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## FEED THE FUTURE INNOVATION LAB FOR LEGUME SYSTEMS RESEARCH

September 2024



The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Legume Systems Research fosters dynamic, profitable, and environmentally sustainable approaches that contribute to resilience, productivity, and better nutrition and economic opportunities. The lab is managed by Michigan State University.

### *From the Management Office*

## Legume Systems Innovation Lab Participates in Innovation Lab Meetings in D.C.

The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Legume Systems Research recently participated in the Feed the Future Innovation Lab Council 2024 Annual Partner's Meeting held in Washington D.C. The theme of the meeting was "Translating Research Into Action".

The meeting provided an opportunity for the 23 University-led Innovation Labs to connect with key stakeholders including United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD), and global partners.

Program Director, Dr. Barry Pittendrigh participated on panel session titled, "Private Sector Engagement". The session was moderated by Legume Systems Innovation Lab Deputy Director, Dr. John Medendorp. The session delved into topics centered around avenues for sustainable private sector engagement in international development.

A poster gallery walk was held with the theme of locally-led development. The Legume Systems Innovation Lab participated by presenting three unique examples that showcased locally-led initiatives.

Both private sector engagement and locally-led initiatives have been identified as key for moving innovation lab generated technologies and products into scaling and use.



*Locally-led initiatives strengthen resilience and self reliance. Legume Systems Innovation Lab projects are designed to engage local actors for sustainable outcomes.*

***In the Field***

**It's Time For Musuro; A New Approach**

## **Towards Inclusiveness**

### **Reflections from a gender advisor**

*by Dr. Sony K.C.*

*“I had given up with musuro (lentil) because I thought this crop would not give me good yield. Till date, I was doing it all wrong. I need to gear up and get back to this nutritious crop and I have been encouraged through this meeting,”* expressed a farmer from Lumbini province in Nepal.

The multi-stakeholder platform (MSP) meetings conducted in August of this year showed a tremendous increase in women’s participation alongside men from each project areas. The Nepal meeting halls were filled with an inclusive team of men and women farmers, traders, government officials, knowledge centers, technical assistants from the varicolored Madhesh province that reflects the rich Mithila culture; Lumbini province, the birth place of Lord Buddha and a tourist destination; and the lush green, home to exotic flora and fauna, Sudurpaschim province.

As a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) advisor and with trepidation in my heart on whether the representation would be aggregated by gender and social categories, I was enamored to see a mass of women in the halls starting from the Madesh province. Of these women, most were draped in colorful saris and speaking a vibrant language representing the Maithili culture.

In each province, the participation of 50% and more, of these women, evidently was not an intentional setup but rather of remarkable efforts in reaching out to as many inclusive groups as possible based on the lessons learnt from the past. A well-tailored approach was deployed prior to making the representation inclusive.

The mounting participation of women from diverse backgrounds this year has been based on the local level human resources appointed as part of the project. In each province, a coordinator has been appointed and they have been navigated towards integrating GESI in the MSP.

First, we ensured that the coordinators are local, closer to the stakeholders and well informed about the community and the local culture. Second, we

established a mapping process of *musuro* farmers through entry points such as farmers groups, cooperatives and even the local units such as Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs). The FCHVs are assigned by the local government and are by far the closest, door-to-door, service providers. Hence, they are aware of every household's demographics despite many being in geographically challenging areas. This strategy of inclusiveness proved fruitful as denoted by the diverse participation.

Moreover, the participation of farmers, particularly women, also came out of enthusiasm and their interest in honing their knowledge about *musuro* farming, since for many, it was the first time attending an event facilitated for *musuro*.

*"We have had many opportunities to attend meetings for other crops, but never for musuro.... I am so thankful because now I am well acquainted with knowledge about the new way of musuro farming and the importance of why we should not give up this nutritious crop,"* delightfully expressed a female farmer from Kailali.

*"How could I not attend? I would have missed the chances on combatting disease issues on musuro. A lot of us have witnessed our farms blighted by disease which we also call it plant "pneumonia,"* plangently expressed a woman from Lumbini.

*"I am a Junior Agriculture Technician (JTA) and I might not be a musuro farmer, but whatever knowledge I have gained here, I can spread it among the community I am involved in and I can make that difference in farmers' lives,"* audaciously expressed a JTA who belongs to a Tamang community and originally hails from Surkhet but works in Madhesh province.

These testimonies are substantial evidence for multifarious things. First, that the MSP platform is new for both participants and in introduction of *musuro* farming. Second, that the women participants have the zeal to learn and share. Third, inclusiveness of this kind, really provides tangible success stories and makes us ponder, what if women were not a part of the MSPs? Would it be beneficial to reach the targeted goals of increasing the production of *musuro* by 10 percent in the coming year? The answer is simple. There would be no rise in *musuro* without inclusion of the disaggregated farmers from all the

corners of the designated provinces. The effort of women who are the core farm workers needs and deserves attention.

Apart from the ardor to become a part of the platform, the MSP meetings have proved to fulfil the goal of connecting farmers with other stakeholders within one single space. The MSPs have also been viewed as a platform for interventions. *“I did not know about other Gallawala [traders] before coming here. I had no idea about market and also the demonstration trial presentation by Muktinath was very helpful. Honestly, us, women, who are so busy at home and farm, lack skills when it comes to marketing but now, we have market with us through this platform (MSP),”*, expressed a female *musuro* farmer from Madhesh.

*“I am here with my child because I am the only representative of my farmers group and I did not want to miss this opportunity. When I heard about an event as this on musuro few weeks back, I was determined to attend it because many of us have seen our musuro blighted by disease,”* lamented a woman from Kailali, who attended the meeting with her infant on her arms.

*“Now we know who to connect if we need any information on seeds, ways of farming the musuro. Before we were clueless and just doing the farming without proper technique. Times have changed and we should too,”* opined a female from Lumbini.

Building connections and bridging the loops for stronger link between the multiple stakeholders has been a goal achieved from the MSP. Particularly from the perspective of inclusiveness, we now have both men and women farmers connecting with a wide range of stakeholders within the *musuro* value chain. A form of communication has sparked, and our goal further will be to enhance and sustain the platform by keeping the inclusion integral.



*Women participants during the recent MSP meetings in Nepal*

From the aforementioned experiences and testimonies, there are few but crucial take home message for the project. First, it can be inferred that there is an interest in pursuing *musuro* production amongst most farmers as they know how much cultural, social and economic value this crop holds.

Second, the majority had attended the MSPs with inquisitive minds and were enlightened about the market value and demand of this crop nationally.

Third, and without doubt, the connections have already been made between the wide range of stakeholders within the platform to support each other. For example, conversations between farmers and Seed companies ignited great exchange regarding the type of seeds, ways to combat disease, herbicides and their work etc.

Overall, these MSP meetings not only gave us an outstanding representation of women but also their full participation throughout. They raised questions and concerns regarding their experiences on farming. This confers, where there is a question, there is interest. From the GESI perspective, the MSP is a panacea for women to be visible in a mass to hone their voice and leadership skills. This platform is also a space to empower women to implement farming skills they have for better economic growth.

It is the women who know the value of *musuro* as this lentil is served during festivals through a panoply of dishes, is encouraged for pregnant and lactating



mothers to include in their diets, and many more.

Be it for multifarious reasons, the majority of *musuro* farmers who have attended MSPs, alongside other actors in the value chain resonate the same voice that, “it is time for musuro” farming.

*About the author*

*Dr. Sony K.C. is a Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) expert who lives in Nepal and works on the Legume Systems Innovation Lab project focused on improving the Nepal lentil sector.*

## ***Featured Legume of the Month***

### **Yellow Lentils**



Lentils are a protein and nutritional powerhouse that come in a rainbow of colors!

According to [lentils.org](https://lentils.org), a half cup serving of cooked lentils provides 12 grams of protein, 32% of your daily recommended fiber intake, 273 mg of potassium, and 15% of your daily iron needs.

Lentils also contain more folate than any other plant-based food and are high in manganese. Whether you select yellow, green, red, black or brown, give these versatile and colorful legumes a try!

### **Cooking with Yellow Lentils...**

#### **MOONG DAHL WITH CARROTS**

Moong dahl with carrots is an easy and healthy one pot vegetarian dish. We found this recipe featured on the [Beans Is How](https://beansisnow.com) website.

Yellow split lentil is combined with chopped carrots and a vegetable of your choice (this recipe uses peas). Spices including turmeric, cumin, coriander,

and panch phoron are added to the lentils and vegetables and set to cook in a pressure cooker.

Not familiar with panch phoron? it's a five spice blend made up of cumin seeds, fennel seeds, black mustard seeds, fenugreek seeds and nigella seeds. Look for it at your neighborhood store specializing in Indian foods.



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