

# Improved Cooking Stoves Change the Lives of Rural Women



“The smokeless stove has made a great difference to my life,” says **Bishnu Devi Dhital**, of Bhakunde village of the Gausahar Village Development Committee (VDC). “Since the stove was installed I have stopped getting severe headaches as there is no smoke and pollution inside the house now and also I do not have to wear spectacles anymore.”

**Muna Khadka**, a 14-year-old girl of the same village and studying in the eight grade in a local school has even more to say about the stove. “My studies have improved since we installed the improved stove in our house. In the past with the traditional stove, I had to spend a lot of time preparing food for my family and cleaning the cooking dishes afterwards. The new stove doesn’t get the dishes so dirty and I just have to put the pots on the stove and don’t have to keep looking at it to stoke the fire. So I get more time to attend to my studies.”

From a housewife to a young girl, a small change can make a big difference, especially in the lives of the poor. Rural women perform most of the household tasks from collecting firewood and cooking, to looking after the children. Wood collection for cooking food is getting tougher as forests get depleted and women have to walk for hours to find wood. The drudgery of everyday chores leave poor women with little time to participate in the overall development process and improve their lives.

In rural areas, women spend about six hours of their time under hazardous conditions cooking on traditional stoves that spew toxic smoke all over the house, giving rise to eye and respiratory problems for the whole family. Other means of cooking such as solar, biogas and L.P. gas are neither affordable nor easily available and only fill about four percent of the total requirement in Nepal.

The German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) decided to address the problem through its Rural Development Programme (RDP) by introducing Improved Cooking Stoves in rural households.

## GTZ Introduces the Improved Cooking Stoves

The programme to introduce the stoves started eight years ago in the Gorkha district and was later replicated in the Lamjung district and extended to another two RDP districts in eastern Nepal. As of December 2001, the Improved Cooking Stoves (ICS) have directly benefited more than 12,000 households in 64 VDCs and one municipality in four districts.

According to women who have been using the improved stove, apart from being cleaner the stoves are much more fuel-efficient. Mithu Mijar from Sarki Gaun says that previously she had to collect three bundles of wood every ten days, which meant 110 bundles a year and now she needs just 85 bundles annually. Women now have an additional two hours a day to devote to income generating activities like growing vegetables and raising livestock. Due to the many advantages of the Improved Cooking Stove, several VDCs have allocated resources to promote the use of the stoves in more households. A number of NGOs have also decided to promote the improved stoves in their programmes to help poor women.

Local people have been trained to promote and build ICS. One ICS costs Rupees 185, which includes payment for installation services and materials.

### The Impact

The following are the specific impacts of GTZ's efforts to help poor rural women by providing them with the means to get better stoves:

- **Environment:** Comparative studies conducted on firewood consumption in rural households show that the Improved Cooking Stoves consume 21 percent less firewood than traditional stoves. The more these stoves are used the less pressure there will be on forests and ultimately it will help to conserve the natural forests and the environment.
- **Women's Health:** Since the improved stoves have chimneys that take the smoke out of the house, there is no toxic smoke to deal with while cooking and women have found that their families and they themselves have less eye and respiratory problems.
- **Workload Reduction:** Women say that the new stove saves them more than two hours a day depending on the availability of firewood. They used to spend this time in fetching firewood and cooking food.
- **Self-employment:** Installation of the stoves is very simple and it is fairly easy to transfer the skills to the local people. A total of 191 local people (90 percent women) have been trained on the promotion and installation of the stoves in the RDP districts. More than 80 percent of the trainees are promoting and installing the stoves within or outside the programme areas and earning an income. It takes a woman, on average five hours to install a stove and she can earn upto Rupees 100.
- **Increased Income:** Women with the improved stoves now use their spare time on various productive sectors like growing vegetables, looking after livestock and other income generation activities.

### Future Promotion Strategies

Due to several benefits that poor women get from the stoves, GTZ together with the Center for Rural Technology (an NGO) has come up with a plan to promote the Improved Cooking Stoves in several other areas. Strategies to promote the use of the stoves include:

- ▶ Developing the capacity of local people to promote and install the stoves.
- ▶ Partnering up with NGOs already involved in women's programmes in the field.
- ▶ Giving full material support equivalent to Rupees 85 and subsidizing installation costs by 50 percent (Rupees 50). This support is given only for the first two years in one area to demonstrate and promote the stoves and then local trained people are supported to implement ICS promotional activities.
- ▶ Involving local hardware stores to stock the materials required to make the stove.
- ▶ Encouraging VDCs to promote the stoves by sharing the costs.

It has been recognized that unless women's lives are made easier they cannot participate in any kind of development work that can improve their situation. Since the Improved Cooking Stove reduces a woman's workload by one-fifth it can become an essential part of any programme that focuses on helping poor women.



Rural  
Development  
Programme

