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**Empowerment of farmers through agricultural
extension: A case study of farmer groups in
Khairahani, Chitwan, Nepal**

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Abstract

The government of Nepal adopted a farmer group approach as the official agricultural extension approach for Nepal in 1988/89. Since then, this has been the major strategy of the Government for the provision of agricultural extension services. The literature has shown that organizing rural farmers into groups has provided an effective institutional mechanism for their empowerment. However, limited research has been conducted in either Nepal or other developing countries to investigate farmer groups through the lens of empowerment theory. The overall aim of this study has been to gain an improved understanding of how participation in farmer groups, assisted by the public agricultural extension organisation, leads to the empowerment of rural farmers in Nepal. To this end, four farmer groups that were assisted by the District Agriculture Development Office in Nepal were studied using a qualitative case study approach.

This study provides a more comprehensive model of the relationship between farmer groups encompassing the three different forms of capital accumulation and the four dimensions of empowerment. It has revealed that participation in a farmer group facilitated the accumulation of human, social and financial capital which then contributed to economic, psychological, social and political empowerment. The study illustrated the interconnected nature of different forms of capital accumulation. Likewise, the present findings showed that feedback loops existed between the dimensions of empowerment. The findings of this study suggests that improvement of one form of capital by itself is not sufficient to ensure the empowerment of farmers across the four dimensions, unless the other two forms of capital are already present.

It was found that the degree of empowerment that occurred within a group was influenced by the level of cohesion among group members and the volume of resources that flowed into the group. The findings of this study demonstrate that farmer groups are more beneficial for women as opposed to men, and for the poor as opposed to wealthier farmers. These findings suggest that the current group-based extension approach can serve as an effective strategy for providing agricultural extension services to women and poor farmers who have limited financial and personal resources on their own.

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Abbreviations

AA	Agriculture Assistant
ASC	Agriculture Service Centre
DADO	District Agriculture Development Office
DLSO	District Livestock Service Office
DOA	Department of Agriculture
DOLS	Department of Livestock Services
JT	Junior Technician
JTA	Junior Technical Assistant
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SADO	Senior Agriculture Development Officer
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
VDC	Village Development Committee
VLAA	Village Level Agriculture Assistant