

Preface to the Special Issue on “Community Development Strategies in the Developing Countries”

Due to the global and or local stresses/shocks such as climate change, natural disasters, economic crises, political instability, social turmoils, regional conflicts, ethnic disputes and policy failures, the challenges faced by the developing countries, including poverty alleviation and improvement of local livelihoods have remained far from being achieved. Food security has further deteriorated, rural locations have remained marginalized and the gap between haves and have-nots have widened across the globe. Under such circumstances, it is essential to consider how local resources (natural, human, socio-cultural, systems and networks) can be used strategically such that the livelihood of the people is enhanced primarily by their own efforts through appropriate mechanisms to cope with and recover from such stresses/shocks, without undermining the resource base. Thus, pursuing sustainable development has become imperative in most countries, more so after the 1992 Earth Summit and Rio Declaration to harmonize economic and environment issues.

Farmers, in general, respond to such adverse on-farm conditions by either increasing land under cultivation and by intensifying land use through agronomic and mechanical interventions, making a choice of crops and cropping patterns and increasing external inputs to cope with decrease in crop yields. They also increase the returns by engaging themselves higher up in the value chain beyond the farm gate into value added processing and/or choosing to produce for high value niche markets. In order to make such efforts part of the farming culture, it is necessary to organize inhabitants of rural communities in groups for knowledge sharing and assimilation. In this setting, community development strategy, supported by participatory development programs and policies, will inure to the collective benefit of the community. Such a society will be capable of taking advantage of economic opportunities including credit, market access and other forms of support. The sense of unity and solidarity brings along with it the capacity to withstand external shocks including those associated with globalization. This way, rural communities can achieve stable livelihoods through development strategies that ensure inclusive, connected, equitable, prudent and secure community development, which is in line with societal objective of sustainable development.

The papers in this special issue of the *Journal of International Development and Cooperation*, Vol. 20, No. 3, will discuss the above mentioned theme from their different perspectives in order to have different shades of understanding of the study theme. After a rigorous review of the several manuscripts submitted, seven refereed papers, comprising one review, four articles and two research notes, are accommodated in this volume with due consideration of the theme.

The first paper, a review on decentralization of local governance, makes an effort to identify the opportunities and challenges brought by decentralization for rural development. Through literature review, it suggests countries applying decentralization for rural development should pay attention to issues of formulation of local budget, social capital, local capacity and community participation. It argues that decentralization is like a double edge sword for rural development. It will result in successful development only if the local budget is spent to address the needs of rural people, the local social capital is strong, the rural poor actively participate in the development programs and the local institutions have enough capacity to execute such programs. Hence, it recommends that the application of decentralized system should go hand in hand with political commitment by the local authorities to seek and prioritize community needs, institutional arrangements that promote people's participation, procedures guaranteeing the rights of the marginal groups in the local political process, empowerment of the rural people and the capacity development of the local institutions.

The second paper, an article, discusses the role governance of community-based rice seed producing organizations play in increasing benefits to their members by minimizing transaction costs. This paper evaluates the governance of these organizations

and analyzes how organizational governance indicators contribute to the enhancement of economic indicators through the analysis of data collected from three Tarai districts in Nepal using simple linear regression technique. It concludes that selecting highly educated leaders to administer these organizations is important for enhancing organizational governance, which in turn contributes to the economic benefits of households in the community.

The third paper, second article, discusses the issues of technology demonstrations and value chain interventions for commercial promotion of lentil, a leading pulse crop, in rice-fallows in the Tarai region of Nepal. The paper argues with empirical evidence, that the enhancement of the productivity and production of lentil and improvement of linkages among the value chain actors can be materialized by introduction of locally innovated technology package through NGO projects on a cost sharing basis. It concludes that, in addition to delivery of technology packages to farmers, improvements in value chains and marketing play crucial roles in enhancing farm level profitability and commercial farming of lentil in Nepal.

The fourth paper, third article, discusses the issues of organic farming, an emerging concept which has been gaining recognition as a more sustainable production system in Nepal. This paper is based on the study conducted in Chitwan, a district in Tarai, where the indiscriminate use of agro-chemicals is common in commercial agriculture, but the concept of organic farming is also emerging in areas where people are more concerned about the food quality, health and the environment. A multinomial logit model analysis reveals that the farmers inclined to undertake organic or partial organic farming tend to form groups and partake in training programs that promote organic farming. This implies that the formation of such groups could be a good strategy to promote organic farming in other communities and a viable local policy to attain sustainable agricultural development.

The fifth paper, fourth article, discusses the benefits and challenges of farming in crop-livestock mixed production systems in Ala-Buka region of Kyrgyzstan, where the agrarian land reform after its independence from the Soviet Union changed Soviet model of state-owned land with predominance of large-scale farm enterprises to a market-oriented model of privately owned land with predominance of small and medium-sized family farms. This paper makes cost benefit analysis of major crops, each separately and according to cropping patterns, through the data obtained from village level surveys in the Ala-Buka district. Accordingly, it is found that, crops such as, wheat and sunflower are commonly grown though their benefit-cost ratios (BCR) are low as they are less risky and important crops for livelihoods that enhances local food security. Whereas tobacco and vegetables, though with high BCR and transacted for cash, are less preferred due to their high production cost and risky nature. Majority of households cannot afford to grow these crops in larger land size because they face challenges in acquisition of machinery, irrigation, labor and seed, as well as unexpected fluctuation of input and output prices and weather. Finally, the paper implies the need of strategic policy for promoting research and development to address these problems.

The sixth paper, first research note, aims to analyze the impact of mass media on agricultural development, with a hypothesis that mass media may influence the level of knowledge among farmers which, in turn, may lead to efficient agricultural production. With the village level empirical evidences from Osh Oblast in Kyrgystan and the content analysis of 9 print versions of newspapers disseminated in the area, it is revealed that though the preference of people for television, radio and internet as agricultural information source is increasing, there are still many, especially the elderly, who believe that print media has positive educational influence and, thus, support its development as a tool for dissemination of agricultural technologies among the farmers. Hence, the paper recommends training of journalists to better report agriculture related news, improving the mechanisms of distributing agricultural information through introduction of more educational and culturally cognitive programs, and placing the media as a key link between the state and the rural people to create conducive platform for agricultural and rural development.

The second research note, the last paper of this volume, dwells on rural sanitation situation in Bangladesh. It reviews existing literature about the sanitation concerns focusing on water supply system and programs related to dissemination of hygienic toilet. Bangladesh being a highly populated country with inefficient waste management system, sanitation issue in potable water supply

has been a serious issue. This paper reveals that sanitation issue is poorly addressed in projects/programs related to water supply system. Some efforts have been made to integrate sanitation issues in water supply, but they are poorly budgeted and activities of government and non-government organizations are not integrated. To address these issues, the paper recommends total sanitation framework, which could integrate sanitation issues in the current water supply system, bringing innovations from government and non-government organizations together on the same platform to achieve better results.

The contents of this volume are evidences from developing countries on the issues of community development strategies, but the issues addressed are not peculiar to those countries alone. The research output is applicable to countries and/or regions elsewhere with similar biophysical, political and socioeconomic conditions and would be useful to all researchers pursuing similar issues elsewhere.

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