

Impact of Economic Development Activities for Livelihood Security and Social Inclusion of Dalits: A Lesson from Ilisscon Project

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Abstract

A study was carried out to measure the contribution of socioeconomic development activities for livelihood security and social inclusion of Dalits in ILISSCON project of LI-BIRD. Sample survey was used in the study for collecting the qualitative and quantitative data. Project results shows that average annual household income of the Dalits has been increased by Rs. 56,861.27 (increment 48.19%) from baseline and similar result was also observed in Janjati (Rs.57581.54) and Brahmin (Rs.66243.75) groups. Such increment on income of the beneficiaries was result of positive growth on the production and diversification of the livelihood sources. Majority of Dalits households (46.57%) have food sufficiency for more than 6 months as compare to baseline (10.47%). Participation of the Dalits and disadvantaged groups has been remarkably increased in development activities, which shows important indication of the empowerment and inclusion of excluded groups. As a result, they are able to make meaningful exercise of their right with different service providers. Therefore, economic development activities have made significant contribution for social and economic empowerment, livelihood security and social inclusion.

Key words: Food sufficiency, household income, livelihood diversification, empowerment

INTRODUCTION

A livelihood is concerned primarily with poverty, development, vulnerability and people's coping strategies. This particular understanding of livelihoods has been informed and shaped by multiple studies into; community forestry (Gautam *et al.*, 2008); access to land and livelihoods of rural people (Upreti *et al.*, 2008); and internal and international migration (Kaspar, 2005; Thieme, 2006). The second, which can be termed a 'group-centered' understanding, privileges an analysis of identity (caste and ethnicity) and social inclusion/exclusion (Lietchy, 2008; Fischer, 2001; Geiser, 2005). This second understanding

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pays greater attention to social relations, focusing as it does on the problems and issues facing specific caste and ethnic groups.

Dalits and other ethnic minority groups are being deprived from socio-cultural, political and economic aspects because of prevalence of traditional practices, poverty and deprivation. Dalits are highly dependent on their traditional so-called caste based occupation for their livelihoods. Their living standard is also very low i.e. per capita income of Dalit is 39 US dollar as compared to 240 US dollar, national per capita income (BK, 2005). Their livelihood will be sustainable, as they can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation (Chambers and Conway, 1991).

Dalit groups are skillful in their traditional occupation but due to lack of resources and access to finance it are becoming increasingly difficult to them to make a living on the sole income out of their artisan (NNDSWO, 2005). Dalits have limited access to farm land, the ownership of which in Nepal has social prestige. Sharma, K.P., 2004 in his article "Land Reform: A viable Programme for poverty reduction", published in a book Readings on Governance and Development has concluded on a point that land has been a matter of prestige, pride and productive asset of Nepalese people. Though various tenure systems of feudalistic modes don't exist, legacies that Nepalese people have inherited from the past still persist. The so-called upper castes therefore tend to own as much land as possible. Dalits own only 1 percent of Nepal total cultivated land, about 15% of hill dalits and 44 percent of Terai Dalits are landless. Unlike the other groups, Dalits have limited opportunities to employment. Over 54% of the Dalits have derived their livelihood from agriculture, though they are marginalized farmers; another 20 percent in wage-earning and rest 16 percent in services (NHRC, 2004). Even if they rear livestock they cannot sell the dairy products, because of untouchability. Seasonal unemployment, minimum wage, subsistence farming etc, are the basic problems of the Dalits.

Social inclusion is often defined as socioeconomic and political empowerment of the particular groups who have been victimizing by the stark discrimination, distinction, segregation and exclusion. Social inclusion is the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of diverse individual and group to development opportunities (Bennett, 2002).

Social exclusion is a major challenge of the country. Dalits (lower caste) and minority ethnic groups are the most vulnerable communities in Nepal, not having access to even the minimum basic services. Dalit who are routinely denied access to education, public resources, and other mainstream socioeconomic resources. Other discriminated groups, created and recreated along the process, are Sukumbasi (landless), Haliya (bonded laborers), and ethnic minorities, who form substantially part of historically poverty stricken group in Nepal (Lumsali, 2005). Similarly, the World Bank (2005) has also identified four elements: excluded people who are in exclusion; the institutions from which they are excluded; agents whose results are in exclusion; and process or mechanisms through which exclusion occur.

The eight plans attempted to target particular caste and ethnic groups. Primary school scholarship for Dalit children were the first program to target disadvantaged group, but never been initiated. The Tenth plan recognized social exclusion as a factor contributing to Nepals' poverty and has special programs targeted to the excluded groups such as women, Dalits and Janajatis. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Program (PRSP) has mentioned strategies for Dalit inclusion but it has used the deprived communities rather than specifically naming

Dalit/Janjaties groups identified as having low education and economic status (DFID, 2005). According to the World Bank (2010), positive outcomes of community managed programmes initiated under the Act are now visible throughout the country, such as an increased number of rural roads, community managed schools, health centers, forests and micro hydropower plants. Mercy Corps are currently working on a project, funded by the EU and focusing on the East and Far West regions, to strengthen the capacity of 'underserved' communities to understand and access social protection measures for informal sector workers by supporting the registration and formalization of informal safety nets (Mercy Corps, 2010).

Employment opportunities are less for the Dalits and minority ethnic group (indigenous people). Due to exploitation and oppression of these groups of people, and abolishment of their rights to lands, forests and other natural resources, many male members travel elsewhere in search of jobs to secure their families' livelihoods. This has increased the burden and responsibilities of women since they have had to lead the households. Furthermore, the poor remuneration of manual scavenging, agricultural labour, and other forms of low-caste employment often force families of these target groups into bondage. Lack of access to cultivable land, low productivity, lack of knowledge, lack of extension services, lack of appropriate tools and technologies are the main factors contributing to this situation. To address on the above issues a four years' project "Improving Livelihood Security of Socially-excluded Communities of Nepal (LISSCON) Project" was implemented from March 2006 to February 2010 in the partnership among Dalit Welfare Organization (DWO), Local Initiative for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD) and Practical Action Nepal in six conflict affected districts (Doti, Kailali, Banke, Surkhet, Rupandehi and Nawalparasi) of Nepal. The major economic development activities implemented by the project includes; Farm (Lease based and semi-commercial vegetable farming, fish farming, goat keeping, mushroom production) and off-farm (house wiring, bamboo carving, leather shoe making, blacksmithing etc.) based activities for income and employment opportunities; Micro-enterprise and business management and development; Group Capacity building for economic and institution development and Infrastructure support (collection center, equipments and materials) for promotion of market and basic services.

OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives are:

To assess the socio-economic status of low-caste and excluded minorities groups

To assess the capabilities of the project beneficiaries for explore the resources from different service providers

MATERIAL AND METHOD

STUDY DESIGN

This study was carried out to know livelihood security and social inclusion of low-caste and marginalized rural communities in the project "Improving Livelihood Security and Socially-included Communities of Nepal". Sample survey method was used for carrying out the study. Stratified random sampling was used to get the required information from target beneficiaries. Due to the heterogeneity nature of target beneficiaries and different levels of support to the target beneficiaries, it was divided into three categories viz. high, medium and low support level and considered as the sampling population. Sampling population for each

district was made separately. As the financial and technical support was higher in leasehold vegetable farming, it was kept in high support level, on the other hand comparatively low investment was in semi-commercial vegetable farming, community leasehold fish farming and black smith training, so it was placed under medium support and remaining activities were put on low support category. Altogether 1,422 households were surveyed in six districts. Sample size was calculated by using formula as per given below (Parel *et al.*, 1973).

$$n = \frac{NZ^2P(1 - P)}{Nd^2 + Z^2P(1 - P)}$$

Where;

n = sample size;

N = total number of households or members in the study district;

d = maximum error deemed acceptable (in this case 0.10);

Z = the normal variable (in this case value used is 1.64 to correspond 90% reliability);

P = probability of the success (50%) due to the implement of the project.

Project results in terms of outcome and goal were assessed from qualitative and quantitative data which was collected by different participatory methods (focus group discussion, field visit, interaction and group meeting) and sampling survey (semi-structured open ended questionnaire). All the information collected from the field were coded, tabulated and entered into the computer using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Simple descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data and necessary tables and graphs were prepared and inserted under suitable headings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SOURCES OF LIVELIHOOD

Major livelihood sources of the people in the project area were agriculture farming, wage laborer and off-farm based enterprises. Before project, majority of the Dalits (20.72%) were doing daily wages and caste-based occupation like tailoring, blacksmiths and goldsmiths for the normal living. Due to low productivity from the occupation, livelihood source of Dalit was not increased and diversified. Upreti *et al.*, (2008) also reveal that crisis associated with stagnant production has led to a deepening struggle for the fulfillment of basic needs, causing people to diversify their livelihoods options.

Table 1: Contribution of the different sources of livelihoods on avg. annual household income

Ethnic Groups	(Baseline Status) Sources of Livelihoods			
	Agriculture (%)	Wage Laborer (%)	Foreign Income (%)	Others (%)
Brahamin	6.78	30.82	43.39	18.02
Janjati	9.24	53.17	14.80	22.79
Dalit	6.23	20.72	29.46	43.59
Other	3.21	27.71	18.78	50.29

Sources of livelihood of Dalits have been increased and diversified in a larger scale from the baseline as they received support on commercial vegetable farming, goat keeping and

off-farm enterprises (leather shoe making and welding). Level of contribution of leased based and semi-commercial vegetable farming (29.64%) to household income was found to be increased remarkably higher from the baseline (6.23%) in Dalit group and increment was similar to Janjati (23.99%) and Brahamin (18.96%) (Table 1 and 2). This helped to diversify agriculture farming and created employment opportunity to Dalits. Timilsina (2003) has shown such that the changing livelihood patterns of different caste/ethnic groups is due to changes in social traditions, market systems and other economic systems. The most importantly contribution of the wage laborer (10.66%) to household income has been significantly decreased from the baseline (20.72%) in Dalit group (Table 1 and 2), and this was due to support of commercial vegetable farming and improved off-farm enterprises.

Table 2: Contribution of the different sources of livelihoods on avg. annual household income

Ethnic Groups	(Endline Status) Sources of Livelihoods			
	Agriculture (%)	Wage Labourer (%)	Foreign Income (%)	Others (%)
Brahamin	18.96	13.22	1.38	66.44
Janjati	23.99	7.96	3.84	64.21
Dalit	29.64	10.66	2.72	56.98
Other	32.68	17.29	1.16	48.87

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

One factor that causes vulnerability among the people is the limited access to assets. A report by UNDP (1997) suggests that asset ownership reduces people's vulnerability and builds their resilience. Land is perhaps the most important economic asset that provides the basis for generating income, economic production and safe livelihoods. Average landholding of the Dalit (5.68 Katha) was found least at the baseline than other ethnic group and this was increased by 6.24 Katha at the end of the project and gap of the landholding against Janjati (6.77 Katha) and Brahamin (9.96 Katha) was found to be decreased after the end of the project (Fig. 1). Average rented/share cropped land (6.77 Katha) by Dalit was found to be increased from the baseline (Fig. 2). This shows project was successful to ensure the access of land to Dalits and excluded groups.

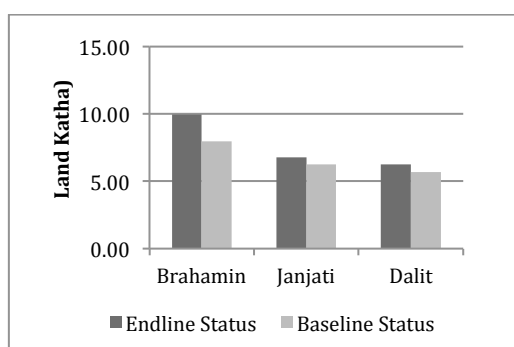


Fig 1: Status of the average landholding of beneficiaries

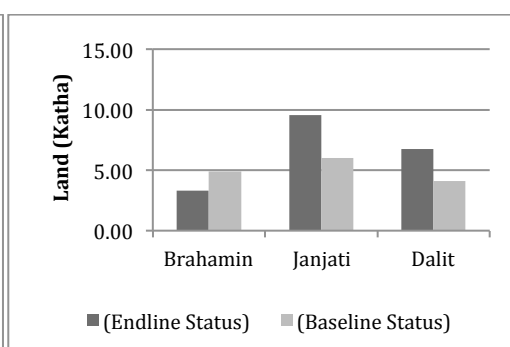


Fig 2: Status of average rented and share cropped land by beneficiaries

Project members from Dalit groups were also able to purchase about 3.25 Katha (avg.) land (Fig. 3), this was due to creditable earning from the lease based and semi-commercial

vegetable farming and improved off-farm skill based enterprise. This increase on access to land provides opportunity to Dalti group for making meaningful income and self-employment. Nepali (2008) also suggests that land is critical for the livelihoods of a large number of poor farmers and minorities and those with poor land entitlement are systematically marginalized and excluded from productive opportunities. Majority of the project beneficiaries have accumulated assets portfolio like she buffaloes, goats, bicycle, TV, bullocks, water pump/boring, houses, mobiles, leasing and purchasing of lands. Survey results shows, Dalits were able to generate total average assets value of Rs. 16,054.41 as compare to baseline (Rs. 7,981.14) and this is not the big gap than Janjati (Rs.20427.98) and Brahmin (Rs. 23,213.06) (Fig. 4).

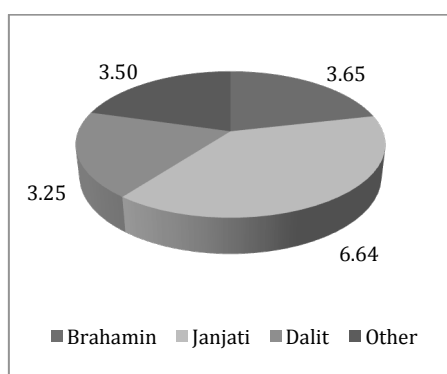


Fig 3: Average purchased land by different ethnic groups at the end of the project

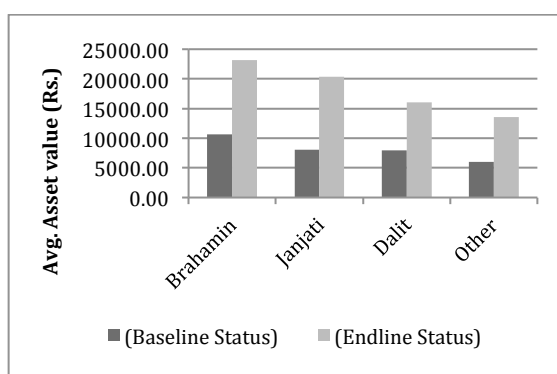


Fig 4: Average total assets worth

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Household income is the most important source for meeting basic needs and running the productive activities of the beneficiaries. Before project, daily wages was the major occupation contributing to income of the Dalit and ethnic minorities groups. People used to go to the field of land owner for work. It was very difficult to Dalits and other ethnic minorities groups for sustaining the livelihood from the small amount of income. After the project support, average annual household income of the Dalit (Rs. 56,861.27 and 48.19% increased from baseline) has been significantly increased from the baseline (Rs. 29462.59) and this change in the income was minimum difference with Janjati (Rs. 57581.54 and 49.63% increased from baseline) and Brahamin (66243.75 and 49.50% increased from baseline) (Table 3).

Table 3: Average annual household income of the beneficiaries

Ethnic Groups	Avg. Annual Household Income (Rs.)		Increment (%)
	(Baseline Status)	(End line Status)	
Brahamin	33451.82	66243.75	49.50
Janjati	29003.03	57581.54	49.63
Dalit	29462.59	56861.27	48.19
Other	31085.37	57104.55	45.56

Similar result was also observed in household income (43% increased from baseline) of Dalits group through support of micro-enterprise interventions of MEDEP project (MEDEP, 2001). Such increment in income is the result of commercialization of leasehold vegetable farming and improved off-farm enterprises. They have utilized the income on household works, education and health of children and agriculture. Survey data shows, expenditure of farm and off-farm activities (Rs. 3,575.98 and Rs. 54,826.14) have been found to be increased remarkably higher in Dalits group from the baseline (Rs. 1943.19 and 30619.59), respectively (Table 4). As a result of this they are growing business in larger scale and generating good profit.

Table 4: Average annual household expenditure of the beneficiaries

Ethnic Groups	Farm Expense (Rs.)		Off-farm Expense (Rs.)	
	(Baseline Status)	(Endline Status)	(Baseline Status)	(Endline Status)
Brahamin	1950.00	2228.32	33146.03	49398.94
Janjati	2488.33	5592.95	27728.57	46246.48
Dalit	1943.19	3575.98	30619.59	54826.14
Other	3179.67	8399.69	35294.17	42110.07

FOOD SUFFICIENCY

Food security is a complex, multidimensional issue that needs to be addressed with a more holistic approach for moving towards attaining sustainable livelihoods. Most of the excluded and disadvantaged groups from the rural areas are the vulnerable to food security throughout the year. Household survey shows project activities have contributed to increase the food sufficiency months of the beneficiaries from their own production and income. Before the project, food security situation of Dalits was very worse than other ethnic groups. Majority of the Dalits (63.53%) had food sufficiency for less than three month (Table 5).

Table 5: Percentage response of ethnic groups on household level food sufficiency

Ethnic Groups	(Base line Status)			
	< 3 months (%)	3-6 months (%)	6-9 months (%)	9-12 months (%)
Brahamin	60.00	29.70	6.67	3.64
Janjati	35.22	37.25	21.46	6.07
Dalit	63.53	26.00	8.59	1.88
Other	68.82	19.35	8.60	3.23

After the project support, only 8.8 percent Dalits households had food deficit for less than three month (Table 6). More remarkably, project was successful to improve the food sufficiency of Dalits for 3 to 6 month (44.60% HHs), 6 to 9 month (31.6% HHs) and 9-12 month (15.21% HHs) as compare to baseline (26.0 and 8.59 and 1.88% HHs), respectively (Table 5 and 6) and similar trend was also found in Janjati and Ethnic groups. Similar result was also found with Dalits and excluded groups on household food sufficiency (more than 5 month) in Food Facility Project of Practical Action Nepal (Practical Action, 2012). Such improvement in food sufficiency month of target beneficiaries is the result of income and production of logically designed farm and off-farm based economic development activities of the project.

Table 6: Percentage response of ethnic groups on household level food sufficiency

Ethnic Groups	(End line Status)			
	< 3 months (%)	3-6 months (%)	6-9 months (%)	9-12 months (%)
Brahamin	4.68	43.27	35.09	16.96
Janjati	2.88	23.05	42.80	31.28
Dalit	8.83	44.60	31.36	15.21
Other	2.13	52.13	29.79	15.96

PARTICIPATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Majority of the disadvantaged groups were excluded from the development activities around project site due to their low income and awareness before project. Project had benefited to 2792 Dalits; 1269 Janjaties and 1183 Brahamins through participating them in different farm and off-farm programs. This shows project was successful to ensure participation of Dalits and other ethnic minorities groups in the programs. Similarly participation of the disadvantaged group was also found prominent in Livelihood and Forestry Program (LFP) of DFID (DFID, 2005) and it indicates targeted programs are more rationale strategy for social inclusion of excluded groups.

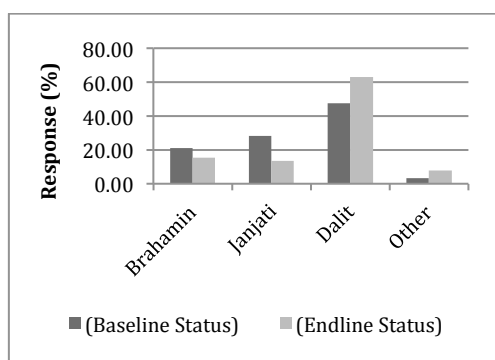


Fig. 5: Participation of ethnic groups in community organization

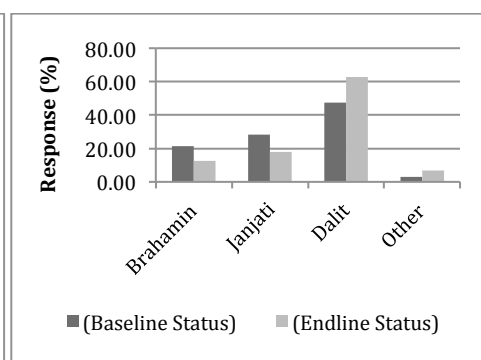


Fig. 6: Participation of beneficiaries in saving credit groups

Household survey shows participation of Dalit's households have been increased notably in community group (63.01%) and saving credit groups (62.94%) as compared to baseline (Fig. 5 and 6), and trend of participation was similar to Janjati and Brahmin groups. Project supported different capacity building programs like group management and leadership development, enterprise development, group level planning and monitoring. Because of this, Dalits and excluded groups' capacity has been enhanced markedly and they are able to receive different resources (sprayers, irrigation pump, technical services) from DADO, VDC and local level NGOs and private service providers. Another positive aspect of the capacity building program was adoption of participatory decision making system in family. Survey result shows majority of the Dalit households (69.9%) have made participatory decision by both male and female on daily household affairs compare to baseline (47.80% HHs) (Fig. 7 and 8), and similar trend was also observed in Janjati and Brahmin groups. This will surely help them to increase and diversify their enterprises in larger scale and contribute for sustainable livelihood security.

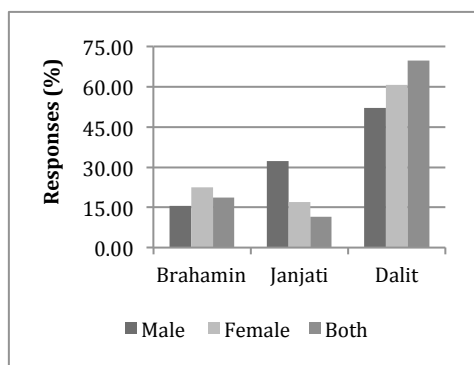


Fig. 7: Trend of decision making on daily household affairs (Baseline)

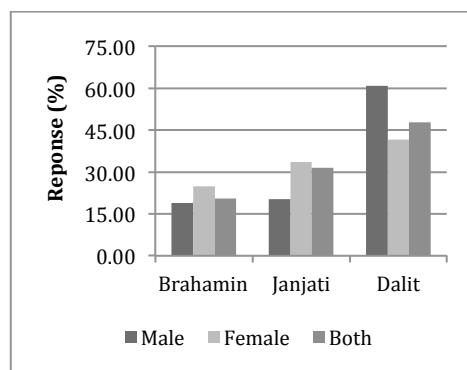


Fig. 8: Trend of decision making on daily household affairs (Endline)

CONCLUSION

Increased income of Dalit and ethnic minorities groups within the short period through farm and improved off-farm based activities is most important outcome of the economic development programs. As a result, gap on access of resources (physical, financial and services) of Dalits and socially excluded groups have been narrow down against Janjati and Brahamin groups. Impacts of project can be observed in various areas of beneficiaries. Most importantly wage laborers have been changed into self employed mainly because of leasehold and semi commercial vegetable farming and off-farm based enterprises. Because of regular income from the enterprises, this has helped to secure livelihood in household level.

Because of encouraging income and production from the farm (commercial lease based vegetable farming, mushroom production, fish farming and goat keeping) and improved off-farm based (improved blacksmithing, leather shoe making, house wiring, bamboo carving and motor winding etc.) economic development activities, food deficit of Dalits and excluded groups have been addressed to large extent. Possession of livelihood assets such as bullocks, water pump/boring, houses, mobiles, leasing and purchasing of lands has been increased significantly. School education and health services have been affordable among beneficiaries' groups. A kind of social dignity, especially in landless and Dalit, was found fostering.

Capabilities of Dalits and excluded groups have been remarkably increased through involving in different trainings especially technical and management aspects. Because of this, they have been participating in group strengthening activities such as monthly meeting of groups, training, workshop and other social development program at community level. As a result, they are able to advocate for the resource with different service providers at village and district level. Thus, beneficiaries groups have been empowered socially, technically and economically through support of project interventions, and which resulted to improve livelihood security and social inclusion of Dalits and excluded groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on aforementioned facts and figures, the following recommendations have been drawn:

- Lease-based vegetable, semi-commercial vegetable farming and improved off-farm market demand enterprises are most successful component of the project in addressing livelihood problem of marginal and landless Dalits and excluded groups, and these socioeconomic activities are also deserved for replication.
- Support for network establishment, capacity strengthening of service providers and establishing and strengthening of resource centers is necessary so that these organizations can provide quality services to beneficiaries even after the project.
- In one hand, land reform is must for overall socioeconomic transformation. On the other hand, state has to take special efforts for alternative sources of livelihoods. Specially, modernization of Dalits caste based occupation is one of the single alternative strategies for ensuring livelihoods security. Different related organizations and institutions should have to launch programs at root level on advocacy of these common issues. They can also play an important role to make an access up to the policy level to address the problem in a strategic way.
- Certain level of reservation program should be launched on behalf of all poor, needy and landless peoples of Dalit community, as Dalits have high potentiality of their own traditional caste based occupation. It must be modernized as per the current demand and market scenario.

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