



CASE STUDY, NEPAL: ACHIEVING ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Photo: Women bringing vegetables to market
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ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

Photo: A successful woman farmer inspires others
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The Rural Women's Economic Empowerment programme (known officially as the 'Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women; JP RWEE) is a global initiative that aims to secure livelihoods and rights for rural women. The programme is jointly implemented the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Women (UNW), and the World Food Programme (WFP) and is currently being implemented in seven countries: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger, and Rwanda.



In **Nepal**, the JP RWEE has been supporting rural women farmers' groups in two districts: Rautahat and Sarlahi. The JP RWEE programme in Nepal collaborated closely with local government institutions and set out to achieve three objectives:

- ✔ Improve food and nutrition security;
- ✔ Increase income to secure the livelihoods of rural women; and,
- ✔ Enhance women's leadership and participation in public life and decision making.

To meet these objectives, **the JP RWEE made sure that the programme activities complemented each other and built momentum throughout the intervention.** It achieved this by providing agricultural training, developing leadership and entrepreneurship skills, creating demand for agricultural outputs, and ensuring that the women knew their rights. Working together, all of these actions supported the economic empowerment of rural women in Nepal.

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'I have realized that you cannot always be dependent on your husband, but you are able to do anything and should do it, even through your household.'

– Female participant from Sarlahi

FARMER GROUPS AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Photo: An increase in vegetable production has improved nutrition.

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The programme began with the establishment of farmers groups (a technique developed by the FAO) that were socially, culturally, and religiously diverse, made up of women from the Janjati (25%), Dalit (10%), Muslim (4.8%), Madhesi (50%), and Brahim and Chhetry (9.3%). Farmer groups act as an entry point for training programmes and innovation. The ultimate aim is for these groups to evolve into cooperatives, which would allow community members to request support from the municipality on the behalf of the cooperative members.



COMPLEMENTARY ACTIONS

The four implementing agencies worked together to establish and run the JP RWEE in a way that compounded the success of all areas of programming.

FAO set up the farmers groups and provided each group with improved seeds and polytunnels (plastic hooped tunnels that operate on the same principle as a greenhouse) that could be used to grow vegetables outside of the traditional growing season. **IFAD** introduced the Gender

Action and Learning System (GALs) methodology for mobilizing and empowering women. **UNW** conducted leadership skills development training and provided awareness raising campaigns to help ensure participants knew their rights. At the same time, **WFP** organized the construction of storage centres, created employment opportunities for the most vulnerable women, and developed nutrition improvement plans for schools.

Once farmer groups were established, five additional actions helped establish momentum for the success of the JP RWEE.



Successes in one area were fed into and were amplified into the success of other programming areas, creating forward momentum for the programming as it continued.



Photo: JP RWEE provided training on marketing of produce ©JP RWEE, 2021

Adopting innovative farming techniques to increase vegetable production

Introducing innovative farming techniques to the farmer groups helped increase vegetable production, which could in turn be sold for profit. For example, in 2018 the FAO introduced polytunnels to communities participating in the farming group programme. These polytunnels were then adopted by non-programme farmers living in the same district, thereby increasing vegetable production and leading to higher incomes across entire communities.

Creating market demand for vegetables

As innovative farming techniques were being introduced, the JP RWEE provided training in quality testing, collective production, and marketing of produce within local communities. This has helped create demand for the vegetables grown by the participants on the farming programme – which, in turn, has led to increased profits for the individual farmers, with additional positive impacts for their families.



IMPACT STORY 1: MAIYA



Maiya, 34, is a keen farmer and the chairperson of a women’s farming group supported by JP RWEE. She and her husband live in Sarlahi district with their three children: one daughter, and two sons.

Maiya has been an active member in her local farmer’s group since its inception, helping form the group, establish a plant nursery, and transplanting seedlings, and harvesting the crops. She has also taken an active role in more administrative tasks, such as chairing group meetings, coordinating activities, and marketing. Through her participation in the farming groups, Maiya learned

more efficient methods for growing fresh, commercial vegetables on her land, including chili, tomato, cucumber, aubergines, gourds, cauliflower, and cabbage.

Together with her farming group, Maiya created a marketing campaign for their group’s produce in the local market. In 2019, Maiya earned an impressive 400,000 Nepali Rupees (approx. USD 3,450) selling her vegetables. Her income enabled her family to purchase a motorbike so she could take her produce to the market. When schools closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, she was able to purchase a phone for her son so he could keep up with his online classes. The additional income has benefitted Maiya’s entire family and helped ensure that her son’s education was only minimally impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Women in Maiya’s farming group understand that commercial production of vegetables means increased earnings, which increases empowerment. Through her involvement in JP RWEE, Maiya has developed leadership skills and has the confidence to make decisions that impact her family and her community for the first time in her life.



IMPACT STORY 2: BELI

Increased contributions, increased confidence

Increased production of vegetables has led to new and higher sources of income. Women contribute more to household economy, which in turn increases the status of the women in the family and builds confidence. This increase in confidence, development of leadership skills, and contribution to the household economy shows the community that women are able and capable to work and lead. In turn, the municipalities have a clear reason to invest in women.

Addressing the totality of needs is key

At the same time that farmer training activities were being carried out, the GALs programme – which focused on engaging members of the farmers group – carried out training on self-awareness, helping women identify the barriers in their lives

that were holding them back from achieving their goals, and seek out those who could support their journey. This has helped participants develop the skills and confidence needed to support their livelihood activities. One important issue – women’s mobility – has even made it to local politics: ‘We knew that we had to be involved in the planning process at ward level,’ said one participant in Sarlahi. ‘We had to approve it from ward assembly and then it goes to municipality for budget allocation.’

Addressing the totality of needs – not just providing training on how to grow more vegetables, but ensuring the confidence and knowledge was in place to ensure those vegetables could reach customers in the local markets – has helped ensure that women are aware of their rights and have an equal opportunity to earn a living and provide for their families.

Photo: Participants have developed the confidence needed to support their livelihood activities ©JP RWEE, 2021



Beli, 30, lives with her husband and his family. She joined a JP RWEE supported farmers group and began attending training meetings, learning how to use polytunnels, store produce, and market vegetables in her local community to ensure there would be a demand for their outputs.

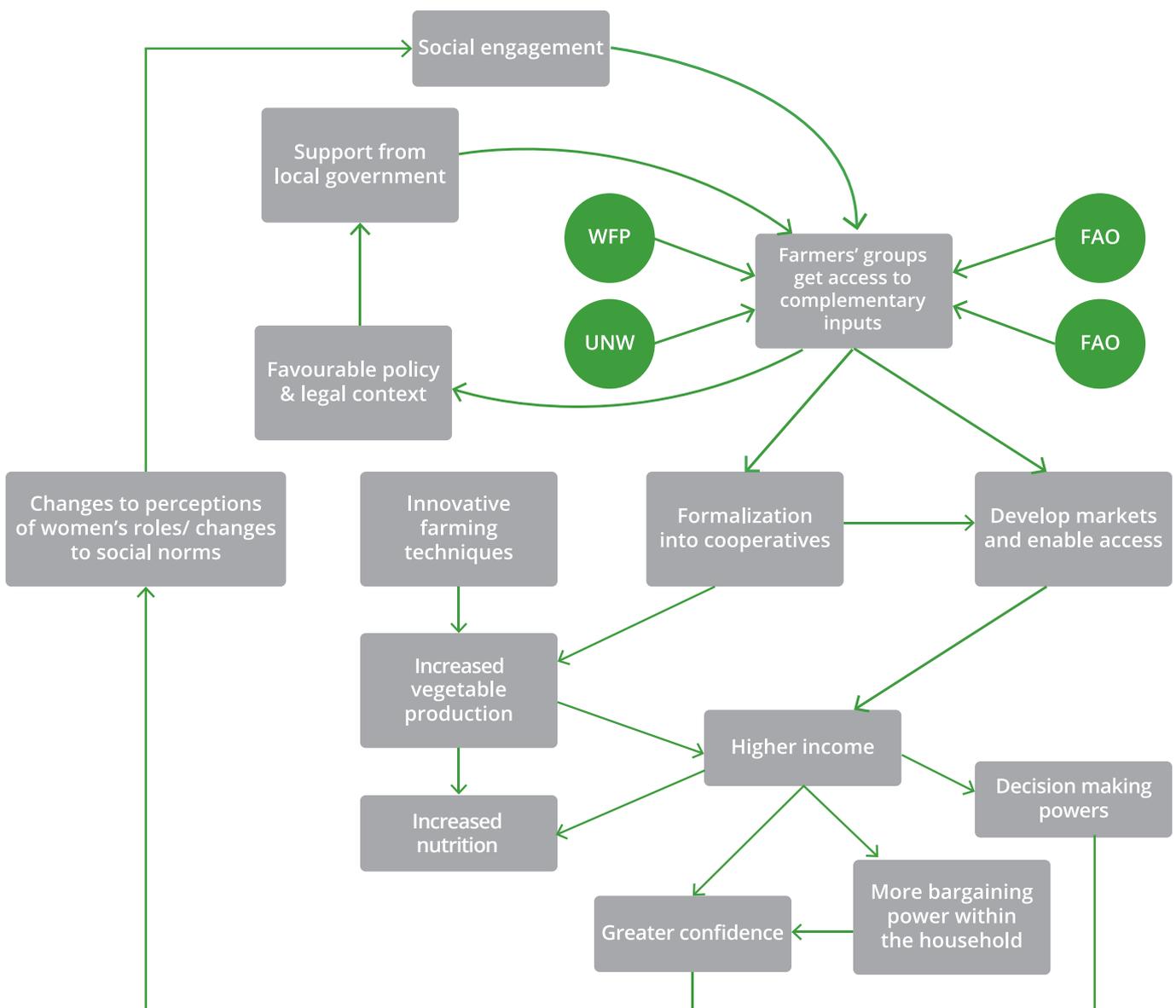
As Beli began selling vegetables, her income and her confidence grew. She began to seek leadership opportunities, taking on the secretary position with her local farming group and teaching her in-laws how to grow vegetables. With the encouragement of her brother-in-law, Beli decided to go one step further. With local elections coming up, she decided to run for a leadership role in her municipality.

Using the skills and confidence she gained from being a part of the JP RWEE women’s group, Beli campaigned for her seat. She won the trust of her community – and was elected to the ward! She is now a serving member in her local government, helping to form decisions that will impact her entire community.

Working together with the Government of Nepal

The policy context in Nepal has been an added advantage to the success of the JP RWEE. Economic empowerment is a key priority of the Government of Nepal, which has added a sense of ownership over the JP RWEE programme, with local government supporting the initiatives taken by the farmer groups.

For example, public hearings have taken place between rural women farmers and the local government. In one case, the local government provided the farmer group with land so they could create more farmer groups and include more women in the programme. Local governments have also provided additional technical and agricultural inputs to the farmer groups, thereby helping to ensure that women's access to markets and more sustainable livelihoods are assured.



ACHIEVEMENTS WORTH CELEBRATING

Photo: Entrepreneurial activities have increased income

©JP RWEE, 2021

The complementary nature of the intervention means that the effects of the activities are amplified across the JP RWEE programme.

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‘We eat more vegetables than before, children are not falling ill frequently, we spend less money for treatment due to adopting good hygiene and the balanced diet.’

– Farmer group participant in Rautahat

The women taking part in the farming groups have gained confidence and status both within the community and within their own families, and there is a significant increase in women’s social and interpersonal skills. For example, **women feel they are more comfortable with speaking, sharing, and educating themselves on farming and food consumption practices.** The increase in vegetables has also led to better nutrition for entire families, which has decreased both ill health, and expenditure of household income on health-related services.

At the same time, the women’s empowerment programme has allowed the women to acquire new social skills, and – significantly – to read and write their own names. This means that **women who were previously uneducated can, at a minimum, spell their names, understand how to sell and handle cash transactions, and sign paper documents.**



Having learned new farming techniques, the participants in the farming groups are able to sell surplus produce for a profit of between 500 – 1,000 Nepali Rupees (NRs) a day (around USD 4.30 – 8.60). Depending on the season, the women themselves report that they can sometimes make as much as NRs 10,000 (roughly USD 86).

With women earning more income, they have taken on a leadership role the family. Importantly, they have stopped discriminating between boy and girl children, and their access to education, health care, food, and nutrition.



IMPACT STORY 3: CHAMELI

Chameli earned NRs 10,000.00 (USD 87.67) at the beginning of the programme. Now, she is earning NRs. 150,000.00 (USD 1,316) per season from selling of fresh vegetables. Her family is also benefitting from extra income of NRs 40,000.00 (USD 350.70) through cereal production, like rice and wheat, which they learnt from Chameli under the

JP RWEE. Earlier, her husband used to work in India as a seasonal labour worker, and now he is working hard in their farm at home. The efforts of this woman, after her enrollment in the training provided under the JP RWEE is bringing home a reliable source of income. This enables her to engage more in the family level decision-making process which was almost unheard of before.

During focus group sessions, the husbands of the women participating in the farming groups reported that they felt that their wives’ involvement in the programme had had a positive impact on their home. Inside the home, they reported taking on increased roles in household chores, seeking opportunities to work in agriculture, and said they had stopped looking for migrant work opportunities. They also reported that their wives were less apprehensive about taking on new tasks in the community, seeking education opportunities for farming businesses, and earning money for their own livelihoods. This has led to growing support community for the improvement of women’s status in the village.

A clear transformation is happening.

JOINT PROGRAMME ON:
Accelerating Progress towards the
Economic Empowerment of Rural Women



This case study has been produced by Mokoro Ltd as part of the Global End-term Evaluation of the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda from 2014 to 2020.

Photo: Poly tunnels have increased vegetable yields and extended the growing season.

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