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Is GAFSP reaching
small-scale food
producers in Nepal?

Introduction: The GAFSP supported AFSP in Nepal

Despite progress being made in recent decades to reduce poverty in Nepal, World Bank figures show that 25.2 percent of the population was still living below the national poverty line in 2010.¹ The proportion of undernourished people decreased from 22.8 percent in 1990-1992 to 9.2 percent of the population in 2010-2012.² Maternal and child malnutrition remains a serious problem.³

Agriculture is key to eradicating hunger in Nepal. More than three quarters of Nepalese households are agricultural households.⁴ The sector provides livelihoods for a large majority of the population, but accounts for only 34 percent of the GDP.⁵ Nepal is a diverse, unequal and fragmented society, with 103 different social groups, distinguished by caste, ethnicity, religion or language.⁶ Poor rural people tend to be concentrated in specific ethnic, caste and marginalized groups, particularly those of the lowest caste (Dalits), indigenous people (Janajatis) and women.

Although women make up 65 percent of the workforce in agriculture,⁷ there is a significant gap between women and men in terms of access to health care, nutrition, education and participation in decision-making. Many rural women live in extreme poverty.

Fair access to productive land is a critical issue in Nepal, as land ownership has traditionally been concentrated in a feudal system. More than 50 percent of Nepal's farmers operate less than 0.5 ha of land and account for less than 19 percent of the total surface of agricultural land in the country.⁸

The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) Multi-Donor Trust Fund, through its Public Sector Window, supports the Nepal Agriculture Food Security Project (AFSP). The project aims to improve food security and nutrition through increased food availability (by increasing the productivity of crops and livestock) and through improved dietary intake (by promoting diversified diets and improved feeding and caring practices for pregnant and nursing women, and children up to 2 years old). Nineteen of Nepal's 75 districts are targeted by the project, with a focus on the Mid-Western and Far-Western regions. The project set out to directly reach nearly 162,500 beneficiary households of 190 Village Development Committees (VDC) over a period of five

Glossary

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| AFSP | Nepal Agriculture Food Security Project |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| DADO | District Agriculture Development Office |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| FCHV | Female Community Health Volunteer |
| FFS | Farmer Field School |
| FO | Farmer Organization |
| GAFSP | Global Agriculture and Food Security Program |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| MOAD | Ministry of Agricultural Development |
| NARC | Nepal Agricultural Research Council |
| NGO | Non Governmental Organization |
| VDC | Village Development Committee |
| VMF | Village Model Farm |

1 World Bank, Country Poverty Brief, Nepal, October 2017 : http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/B2A3A7F5-706A-4522-AF99-5B1800FA3357/9FE8B43A-5EAE-4F36-8838-E9F58200CF49/60C691C8-EAD0-47BE-9C8A-B56D672A29F7/Global_POV_SP_CPB_NPL.pdf

2 FAO, Regional overview of food insecurity Asia and the Pacific. Towards a food secure Asia and the Pacific, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2015: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4624e.pdf>

3 World Bank, Nepal Agriculture and Food Security Project, Project Information Document - Concept Stage, 2012 : <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/247321468758137220/pdf/PID0Print0P12890500530201201338406982864.pdf>

4 Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal, Nepal Living Standards Survey 2010-2011, Statistical Report Volume II: cbs.gov.np/nada/index.php/catalog/37/download/745

5 FAO, Nepal at a glance, FAO in Nepal: <http://www.fao.org/nepal/fao-in-nepal/nepal-at-a-glance/en/>

6 Rajendra Pradhan and Ava Shrestha, Ethnic and caste diversity : Implications for development, Working Paper Series No. 4, Nepal Resident Mission, ADB, 2005: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/28686/wp4.pdf>

7 FAO, Women in Agriculture. Closing the Gender gap, State of Food and Agriculture, 2010-2011 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e.pdf>

8 Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal, Nepal Living Standards Survey 2010-2011, Statistical Report Volume II: cbs.gov.np/nada/index.php/catalog/37/download/745.



TERRACED FIELDS IN THE VALLEY BELOW KALIKOT IN NORTH WEST NEPAL

CREDIT: LOK CHANDRA THAPA/ ACTIONAID

years (2013-2017), including approximately 150,000 of the regions' poorest farmers, 50,000 young mothers, children and adolescent girls, and 25,000 agricultural workers.

The total funding for the project was US\$58 million, with a US\$46.5 million contribution from the GAFSP, and a US\$11.5 million contribution from the Government of Nepal. The World Bank is the supervising entity for the project, while the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations provides technical assistance. The project has been jointly implemented by the Ministry of Agricultural Development, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Livestock Development.

The AFSP has four main interrelated components that combine to reach the overall project objective:

| COMPONENTS | SUB COMPONENTS | EXPECTED OUTCOMES |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Technology Development and Adaptation | (i) Development of improved production technologies for crops (ii) Development of improved production technologies for livestock | Increased productivity of crops and livestock and improved management practices by the project area farmers |
| 2. Technology Dissemination and Adoption | (i) Support for crop production (ii) Support for livestock production (iii) Institutional strengthening of extension services | Improved crop varieties and livestock breeds and management practices of both disciplines including on-farm water management and farm level post-harvest value addition |
| 3. Food and Nutritional Status Enhancement | (i) Enhancing food availability for targeted households and alleviating seasonal food shortages (ii) Improving feeding and caring practices by promoting Behavior Change Communications (BCC) providing nutrition education to farmers groups (iii) Institutional strengthening and capacity building through equipping nutrition laboratories and training frontline extension workers on pro-nutrition actions | Increased household level food availability, diversified diets and improved feeding and caring practices for pregnant and nursing women and children between 6-24 months old |
| 4. Project Management | (i) Interventions are properly planned, coordinated and aligned with project design and development objectives (ii) Implementation and institutional arrangements and activities are in line with relevant fiduciary and safeguards policies, procedures and standards (iii) There is due monitoring, oversight, reporting and sharing of learning of project implementation and the resulting outputs and outcome | The project is efficiently managed through institutional system coordination and strengthening |

Scope of this study

ActionAid and AFA (the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development) are both members of the GAFSP Steering Committee, representing Northern CSOs and Southern CSOs in Asia respectively. They commissioned a study to look at the successes and lessons learned from the AFSP implementation, with a focus on small-scale food producers; women producers; the engagement and participation of producer and civil society organizations; and climate resilience. Even though women's empowerment and climate resilience are not explicit specific objectives of the AFSP, ActionAid and AFA consider that such goals are key to any successful attempt at enhancing food security and poverty alleviation in the long term.

The research for this report included a desk review of relevant reports, focus group discussions, individual interviews, observations and validation of findings from the field with the concerned stakeholders. The areas where the research took place were selected in consultation with the GAFSP Project Management Unit (PMU) based on their remoteness, accessibility, their level of socio-economic development and access to services. Three districts (Jumla, Kalikot and Surkhet) in the Mid-Western Region and two districts (Doti and Dadeldhura) in the Far-Western Region were visited and meetings and discussions were held with a total of 132 farmers, 107 women and 25 men from targeted farmer groups (Farmer Field Schools and Village Model Farms). Interviews were undertaken with farmers, government officials, project facilitators, technicians, NGO staff, national-level AFSP staff (FAO and MOAD) and representatives from producer organizations at the local, regional and national levels.

Key findings on the project implementation

The AFSP has been very successful in reaching the most deprived households and in focusing on women. It has brought about positive change in terms of agricultural and livestock development, in promoting nutrition security through agriculture, and by supporting livelihoods. The national Steering Committee included a FO representative. District level NGOs were involved in the implementation and FOs participated in project monitoring missions. However, important decisions around the variety of seeds and the livestock promoted were taken without taking into account the differing views of the FOs. In the long run, the sustainability of the project will depend on whether the local level farmers groups continue to be active and farmers continue to use the technologies, breeds and varieties that are associated with costlier production inputs when GAFSP support for the project ends.

1. Does the project target small-scale food producers?

The AFSP targets 19 districts in the Mid-Western and Far-Western regions, two remote hill and mountain zones that are the most affected by hunger and poverty in Nepal, with poverty rates of 45 percent and 46 percent respectively against a national average of 25 percent. Agricultural holdings per household in these areas are the lowest in the country.

The selection of beneficiaries was conducted by local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government staff from the implementing agencies, with a focus on identifying the most vulnerable households according to a range of issues that included gender, caste, ethnicity, disability, remoteness, health status, and education level.

"In Kalikot District, five out of the 10 Village Development Committees (VDCs) targeted by the AFSP are the most deprived VDCs. The VDCs were categorized on the basis of progress status at the social (health, education, gender), economic and caste discrimination levels. For the selection of households, we included more than 60 percent of Dalit women, poorer households, remote households, physically disabled people, single women, deprived women because of polygamous marriage." — Rabindra Shahi, Chairperson of local NGO RDN, implementing partner of the AFSP

The project has successfully reached the most vulnerable women and small-scale producers in remote districts that are hardest hit by poverty. In some of the project locations, most of the households are food secure for only three months of the year, and many men have to look for paid work outside the village or abroad. The district-based NGOs recruited to assist in the implementation of the project facilitated the process of identifying participants from geographically remote, marginalized caste groups, especially Dalits (untouchables in the caste system), Janajatis (indigenous ethnic groups), single women, and physically disabled people.

In some cases, mobilizing Dalit people to take part in agriculture-related activities proved to be a challenge as people from their caste are normally not involved in farming. However, including support to vegetable growing and livestock activities, small grants to household groups, and mother and child health and nutrition activities (including through the 1,000 Golden Days nutrition education campaign⁹) in the project, attracted more Dalit women and enabled them to participate in the AFSP.

"The biggest challenge we faced was to mobilize our Dalit households. They do not own land, and have hardly any agricultural production. Our project facilitators mobilized their enthusiasm by bringing them into the mothers health groups and encouraged them to participate by preparing healthier and nutritious food for children's survival and better health." — Rabindra Shahi, Chairperson local NGO RDN, implementing partner of the AFSP

Despite their focus on targeting people from marginalized castes and ethnic groups, NGOs and staff implementing the project on the ground sometimes found it difficult to maintain a significant proportion of beneficiaries from those groups. It was not always possible to include the lower castes and landless people because of the limited number of beneficiaries per community and the power relations in these areas.

"We focused on women from Dalit and Janajati groups in Chhatiwan village; however non Dalit poor and deprived people were also selected. Despite our sincere efforts to bring a majority of Dalits and Janajati women into the group, the group of VMF consists of 4 Janajati women, 7 Dalits and 14 non Dalit women." — Ganga Malla, Female Community Health Volunteer, Chhatiwan, Doti District

In general, the project activities were successful in reaching some of the most vulnerable individuals within the regions selected, even though activities relating to the provision of improved inputs (improved seeds, new goat breeds) might not be sustainable for the poorest farmers after the project ends, due to the higher costs of inputs provided.

⁹ The Golden 1000 Days Public Awareness Campaign is a partnership between the Government of Nepal (National Planning Commission and Ministry of Health/National Health Education Information Communication Centre), The European Union (EU) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for improving the nutrition situation of women and children in Nepal. It was launched in 2016: <http://www.nfsp.gov.np/PublicationFiles/a9ac005c-e1c7-4492-964f-358b54731006.pdf>

2. How has the project reached small-scale food producers?

a. Increase in agricultural production

The farmers reported that the inputs and technical assistance provided enabled them to start new agricultural activities and increase their production. For example, the provision of seeds and plastic sheets for polytunnels, together with training in agricultural practices and techniques and the provision of small grants to scale up production, has resulted in farmers being able to grow off-season vegetables in winter. This was not possible without the polytunnels. The support provided in terms of livestock, technical assistance and small grants for farmer groups also helped to increase the production of chickens, eggs and goats.

In Kalikot District, the adoption of new equipment, new agricultural techniques and improved seeds by the Lagansheel Farmer Field School has led to an increase and diversification of food production and availability. The farmers first adopted a new variety of potato, before receiving a small grant from the AFSP to grow off-season vegetables (tomato, radish, cauliflower, cucumber, pumpkin, etc.) in winter under polytunnels.

“We can handle growing vegetables even when we get snow, the winter cannot stop us from eating greens any more. While we grow vegetables, women also raise chickens for eggs and meat. This is a complete form of food security for us.” — Khimlall, Chairperson of Lagansheel Krishak Pathshala (Lagansheel FFS) ward 7, Fui Mahadev, Kalikot

b. Access to improved production technologies

The AFSP activities have given significant attention to providing farmer groups with equipment, technical training, networking, and inputs to change their crop and livestock practices and increase their outputs. Farmers supported by the project raised improved breeds of chickens and goats, and were able to get a better price in the local markets. They have been able to grow off-season vegetables in winter under polytunnels, and increase their production of wheat and potatoes, using new varieties. Some farmers were also supported to become seed producers for the improved varieties of wheat and potato. The improved seeds had been locally tested by the Nepal Agricultural Research Council (NARC).

“The District Agriculture Development Office (DADO) gave me 12 kg of wheat seeds (WK1204 variety), free of cost for adoption testing. I planted 2 kg and distributed the rest among 25 farmers. I produced 1.5 ton of wheat seeds and supplied them to the DADO to distribute them to other farmers. This variety gave double production and does not need much water.” — Gyanraj Neupane, Chairperson of the Chimara Malika Seed Producer Farmer Group in Gothichaur, Jumla District

Aside from the positive results linked to the introduction of new technologies by the project, there are concerns about the process and methodology of giving improved seeds and livestock to small-scale food producers, and the sustainability of its impact. The decision to introduce and promote new seeds varieties and goat breeds seems to have been heavily driven by the NARC and DADO with limited consideration of the farmers' views. The continued success of the project after the funding period will depend on the long running costs and technical support needs for continuing to use these crop varieties and breeds of livestock. DADO has provided free seeds so far, but the small-scale food producers fear that they will be dependent on privately run agribusiness companies in the future. Finally, the



long-term sustainability of introducing more expensive non-native goat breeds, whose ability to adapt to the local context and maintenance costs are still unknown, has been questioned by some parties.

“[The project could] promote locally suitable goats which will be more resistant to the local situation and easy to feed. The treatment of Boer goats could be impossible whereas the treatment of locally improved goats is simpler.” — Dr. Keshab Khadka, Association of All Nepal Peasants Farmers’ Federation, producer organization representative in the AFSP Steering Committee

MUNKALA BUDA GROWS SPINACH AND OTHER GREEN VEGETABLES IN HER POLYTUNNEL AND NOW HAS NUTRITIOUS FOOD THROUGHOUT THE HARSH WINTER MONTHS

CREDIT: LOK CHANDRA THAPA/ ACTIONAID

c. Increase in income

In general, farmers saw an increase in income as they were able to sell vegetables, chicken, goats, and eggs, as well as improve their domestic consumption, and are motivated to continue doing this beyond the end of the project. For many farmers, this was the first time they could earn cash from vegetables other than potatoes. The provision of more productive chicken and goat breeds has also increased their income, as they are able to sell the chicks and baby goats. In Silkhaye, Kalikot district, a model hatchery was established by a Farmer Field School group thanks to the initial improved breed chickens, technical assistance and an additional grant provided by the AFSP. The “Kriyasheel Mahila Kukhura Palan Samuha” (Active Women Poultry Group) now sells cross-bred chickens for Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,500 per chicken, instead of Rs 500 for a traditional native chicken.



“I got one of my she-goats crossed with the Boer breed and she gave birth to 10 billy goats, at an interval of six months. Within 18 months, I made more than Rs 200,000. I bought some land for agricultural purpose and continue to raise cross breed of Boer goats.” — Khima, member of the Farmer Field School, in Doti

ACCORDING TO HASTIKALA BIRKATTA MAGAR THE BOER BREED GOATS ARE THREE TIMES MORE PROFITABLE THAN NATIVE GOATS

CREDIT: LOK CHANDRA THAPA/ ACTIONAID

Our field research showed that women farmers used the additional crop or livestock production to improve food availability at the household level, while men preferred to sell it. In some instances, the distance to the market played a role in limiting the potential income increase from increased agricultural production.

While the AFSP successfully supports livelihood development of small-scale food producers, some concerns were raised about the sustainability and the distribution of the resulting increase in income. It remains to be seen whether, in the long run, all small-scale producers will be willing and able to afford the additional production costs (medicines, plastic sheets, seeds) of more input-intensive improved varieties and breeds, and if the market opportunities for Boer goats created by the project will be sustained when the project ends.

“I couldn’t spend any money on my kids before. I barely had enough for household expenses and for saving. But now, both my husband and I save money every month. We pay for our children’s education, health expenses, and the rest is saved.” — Kaushila Thapa, Treasurer of the Samriddhi Agriculture Cooperative. Namaskar.

d. Food security and nutrition enhancement

One key success of the project is its contribution to nutrition security through better integration of agriculture and nutrition, and positive behavior change. The coordinated work by the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MoAD), the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Livestock Development (MoLD), and the support to Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs) and Village Model Farms (VMFs) provided key nutrition messages on



WOMEN IN TATOPANI
HAVE RECEIVED
TRAINING TO GROW
NEW FOOD CROPS AND
INCLUDE THEM IN THEIR
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breastfeeding, young child feeding practices and maternal health, as well as technical assistance, equipment and seeds to grow diversified food at the household level.

“Besides nutrition, the AFSP has contributed to reducing the workload of women and mothers in order to take care of their children, prepare nutritious diets, and maintain sanitation and hygiene. It has also promoted food security through agriculture and livestock inputs and services.” — Dr Kaushal Ali, Department of Health Office, Kalikot District

Before the project, FCHVs used to be mostly supported through health kits and trainings. Receiving more inputs (seeds, chickens, grants to build hen houses, training in agriculture and livestock) increased enthusiasm among farmers and increased their legitimacy as role models. The nutrition activities on the Village Model Farms did not only benefit the mothers of the young children targeted by the project, as other women became interested in changing their nutritional behavior. The impact of changed mother and child health practices is visible through fewer child deaths in some villages.

“Before our mothers would not give their breast milk to babies, thinking that it would be harmful for the child and would cause stomach ache. But now the mothers listen to my advice on how it’s very nutritious for babies and give their own breast milk. The Department of Health office staff now teach that mothers should be given fish, meat and greens.” — Junkali Shahi, Female Community Health Volunteer, Jumla

e. Strengthening of local farmers’ groups

The AFSP project has turned the pre-existing mothers’ health groups into Village Model Farm (VMF) groups, with the aim of promoting mother and child nutrition and health innovations. It also supported the creation of Farmer Field Schools (FFSs), where training and testing are provided for farmers as a group. In some cases new groups of farmers were created. This strategy of service delivery through VMFs and FFSs has successfully strengthened the farmers’ collective effort. Within the VMFs, women farmers learned not only about nutritional behavior but also started saving money as groups. In VMFs and FFSs, farmers have organized to apply for small grants to the AFSP to develop or scale up agriculture or livestock activities.

The FFS and VMF approach has been successful in terms of farmer mobilization, technical assistance, awareness raising and other support for farmers. However, it remains to be seen how the autonomy and strength of farmer groups will be sustained in the future when the service and input delivery of the project ends. The project included space for farmer representation (see below), but could have provided more support to strengthen farmer organizations and enable them to build effective representation and influence at all levels of the project, including at the district level, where significant project management was taking place.

“We involve the farmers only at the implementation sites, still in the traditional way, only as recipients of the program.” — Chandra Bahadur Buda, Plant Protection Officer, Jumla focal person of AFSP

3. How does the project engage small-scale food producers, farmer organizations and civil society organizations?

a. Engagement and participation of small-scale food producers, especially women

During the design phase of the AFSP, small-scale producers were mainly represented by national and regional level farmer representatives. Consultation workshops were held in regional venues, but given the time constraints and the remoteness of the project areas, most of the farmer participants came from the main town in the region with few from the remote project locations. The farmers interviewed reported that the consultations did not allow for an in-depth exchange on local indigenous food habits and knowledge, and that farmers’ knowledge and concerns were not always reflected in decisions taken with regards to the project.

During the implementation phase of the project, farmers were consulted by the local NGOs in charge of the implementation, including for the identification of the program participants. They were also mobilized to participate in Village Model Farm or Farmer Field School groups. Investigation in the field showed women and men farmers were satisfied with their participation in VMFs and FFSs. In all activities, both women and men farmers had space and scope to decide to develop proposals to apply for funding support. They implemented the activities themselves through collective decisions, with the support of NGO facilitators and technicians from the departments of health, agriculture and livestock.

Two farmers (one woman and one man) participate in the District Environmental Social Management Committee of the project. Although the project management has included men and women farmers in the project monitoring, this has been implemented rather formally. Farmers’ consultation, ownership and influence over the project approach, strategies, impacts and sustainability could be improved to ensure their views are taken into account in the management of the project. For example, it appears that farmer beneficiaries did not play a role in deciding which crop varieties and production and livestock breeds would be promoted through the project, but were simply provided with “improved” ones.

b. Engagement and participation of farmer and civil society organizations

The importance of the role of the local NGOs as the main implementing partners of the AFSP has been acknowledged by all parties. It was recognized that they have been efficient in reaching the most deprived target groups, and delivering services and activities on behalf of

the project. Although the Ministry of Agricultural Development coordinates its implementation, the AFSP is practically implemented by the district-based NGOs.

Farmer representation in the project is organized at both district and national levels. One elected farmer representative sits on the AFSP national Steering Committee, while one woman farmer and one male farmer are invited to coordination meetings and monitoring visits at the district level. However, the AFSP seems to involve NGOs and producer organizations as project implementation partners rather than as strategic partners or supporters of community empowerment. External observers and the national farmer representative remarked that farmers are not sufficiently involved in the strategic decision-making of the project.

“During the initial stage, the National Project Director used to consult with me about farmers’ needs and issues, besides inviting me to all steering committee and major meetings. However after this, I was not invited to consultations beside a few very formal Steering Committee meetings. Now, I do not feel very close to the project. Furthermore, in the later days, I have not even been invited to meetings. I have the experience that the government bureaucratic culture dominates the project. The role of CSOs remains to be a parallel implementer and that of the farmer organizations to be an ornamental condition to justify the AFSP’s multi stakeholders’ partnership approach.” — Dr Keshab Khadka, representative of producer organizations in the AFSP Steering Committee

Stronger civil society and farmer organization involvement could have benefited the AFSP on strategic issues and farmers’ rights, especially with regards to land issues and agricultural inputs. In this regard, the inclusion of rights-based CSOs as stakeholders in the AFSP could have brought a useful land rights and policy influence lens.

FARMERS IN THE HILLTOP VILLAGE OF BHARTA USED TO ONLY GROW RICE AND CORN. NOW THEY ARE GROWING A VARIETY OF HEALTHY FOOD

CREDIT: LOK CHANDRA THAPA/ ACTIONAID



“AFSP provided a foundation to promote farmers’ longer-term strategic interests. The producer organizations could have promoted the newly enacted land right policies for women and the landless farmers along with strengthening the Farmer Field School and Village Model Farm strategy. However parties did not seem to be interested in digging out the basic constraints of the smallholders and women farmers. They could have been enabled to exercise their user rights on ‘public land’ for cultivation. AFSP should promote such innovations in the next phase.” — Jagat Deuja, Executive Director of Community Self Reliant Centre (CSRC), leader of the national campaign on smallholders’ land rights

4. How does the project reach and benefit women?

The AFSP is clearly a women-focused project. It has successfully targeted and reached women as a priority throughout most activities. It is estimated that almost 70 percent of the participants in the Farmer Field School (FFS) and Village Model Farm (VMF) groups are women. All members of the VMF groups are women, with pregnant women and mothers of children under two years of age targeted, while FFS groups are 50 percent men and 50 percent women. There have also been cases where women who were not members of the group copied and adopted some of the nutrition change promoted within the VMF groups, with the encouragement of the groups’ members, who wanted to avoid exclusion mechanisms.

The AFSP has been very popular among women farmers, since they benefited directly from nutrition and health education, received support and equipment to reduce their workload and new technologies and technical assistance to grow vegetables and develop livestock livelihoods (poultry, eggs, goats). The mother and child nutrition and health education entry point through Female Community Health Volunteers and Village Model Farms, together with the support to agriculture and livestock activities, has proven very effective in mobilizing women.

Aside from benefiting from the AFSP activities, the implementation of the project has brought about positive economic, social and political change for women within their communities and at the household level. Through the VMF groups, women started group saving and organized themselves to apply for AFSP grants. Thanks to the project, women can open bank accounts in their names and with women’s witness signatures. In all-female groups but also in mixed FFS groups, women have held leadership positions.

“I feel very proud that my mobilization has developed the rural women’s ability to speak in public, before they would not even say their names in public, now you see how they were explaining their experiences and telling you about their aspirations and the ways how to address those by themselves.” — Tulsi Shahi, Project facilitator of the Nagma Village Development Committee and Fui Mahadev Village Development Community, Kalikot District

The share of responsibilities for household work and taking care of children has also started to change thanks to the project. The childcare and nutrition sessions and joint planning for Model Health Village have successfully mobilized some men.

“Our men now help us in household work, because we go to meetings and agriculture production trainings, and our husbands need to help us in our household work. It was a humiliation for our men to carry their own children. Now they take care of the children and love them. Our men help us in the kitchen when we are out in meetings. We women



were very shy before but now we can speak in public.” — Women members of Tatopani Village Model Farm group, Jumla District

“The program encouraged women and men to share childcare roles, which before were only for women. Now through nutritional and child care education sessions through AFSP, men started to appreciate their own roles to take care of children, including cooking for children.” — Dr Kaushal Ali, Department of Health Office, Kalikot District

POLYTUNNELS IN TATOPANI MEAN THAT FARMERS CAN NOW GROW A WIDE RANGE OF NUTRITIOUS GREEN VEGETABLES

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Women’s workloads have been substantially reduced thanks to the introduction of equipment such as corn shellers, seed grading machines, processing mills, and improved cooking stoves. Before, it took them at least four hours to travel to a mill to get their grains processed, and another six to eight hours every three days to collect firewood from the forests.

The AFSP has clearly benefited a high number of women and improved their position and livelihoods, but it could have been more systematic in supporting women’s empowerment. A gender analysis of the agriculture, food security and nutrition activities could have been conducted, and a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) action plan integrated in the project. This could have allowed for an analysis on how the activities address the gender gap in strategic power relationships and decision-making with regards to household productive assets and benefits. This lack of strategic analysis of the gender context has led to some shortcomings in the project implementation with regards to gender. There is a high proportion of men among the project’s technical experts, and a lack of options to manage women’s household responsibilities in order to increase their participation in consultation meetings, and in meetings with government offices and other stakeholders.



A more ambitious gender dimension for the AFSP in the future could include dealing with the issue of women's rights, especially the right to access natural resources. Land ownership is a major determinant factor of decision-making power in the Nepali society. The opportunity of promoting the implementation of the joint land ownership policy for men and women has not been explored by the project. One example of the impact of the limited work on the issue of women's access to productive resources was raised during the field study. The project has been installing improved cooking stoves to increase the efficiency of wood use, but community access to forests through the Community Forestry Program, including to gather wood for domestic use, is not formalized and protected in all the project locations.

"Our next effort will be to eliminate discriminatory norms on women's land ownership. We have a Citizens' Awareness Forum, a Women's Development Office, the Himchuli Saving Cooperative, and the AFSP trained skills, which can be used to proceed on organizing women's discussions for equal wage at work, and equality in land and inheritance rights. As well as working towards the AFSP agenda on livelihoods and nutrition, we should also discuss and try to get all inequalities abolished in our Village Development Committee." — Tulsi Shahi, Project facilitator of the Nagma Village Development Committee and Fui Mahadev Village Development Community, Kalikot District

FARMERS IN JUMLA RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM THE AFSP TO IMPROVE WHEAT PRODUCTION

CREDIT: LOK CHANDRA THAPA/ ACTIONAID

5. Does the project make communities more climate resilient?

Nepal has a high exposure to climate change and poverty, and a low adaptive capacity. It is the fourth most at-risk country according to the Climate Vulnerability Index.¹⁰

Climate resilience is formally taken into account in the AFSP as all activities need to go through an assessment of potential impacts on climate change vulnerability.

“We are supporting farmers in building community resilience by introducing them to some vital skills, such as, changing cropping pattern, micro irrigation techniques, ponds, sprinklers, rain water harvesting technique, as well as conducting social and environmental safeguard assessments of every activity of the project prior to its implementation, so as not to produce any environmental hazardous impacts.” — Sunil Kr Singh, DADO, Kalikot

The development of micro-irrigation techniques (ponds, sprinklers, rain water harvesting techniques) and off-season vegetable growing under polytunnels supports agricultural livelihoods and makes them less weather-dependent. In a more indirect way, the reported increase in food availability and increase in income may lead to improving households' ability to cope with external shocks, including ones related to the climate.

However, even though climate resilience has been an integral concept in the AFSP interventions, there were no interventions specifically aimed at building climate resilience at the community level such as doing a mapping of vulnerabilities and risks, developing community adaptation plans, allocating budgets or setting up climate resilience funds, and defining roles and responsibilities, networking and building alliances. None of the communities visited by the researchers understood the concept of a community resilience fund, apart from the Dadeldhura Alital Farmers Group, where a NGO not linked with the AFSP had facilitated a climate vulnerability mapping and had engaged the communities in resilient building activities.

Recommendations

The AFSP is an example of effective integration of public health, nutrition and food security, and agricultural development. The project has been successful in reaching women farmers and vulnerable households, and its focus on mobilizing and supporting Village Model Farm and Farmer Field School groups should be praised. The following recommendations could improve the sustainability, resilience and gender dimensions of future interventions after the completion of the AFSP.

On the general project approach and strategy:

- The project needs to consider how to further support and strengthen CSOs and producer organizations so they can better organize farmer groups, improve farmer representation at the subnational and national level, and support the affected communities to influence government policy. One option could be to provide specific capacity building support to FOs so they can take on the organizing role.

¹⁰ World Bank, Nepal Agriculture and Food Security Project, Project Information Document - Concept Stage, 2012 : <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/247321468758137220/pdf/PID0Print0P12890500530201201338406982864.pdf>

- The project should adopt a consensus building approach to decision-making in order to better consider the CSOs and producer organizations' inputs in the design, implementation and general management of the project. In case of divergent views, adequate time and space should be devoted to building consensus, and FOs/CSOs should be informed where their recommendations have been considered.
- The project would benefit from adopting a rights-based approach to its intervention strategy, especially with regards to access and management of natural resources. Including CSOs that promote human rights, women's rights, and rights to human and natural resources, and food sovereignty as strategic partners would be a useful way to do this.

On women's empowerment:

- Gender analysis and impact assessments need to be systematized at all levels of activity planning and implementation.
- Women's rights and women's empowerment need to be integrated in the skills and curriculum used in the recruitment of project staff and integrated in the project's human resource capacity building and support.

On climate resilience and sustainability of the project:

- The project needs to go beyond social and environmental assessments of planned activities and consider integrating a community-based or community-managed resilience building approach, with activities such as community-level vulnerability and risk mapping, action planning, alliance building, community resilience budgeting or funding.
- The project needs to turn the claimed focus on local and indigenous knowledge into action at the project implementation level by looking for ways to promote traditional food crops, selecting and adapting local varieties and breeds, and involving communities in defining agricultural research needs and actions.
- The project should develop a clear sustainability plan to ensure the sustainability of the supported farmer and women groups, and the sustainability of activities that have relied heavily on the distribution of costly inputs and equipment. Building farmers' autonomy with regards to agricultural and livestock inputs and food consumption should be a key objective of the final project implementation phase and any next steps.

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