

Dear selection committee,

I am Ashmita Acharya, a master's level student majoring in "Organic Agriculture and Food Systems" at the University of Hohenheim. I am writing to apply for the Junior Scientist Program scholarship to support the field work component of my thesis research in Nepal.

The topic of my thesis is "**Influence of gender roles on food sovereignty in rural community in Nepal: an intersectional inquiry**". My study examines the intersectional gendered power relations in the agroecological practices and food sovereignty outcomes in rural Nepal. I chose this topic based on both my academic interest and personal experiences. I grew up on a farm in Nepal which sparked my interest in agriculture and later led me to specialize in this field. Growing up, I observed gendered and social differences in everyday farm activities, such as my grandfather (man) making crop-related decisions while my grandmother (woman) carrying out most field operations. Also, I witnessed unequal treatment on hired laborers. These early observations and experiences raised questions about power, roles and social hierarchies in rural life and motivated me to explore these issues through my research.

Agriculture remains central to livelihood in Nepal and women play crucial role in agri-food system. Their contributions, however, often remain undervalued. Nepal's deeply rooted caste hierarchy continues to shape access to resources, knowledge and decision-making alongside other intersecting social identities such as class, ethnicity, age and marital status. My research seeks to generate a nuanced understanding of how these social inequalities influence participation in agroecology and outcomes towards food sovereignty through the lens of intersectionality.

I am particularly interested in agroecology and food sovereignty as sustainable alternatives to conventional agriculture that focus on local knowledge and community autonomy. Feminist agroecology further challenges patriarchal norms and elevates women's role in both production and reproduction economy. I believe that the combination of intersectionality, feminist agroecology and food sovereignty frameworks will help me critically examine the internal power dynamics in the agri-food system.

The opportunity to conduct this research in collaboration with IWMI within the "Policy Innovation Science Program" is highly valuable. Being embedded in a CGIAR research center will allow me to benefit from interdisciplinary exchange, methodological guidance and engagement with agriculture research while contributing to empirical insights to ongoing work on food system transformation. The JSP scholarship is essential for me to enable the stay and conduct high quality field research. I value JSP's emphasis on combining scientific knowledge with practicality in development. I see this scholarship as an opportunity to strengthen my research skills, understand international agriculture research and contribute from my side to informed and sustainable development interventions by being involved in one of the CGIAR research centers.

In the long term, I aspire to work in development-oriented research to promote socially just and sustainable food systems. The JSP scholarship would be an important step towards this goal by providing academic, institutional and practical foundation necessary for my career growth.

Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Ashmita Acharya

