
Advocacy case studies

IMPROVING IRRIGATION FOR AGRICULTURAL LAND IN NEPAL

COUNTRY:	Nepal
THEMES:	Land and property; livelihoods
ADVOCACY APPROACHES:	Community mobilisation; educating community members; government officials: lobbying

In Surkhet district in the mid-west hills of Nepal lies the community of Lekhgaun. It is here that Tearfund partner International Nepal Fellowship (INF) helped form a self-help group (SHG), one of 24 such groups it set up in the area. Its members, many of whom are poor and marginalised, meet together every month to discuss the main issues they and the wider community are facing.

One of these issues was poor irrigation of their agricultural land. People in their community, along with many from nearby communities, relied on the water of a poorly built channel to irrigate their fields, but it often became blocked. This meant that they faced frequent delays in planting their crops at critical times of the year, and had difficulty in keeping the fields adequately watered. Although everyone recognised the problem, no one had taken the initiative to tackle it, as they thought they would not be able to access the necessary resources.

INF's community facilitators accompanied the SHG during its meetings in its early stages. They informed the group about laws the villagers had previously been unaware of, laws that entitled groups such as theirs to support from the local government office. So, the group decided to hold a meeting with all three communities who used the water channel, to prepare an action plan and a formal request for government support.

The SHG was able to help the community recognise the resources they already had available to them to help solve the problem: time and local materials (sand and rocks). All the community members agreed to get involved, giving their time and gathering an affordable financial contribution from each household. They prepared formal requests to the government office (asking for a technician and financial support) and to INF (for 40 bags of cement). INF continued to advise them through the planning process.

After receiving the request, the government office sent a team of technicians to perform a site survey. They produced a report, which led to the government office releasing money for the construction of a permanent irrigation channel. Likewise, INF agreed to provide the 40 sacks of cement. The SHG members mobilised people from the three communities to collect rocks and about 9,000kg of sand. The community members then worked together to complete a new 120-metre-long channel over 14 days.

Now, everyone in the community has continuous access to water for irrigation. They can realise the immense potential of farming different crops and vegetables in their fields. The government and

wider community have recognised the group's initiative in addressing a problem that was affecting everyone.

One group member, Netra Bahadur Sunar, said, 'Now, the problem of irrigating our fields has become a thing of the past. Before, we had to wait for our turn to water our fields to plant rice, paddy, etc. But now all of us can begin planting at the right time, without worrying about water shortages. Now, there are no more quarrels among us for water. We have total harmony and now are thinking of planting vegetables out of season for extra income. With this channel, we now have so many possibilities to increase our income!'