancing humidity in the environment, by protecting natural inhabitants, and by providing natural fodder. Therefore, planting 1,000,000 useful trees mean as of today –250,000 trees (1/4 of total no. of trees planted) x US\$ 250 (1/4 of total worth expected) equals to \$ 62,500,000 of value being created in the community. The visible results as seen in photographs are attached herewith.
- Similarly, construction of 605 biogas plants means: saving of 1,210 tons of firewood/year, 15,125 liters of kerosene and moreover, 7,471.75 tons of carbon emissions into the atmosphere is reduced, helping the nation in reducing its carbon footprint as well as help in carbon sequestration for

capturing stored carbon through tree cultivation. This could also become an additional source of income for farmers.

In the sustainable agriculture sector

- Production and use of compost and organic fertilizers by 350 organic farmers has created the awareness in the village of the importance of 'organic farming.' It definitely has had a steady ripple effect in the villages for a growing interest in organic farming by the farmers.
- Conservation and cultivation of orchids for the income generation of 105 women of marginalized hill tribes has started to benefit the women, generating an income of 145,000 in the initial year, i.e., this year. This amount will double next year, and will increase exponentially every year. Similarly, the smuggling of rare, endangered orchids from the project area is now monitored as an increasing number of women have become aware of the fact that orchids and their natural habitat should be conserved.
- Plantation of fruit trees in the farmers' land has increased the income level of the households by 25 %, the average income of a household having reached Rs 12,000/month. (For instance US\$ 1.00 = NRs.68)
- Similarly the high valued fruits like the Japanese variety pears are sold at 5 times higher prices. In 2008 only, the total production of the Japanese variety of pears by the farmers under our NGO is expected to be 6 tons. It means the affiliated farmers are expected to get income of Rs. 480,000 from the Japanese pear alone.

Impact of LGN's Integrated Greenery Development Efforts



Panchakhal valley in 1992



Panchakhal valley in 2007

8. Factors Leading to Success

- Bottom-up planning system, preparation after collection of required/available data for need identification, socioeconomic study before initiation of new work.

- Precise and unambiguous division of work with a well-defined job description for the person-in-charge.
- Strong team work and regular communication with the stakeholders at each stage. Start of social audit from the communities involved.
- Continuity and work with consensus.
- Immediate problem solving by the stakeholders as and when problems arise.
- Gender equity in the decision-making, participation of local women in each stage of work.

9. Advice to other ex-participants undertaking similar activities

- Understanding of exact requirements/needs of the partner is the first important task.
- Sustainable development initiatives should be taken by the groups themselves with the need, not by the outsiders.
- Continuity in the activities ‘only bears the fruit.’
- Japanese style of full fledged planning with numerous discussions/meetings before starting the work is a ‘must’ unlike our style of abrupt starting with less or no homework.
- ‘Women’ are the catalysts for social change and economic reform in rural areas. Besides they are the best managers, as good practice of management starts from the ‘home.’
- Think globally, act locally.
- “Earth is the home of mankind and all living beings. Let us contribute to save the earth with a small effort from each of us starting right now.”