

Process Monitoring Briefing Note 3:

Impact of Public Wage Programme: Reflections from KEPTA assisted projects

Process Monitoring conducted by MEL in February 2015 examined the Karnali Employment Programme Technical Assistance (KEPTA) project in Kalikot and Jumla. MEL consulted with five KEPTA assisted and one traditional Karnali Employment Programme (KEP) projects, with community members, and with the KEPTA team. A total of 105 beneficiaries were consulted in February 2015.

The Process Monitoring focused on the following areas of inquiry:

- Process used for identification of potential workers.
- Participation of women in Project Implementation Committees (PICs).
- Work conditions and amenities.
- Wage earning and use.
- Relevance of the winter work programme.
- People's perceptions of change.

Process used for identification of potential workers: All projects complied with KEPTA standards of communication campaigns, engaging ward citizens' forums (WCFs) for identification and selection of potential workers and distribution of job cards. **Communication campaigns were conducted by KEPTA** staff in each ward of the Village Development Committee (VDC) selected for project implementation to inform potential workers of programme objectives and the processes for applying for job opportunities. **A quota for the number of workers** that could be selected was either assigned randomly or evenly divided to the WCFs depending upon the context. **Selected households received one job card** that listed eligible household members aged 18-58. Job cards were only provided to households who produced a citizenship card for the household head.

The MEL team observed that the communication campaigns were more focused on information dissemination than engaging potential workers. Community members consulted reported that low levels of literacy, indifference towards development activities, and inability to assert their right to work and hence were **major challenges faced by the campaigns**. The processes of worker identification and selection faced major challenges including the assertion of rights by relatively well-off families. A common observation was that WCFs lacked the capacity to facilitate participatory processes and were dominated by local vested interest groups (such as local contractors) in their membership. A major reason for exclusion of potential workers was that many potential beneficiaries did not possess a **citizenship card**, which KEPTA and WCF partially addressed by assisting potential workers in applying for them.

Participation of women in Project Implementation Committees (PICs): A PIC is a representative committee responsible for project implementation. It comprises workers selected from different sub-groups implementing the project. The PIC membership composition collected from the field was verified with the KEPTA MIS. The validation showed that two PICs in Kalikot have less than the mandatory 33 percent women members. According to KEPTA's experience, women associated with the work groups in Jumla are more active and confident in themselves than in Kalikot and this was confirmed by MEL observations. **The project sites in Jumla have a long history of women's involvement in development activities compared with those in Kalikot.** Women selected for leadership positions in the PICs in both districts shared positive stories as to how KEPTA support has helped them to improve their confidence level.

"We (Dalit women) in this village have not been involved in key roles in development committees in the past. Thanks to KEPTA we have now received an opportunity to lead as well as earn for our family" - Rithu BK, Treasurer, Majhiunkhola to Ghattekhola Rural Road (Kumalgaun VDC, Kalikot)

Working conditions and amenities: All workers employed have group accidental and medical insurance coverage. However, they lack a clear understanding of these provisions. KEPTA provides child care centres at the worksites of all supported projects that were monitored. Lactating mothers have benefitted most from these centres because they enable them to breastfeed their babies in a safe environment without disruption to on-going work. All workers interviewed reported that they appreciate the provision of worksite toilets and this has been particularly significant for women workers.

"[Previously] if there were no worksite toilets, we had to walk all the way to a nearby river or forest" - Jaipiura Bista, worker at Kotbada VDC, Kalikot.

During the worksite monitoring in four projects (one in Jumla and three in Kalikot), workers were found to be working with their safety helmets on. However one important observation from the Kalikot field visit suggests that safety helmets are a basis for stigmatising the poor and marginalised selected for the work programmes. Hence whilst working conditions are not bad per se and efforts have been made to include provision for women with children, further research is needed on issues of stigmatisation that can potentially be disruptive and counterproductive in incentivising poor families from being included on such programmes.

Wage earning and use: The majority of the women workers consulted were either wives of migrants or were single household heads. Women workers appeared more content with their work through KEPTA than their male counterparts. As indicated in the RAP3 baseline, the majority of migrants are males. Hence one possible reason that women workers are more content than their male counterparts is because they have limited alternative income earning opportunities compared to men (because they cannot migrate for work as a result of gender-based family obligations at home) and the possible stresses of migrating for work. The gendered division of roles at the worksite has influenced workers' perceptions towards the equal wage policy. Despite male and female workers being aware of the equal wage provisions, some male workers expressed the view that they should be getting more than women workers because they were doing more difficult work and had to cover additional activities that women could not complete. This has been raised in the PIC by male workers, but claims for higher wages by male workers were overruled.

Relevance of the winter work programme: Workers expressed satisfaction with the winter wage programme and perceived it as a timely intervention, which they said has supported families to smooth food consumption in the winter when it is difficult to find work opportunities. As was envisaged by KEPTA, workers said that the initial instalments from the winter work programme were used for buying food. Several workers across project sites reported that local shop keepers were willing to provide food items to them on credit because of their association with the programme. The final wage payments were generally used to settle outstanding food credit and invest in children's education. The MEL team came across very few instances of wages being invested in capital goods such as buying land or assets.

People's perception of change: MEL planned to assess the differences between KEPTA and traditional KEP approaches during field visits. A KEP project in Dephalagoun VDC in Jumla was selected as a basis for comparison. However, the project had not started by the time of the field visit. An in-depth discussion with one worker in Kunalgaun VDC in Kalikot who had participated in a KEP project last year provides some cursory indications of differences between the two approaches and notes that in KEP projects, there was no provision of first aid, safety gear and worksite toilets. Workers also had to provide their own tools and were asked to sign a receipt of NRs 3,000 as final payment but only received half. In contrast, the KEPTA project has been more transparent, letting workers know the difference in wages for different types of work. First aid kits, safety gear, working tools and worksite tools are provided and KEPTA supervises the work.

Summary of Findings

KEPTA, in line with its technical objectives, has been **generally well received by its beneficiaries** and its provisions for workers, particularly women workers, are an improvement on the traditional KEP. However there are **still issues with communications and understanding on how the poorest people can become included**, and this problem is compounded by many people lacking basic forms of identification (e.g. citizenship cards).

WCF's play an important role in the effective management of KEPTA projects through the selection of projects that are beneficial to potential workers during the annual participatory planning process and the identification and selection of workers during project implementation. Further effort should be made to engage WCFs and target communities *in advance* of project commencement for mapping of potential beneficiaries. Potential beneficiaries who experience barriers to work opportunities (such as lack of citizenship, etc.) could receive support in addressing these barriers from WCFs with support from KEPTA. The MEL team suggests that KEPTA should assess the capacity of WCF to carry on their mandate and provide support to address any capacity gaps.

Direct beneficiaries appreciate the impact of KEPTA support on smoothing food consumption during the winter. However, the project cannot be implemented across all target VDCs due to climatic conditions. Rooted in prevailing gender norms, women workers have to balance work with family obligations. A detailed analysis of the winter works programme from a gendered perspective would further strengthen our understanding of its impact on household consumption and changes in the role of women in the household and community. MEL suggests that KEPTA should map out in which VDCs/clusters work cannot be implemented in winter as to enable the identification of areas where there is a risk of delay to planned project implementation. Social issues like the stigmatisation of the poorest workers needs further research and possibly further sensitisation work could be incorporated into the planning process.