FEED THE FUTURE

CULTIVATING PARTNERSHIPS FOR IMPROVED AGRICULTURE PRODUCTIVITY

An agriculture officer provides practical training to the women literacy graduates on how to effectively handle and transplant seedling on the field.

USAID’s flagship Feed the Future project in Nepal, the Knowledge-based Intervention for Sustainable Agriculture and Nutrition (KISAN) project, is poised to impact the lives of 160,000 smallholder Nepali farm households. KISAN translates to ‘farmer’ in Nepali. Since 2013, the project is working with farmers in 20 districts across the Mid and Far Western regions to improve agriculture productivity and incomes through enhanced services and technologies along the high-value vegetable, rice, maize, and lentil value chains. The project collaborates closely with the Ministry of Agriculture Development (MOAD) and Departments at the national and field level, and works to foster ownership of activities and mobilize government expertise to disburse GoN grants to KISAN beneficiary communities. The project is a robust example of USAID’s partnership with Government of Nepal institutions. By working through GoN systems and people – people who have the cultural knowledge and in-country expertise to ensure assistance leads to sustainable growth – our goal is to also strengthen GoN capacity to eventually implement these activities independently.

Last month, we caught up with the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Development, Dr. Rajendra Adhikari, who was kind enough to share some of his thoughts on the USAID-GaN partnership and insights on the way forward for agriculture development in the country. Excerpts from the Interview:

Although two years is a short time span to evaluate a project, the feedback I’ve been receiving about USAID’s KISAN project and lessons learned has been positive.

What role do you envision for the private sector to help improve Nepal’s agriculture productivity and how can organizations like USAID help facilitate the process? The private sector is a key stakeholder in Nepal’s agriculture development, but I hold the view that it can work efficiently only when it has the requisite capacity to perform. While the government needs to draw on the private sector’s strength, the focus should also be on building and enhancing the private sector’s capacity so that they can perform better and deliver their services. Second, as farmers also constitute the private sector, they should also be included in the definition of the private sector.

There is a saying: “A chain is as strong as its weakest link.” Without empowering farmers who are undoubtedly the most important stakeholder of agricultural development, especially so for agriculture value chains, you cannot expect to strengthen the chain. The ‘empowered’ private sector and others need to focus on strengthening farmers so that the chain’s collective strength is in a better position.

And third, we need to identify who the private sector partners to engage with are, assess their competencies, and leverage their specialization accordingly. For example, if someone is an input supplier, encourage them to specialize in that; build confidence in their strengths so that they do not wander horizontally and try to integrate as a producer and processor as well.

Nepal recently released its new Agriculture Development Strategy. How can external development partners like USAID best contribute to the implementation of the strategy? The ADS is a national policy document drafted after extensive consultations with many development partners. All development partners should own it as the national agriculture policy of Nepal. The first responsibility of external development partners is to commit the resources required for the implementation of that policy. Their second responsibility would be to ensure that their agriculture priorities for Nepal line up with the ADS so that they’re directly supporting implementation of the national policy.

Development partners like USAID can also support the implementation of a strategy like the ADS by sharing their expertise from across the world. Unlike us in the Government, who for the most part operate in and look at agriculture development from a strictly Nepal lens, development partners bring insights from having worked in multiple contexts (and not just Nepal). The lessons that a Nepali farmer eventually learns over many years through repeated trial and error can be significantly accelerated by the development partner because they’ve already done the exact same thing somewhere else.

USAID and MOAD have a longstanding history of close collaboration, especially at the