Nepal Farming and Agriculture

Rural farm workers who might otherwise have joined Nepal’s wave of urbanization band together to raise incomes, by double cropping and branding their produce.

Farmers organized themselves to form Shree Katahardanda Agriculture Cooperative, starting with a small, leased piece of land and 13 members. Today, the cooperative’s land has more than doubled and the cooperative includes 49 male and female members. Photo: Ariel Javellana/ ADB

By the numbers

- **22** hours per day saved from no longer needing to collect water in Parsa
- **9** small irrigation subprojects
- **40** new market and collection centre subprojects

Source: Project Data Sheet. Status of Operation/Construction or Implementation Progress

Sanischare, Jhapa - Never, not even in her dreams, had Anita Upreti, a farmer in a small village in southeastern Nepal, ever imagined that a farmer could live a comfortable life. The farming life, she thought, was about laboring all day in the scorching sun or in the pouring rain and barely making enough to feed the family. But today, it is not only possible for her to imagine a better life;
she actually has one.

"When my husband and I migrated from the mountains to this village, we had only NRs14,000 (about $160) cash in hand and nothing else," she says. "Today, we have a house, a shop, farmland, and other assets."

Her husband, who formerly worked in Qatar, has returned to be with her, and they work together on the farm, in Katahardanda Village.

"Now, we have a stable income from selling the vegetables we produce on the farm," says Uprety. "We have been able to give a better education to the children, and I am happier because my husband is with the family, which makes all the difference."

A cooperative effort

The subsistence farmers of Katahardanda received support through Sahara Nepal, a local nongovernment organization (NGO), under the Commercial Agriculture Development Project, funded by a grant from ADB to the Government of Nepal. The aim is to improve the agricultural sector by providing modern tools, techniques, and technology to farmers through community-based cooperatives.

"The project has brought together key stakeholders - farmers, traders, and processors - to work together toward improving the efficiency of production, marketing, and processing of high-value crops," said Kenichi Yokoyama, ADB country director for Nepal. "In doing so, the project has established value chains and accelerated the process of agricultural commercialization in the region."

Giri Raj Upreti, Anita's husband, has become a successful entrepreneur, but he says could not have done it without the help of his village's Shree Katahardanda Agriculture Cooperative, of which he was a founding member. The cooperative started with a small, leased landholding and 13 members. Today the landholding has more than doubled, and the cooperative has 87 members (male-46, female- 41) with 440,100 rupees share capital. At present, the landholding is 22 bigha with annual sale and production of 11 million rupees Giri Raj has turned over part of his house for the cooperative's office.

"We realized the importance and the benefits of working through organized groups like the cooperative, and Sahara Nepal helped us in the process," he says. "Because of the cooperative ... we don't need to take out loans from businessmen at punitive interest rates. We no longer have to go all the way to Siliguri [on the India border] for seed, as it is easily available at the cooperative."

Banding together has helped subsistence farmers better access support, such as training on high-value crops, integrated pest management, marketing, and processing. Through the cooperative, farmers have also taken educational tours to districts where similar initiatives have been successful.

Transforming lives

Among the farmers who have benefitted from the cooperative's support is Man Bahadur Sampang Rai. He used to work as a field laborer, and could barely manage to feed his large family. Today he is building a new house for himself and his family to live in.

"My life was transformed after I became a member of the cooperative," he says. "I received training on growing vegetables like tomatoes and chilies. It was not as if farming itself was new to me; but the support that was provided through the cooperative made all the difference."

The cooperative is also playing an important role in helping farmers understand the risks of using pesticides and reducing the use of chemical fertilizers. Farmers are increasingly realizing the health and environmental risks, and are looking to organic fertilizers as an alternative, even experimenting with local herbs.

Meanwhile, farmers are having increasing success with high-value crops such as tomatoes and peppers, and have begun building a collection center for the distribution and efficient marketing of the produce - and for processing surplus vegetables.

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Village-level cooperatives empower women by encouraging them to form women's groups and receive training in small-scale production - making tomato paste, pickles, chips, and bamboo handicrafts.

"My heart used to pound whenever anyone from outside came to talk to me, but I am confident now," says cooperative member Radhika Ghimire, who says she has learned more about seasonal farming.

"I plant two to three cycles of crops and this gives me a good income. I am no longer dependent on my husband. In fact, I give him money sometimes when he needs it, and I am happy to be paying my children's school fees."

The group practices savings techniques for their new incomes. "We have individual savings and group savings. We have [each] started saving NRs100 ($1.16) a month," says Deuka Uprety, member of the cooperative. "We plan to engage in productive activities by involving more women with the money collected."

Uprety, who is single, says: "I have a home now and savings for rainy days. With the good income I make from farming, I can afford a better living and food. My health has improved and I can work more."

She adds that now that women earn more, they are also more confident to participate in other activities such as village cultural festivals.

"We recently built a community hall for our (women's group) meetings and events," she says. "We organize prayers and singing on special festival days, which is very healing."

Tek Bahadur Bam, Government of Nepal project director for the Commercial Agriculture Development Project in Morang recognizes the importance of grassroots NGOs in the income growth and social change taking place in this corner of Nepal.

"NGOs have played a crucial role in organizing and promoting small farmers," he says. "People who worked as farm wage laborers yesterday have today created better employment opportunities for many people in the village."

Though there is a growing trend in Nepal of young people choosing migrant labor over agricultural work, Tek Bahadur says, NGOs like Sahara Nepal are helping to change that.

"They have revived the dying interest of the younger generation in agriculture," he says.