FOREWORD

Since hearing about the GEE in 2019, I was eager to join the competition and was waiting for the 2020 competition to start. However, in the unfortunate turn of events, the crisis of COVID-19 struck the world and Nepal was not immune to it either. Just before the country-wide lockdown on 24 March, I and my family had traveled back to our village in Kavre from the capital Kathmandu. Rural parts like Kavre lack internet facilities which posed a serious problem in joining the GEE. Due to this, I was not able to apply for the competition before the deadline. However, Deb Gilbertson ma’am was kind enough to let me and my partner join the competition upon hearing our problems. In the meantime, the government announced plans to provide mobile data packs at reasonable prices to help people stay connected at the time of crisis. So, buying plenty of mobile data packs, I buckled up to take on the journey of GEE 2020 which unfolded as follows.
EXHIBITION OF MY PEER-LEADERSHIP

Our team was quite proactive in introducing each other and setting up the communication channel on WhatsApp. I personally messaged everyone who was inactive in the initial days to check if they were facing any problems. However, we were not quite sure where to start and how to structure the entire workflow. We knew we had to select an idea to even begin the workflow. And to ensure we allocate time wisely, I suggested the team fix deadlines on key milestones like choosing ideas, research works, compiling, and formatting the document. Our team leader added us in the basecamp and posted quite a few ideas but I noticed that the ideas were too short and/or focused on charity rather than profit. I didn’t want to point it out as we were just starting out and it would discourage others. So I posted my ideas with preliminary research and a business model to demonstrate how I thought we had to go about it. It worked and members started posting their ideas as I had structured. I contributed 3 out of 9 ideas among the team. Also, I helped the members restructure their ideas and make it understandable by other members.

Then came the moment of truth where everyone had to select an idea. I created an online poll where everyone had to vote for the ideas they liked. In the first poll, my idea had gotten the leading votes but as one of the members hadn’t voted, we had to re-run the poll where the votes were tied between my idea of ‘Community-Scale Biogas’ and another idea ‘Maize leaf handicrafts’. Honestly, I was too obsessed with my idea as I had put in a lot of research and effort into developing it. Yet, when the votes tied again, I reconsidered my views and looked upon the other idea and I was actually surprised that the other one was way better than mine and would be better for the team. Considering this, I backed off and asked the team to go on with the idea of handicrafts. It was quite hard for me to withdraw my idea but I felt it was the right call that would increase the team’s chances of winning.

Additionally, I volunteered for making the company logo and website. Both tasks were taxing and I worked overnight to ensure these huge tasks were completed on time. From choosing the company name and ideas for the logo to developing the website, I took everyone’s suggestions and added my creative touch. I also volunteered for formatting the proposal at the last minute which was initially assigned to the team leader as we had to meet the deadline. Again, I had to pull an all-nighter to ensure everything looked beautiful on the proposal.

Our team leader recognized my effort and decided to make me co-leader which was very encouraging. Yet, I was aware to respect the boundaries and didn’t bypass the team leader while making decisions. Furthermore, I consulted him regarding inactive members and decided to leave behind a member who didn’t participate in any of the team activities to ensure fairness to other hard-working members. Also, I regularly kept in touch with all the team members to get updated on their progress and offered to help if needed. Meanwhile, we also introduced our countries and the cultures and shared photos of the popular cuisines. In fact, I came to know that one of my team members from Columbia (Erika) had a brother who was planning to climb Everest so I introduced him to my Sherpa friend who helped him get information on Everest Climbing.

QUEST FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Although I had participated in a few international competitions, this was my first time working together with people from different countries and diverse backgrounds which was a totally new experience. I didn’t know what to expect out of this competition. Still, looking through a retrospective monocle, I have developed quite a few personal qualities and conquered some of my fears without even realizing it. Talking to people on video calls was a nightmare for me and adding international members and English to the equation, it was a total disaster. But now, after several meetings, I am quite comfortable with it. I learned to keep myself calm and articulate my thoughts clearly when things went wrong (as when our team leader submitted the wrong version of the proposal).

Additionally, as GEE had advised us, I have become more considerate of others’ situations and their views. I have also learned to put the team’s interest before my own interest. I had saved the team member’s names along with their regional time on WhatsApp so I wouldn’t disturb them at the wrong time. If they were not available, I would take on the task myself. I also raised issues time and again on the matters that needed attention and helped resolve them by providing possible solutions. Since I didn’t want to sound commanding, I chose the words carefully and often retyped the messages to sound more considerate. Besides, I also gained a good knowledge of business finances while assisting to prepare the financial forecasting of the business.

GEE THROUGH MY LENS

My first GEE experience has been amazing and our director Deb has been excellent in guiding us through this journey. I have gained a lot of experience with people and tools during the competition.

While formatting the proposal, I tried out an online report making app that offered beautiful templates so I formatted the entire proposal on it but it turned out to be quite a disaster when I found out that you could only download it after you make payment. So I had to re-do everything all over again in MS Word. Also, I would use google docs for a single source/version of the proposal and not use MS Word which led to great confusion regarding versions of proposal and a blunder while uploading the final document. Furthermore, I learned to use basecamp to increase virtual team productivity and zoom to coordinate and share our computer screen with other team members. Paraphrasing and descriptive language proved to be a great tool for me to bridge the language barrier and ensure I understand the members and their thoughts correctly.

GEE provided me with great means to find ways through which I could impact the local community while at the same time running a sustainable business. I was able to contribute to raising the voice for rural women of Nepal on gender inequality and creating a better world for them by planning a business that will help them uplift their economic status through exporting handicrafts made by them.

My journey with GEE has been very fruitful despite the challenges of lockdown and internet problems and was able to focus my efforts on something productive which helped me keep a sane mind during the time of this COVID-19 crisis.