
Nepal: Water User Authorities Improve Irrigated Agriculture

Operating Unit: USAID/Nepal

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Related Strategic Objective:

SO 1: Increased Sustainable Production and Sales of Forest and High-Value Agricultural Products

In a land where many irrigation systems are plagued by poor service and performance, USAID/Nepal's Irrigation Management Transfer Project (IMTP) is giving farmers hope and optimism. IMTP produces dramatic improvements in agriculture by placing the responsibility for managing irrigation systems directly into the hands of the farmers who use them. The project helped private farmers establish popularly elected, community-based Water Users Associations (WUAs). Through WUAs, farmers were able to receive extensive IMTP training before becoming legally responsible for managing their own systems. In 1997, Nepal's Department of Irrigation turned over 10,100 hectares of irrigated land to the West Gandak Irrigation System WUA.

Mr. Lalman Chaudhary is a farmer who was democratically elected to office in the WUA following the transfer. "Since West Gandak has been transferred from the government to the WUA, farmers are in charge of water releases and water distribution, and my rice yields have doubled from 30 quintals/hectare to 60 quintals/hectare." There is also more money to properly maintain West Gandak's canal system. The WUA budget (which is generated from irrigation service fees), skyrocketed from 22,000 rupees in 1994 to 1,242,000 rupees in 1997 alone.

Mr. Chaudhary now also earns an additional 12,000 rupees/year from his increased crop production. As he proudly displays the new yellow sweater and green jacket that he is wearing, he explains, "With my increased income, I can now send more of my children to school and buy warm clothes for the cold winters."

Mrs. Chaudhary agrees with her husband that the program has changed the family's life. She received training in post harvest technologies as part of IMTP's effort to increase women's participation in irrigated agriculture. "Since IMTP, I now know that income can be generated by home activities like mushroom production, pickle production, and kitchen gardens. Before IMTP, I didn't know about such opportunities."

Stories like this are being repeated over a large portion of Nepal's *terai* region, as 68,000 hectares of government managed irrigated systems are being transferred to private farmers' groups. In fact, farmers who had never experienced irrigated farming before are now receiving water. In IMTP's Panchakanya Irrigation System in the Chitwan Valley, for example, the irrigated area has increased by 66 percent, from 267 ha before IMTP to 442 ha today.

With IMTP's assistance, farmers are committing their lands, their fortunes, and their futures to the success of the private WUAs. Yields and incomes are up, and farmers sense of self-worth has increased dramatically. "Now we control the irrigation. We have the responsibility, and we will succeed."