

STORY OF CHANGE

Leasehold Farming Empowering Dalit Women



Rupa B.K.

The upper caste communities have been gradually shifting towards other alternatives to farming. This is causing the lands that they own to remain fallow while the lower caste communities that don't have financial access to such lands are unable to involve in agricultural production. However, those who don't own land do have options to lease land from the owners and yield production for commercial farming improving their livelihoods, and also benefiting the landowners. Keeping that in mind, 20 women from Kalimati Rural Municipality, Ward No. 3 of Salyan district have set an example through commercial farming in a leased land with support from local government and different organizations.

Earlier, these women were unable to become a member of any farmers' group since they didn't own any land. They were deprived of any support from governmental and non-governmental organizations.

They had no other choice but labour works that didn't help them much. In BS 2075 Bhadra, these women registered a farmer's group and rented a 26 ropani (1 ropani=500 m²) land to start commercial farming which has drastically helped them improve their financial condition. They have been able to market their products in the village itself through the Agriculture Collection Centre.

Bhawana Biswakarma's husband is abroad for labour works. Though her husband earns enough for the family, she wanted to be involved in something on her own and started a tailoring shop. But that didn't help her earn adequate. She had a lot of spare time in spite of the shop and so she involved herself in commercial vegetable farming. That not only utilized her spare time but also helped in earning more than she ever expected. These days, Bhawana spends her morning and late afternoons on the farm and afternoons in



tailoring. She says, "I am very busy and active these days and my earning is also good."

Bhawana was driven to start commercial farming after the establishment of vegetable collection centre near her home. Yet, she was not sure how to do it, as she didn't find suitable land. However, as the saying goes, "Where there is a will, there is a way". She fulfilled her dream of pursuing commercial farming after she found land to lease near her home. She established a tunnel in two ropani land where she produces black eye beans, okra, beans, cabbage, tomatoes, etc. The production is enough for consumption for her family and the surplus are sold in the market. In the first year itself, she was able to earn 12,000 rupees in a season. According to her, she is now very confident and has developed self-confidence and leadership qualities after being involved in the farmer's group.

Bhawana aims to become the President of 18 women-member Dhoreni Leasehold Commercial Vegetable Group. She is actively involved in Shree Kalimati Rampur Agriculture Market Promotion Committee, as a Vice President, which has 226 members. She says that she is further motivated after winning the first prize in Farmer's Quiz Contest and second prize as Best Commercial Vegetable Farmer in the Agriculture Fair and Exhibition organized by Kalimati Rural Municipality in December 2018.

Just like Bhawana, Harikala Pariyar also preferred commercial farming over daily wage works. "I don't have any land, neither I know any other skills. It was very difficult working as a wage labourer. Now that I started commercial farming, it has been a lot easier", says Harikala. Harikala reveals that at the beginning, the cost of investment was low and the production was high and in the first three months itself, she earned 15,000 rupees. She now does not need to wonder for daily labour works, has enough time to take care of her children and is planning to increase land for more



Bhawana B.K.

earning. She is actively involved in the discussions and meetings of the farmer's group.

Rupa B.K. thought that only the clever and smart had access to the services and support of social organizations. Her perception has changed and she says, "After being a member of the farmer's group and starting commercial farming in a leased land, I have received seeds, manures, bamboos for the tunnel and technical support from different organizations." With the motivation to start commercial farming from other members, she was able to earn 16,000 rupees within five months.

Thinking about the prospect after the women of the villages established the farmer's group, Ganga B.K. also enrolled in the group and initiated group vegetable farming. She never imagined about the earning she has made now thanks to the vegetable farming. She was almost on the verge of leaving the group not imagine how it will help her. "After receiving support from the





Harvested fresh vegetables ready for marketing

members, I started growing vegetables again. I was worried that the vegetables won't sell in the market. But, thanks to the Collection Centre, I was able to sell and earn. When you believe and act, you can succeed," says Ganga.

The example of 'When you start to work in a group, you can be socially active' is more than evident seeing the work of Mayadevi Saaru. Though she is a member of an indigenous group, she enrolled in the group with the majority of Dalit farmers and started commercial vegetable farming. She remembers the time the group was established, "We started the group, leased land and started getting seeds. But I was quite worried whether others will be involved in the farming since I was the first women to prepare the land and sow seeds. I started teaching others the experience of vegetable farming and encouraged them." 20 farmers are involved in 26 ropani lands to produce different varieties of vegetables. She shares, "Though each farmer produced comparatively fewer vegetables, we were able to collect about 500 kg of vegetables every two days of a week, helping us sell them easily." Furthermore, she was a member of Kalimati Agriculture Market Promotion Committee so

there was no hassle of selling the product. She is very happy with her earning from farming and encourages each member to move forward.

The above-mentioned five women farmers are the representatives of what the farmer's group has been able to achieve. The other 15 members are also actively participating in the group. The land that once harvested rice and maize has now yielded different vegetables. In the first time itself, the members were able to consume the production at home, share some with relatives, and sell the surplus 11,930 kg of vegetables earning four lakhs twelve thousand and five hundred and fifty Rupees. The group is saving Rs. 50 every month which has now totaled to Rs. 24,000 and they have even saved some in a Cooperative. According to the survey of the project, it is revealed that the households are now consuming diverse vegetables that are helping them in consuming a nutritious diet and earning income.

The example of how the person's good practices in the society provide a positive impact on the society is the member of Dhorani Multipurpose Agriculture Group, Kul Bahadur Reule. Despite being busy as a hotelier, he with Kul Bahadur Roka, a member of the group,





invested 4 lakhs Rupees for commercial vegetable farming in 27 ropani lands. He leased the land at the annual rate of Rs. 6000 per ropani for ten years with each member contributing the rent. The group earned one lakh rupees in the first season. He is confident about earning profit in the second year as well. The group has been further motivated by the two lakh Rupees support from Kalimati Rural Municipality. With this support, they have established a permanent tunnel and drip irrigation.

In the beginning, it was difficult to convince the members about the importance of group, meetings, and discussions, and about renting land and yielding profit. However, the group succeeded in earning profit with financial and technical support from three non-governmental organizations, namely, Dalit Welfare Organization, LI-BIRD and Rural Reconstruction Organization Nepal.

With the financial support from the Development Fund, Norway, through the project 'Livelihood Improvement of Socially Excluded Community (LISEC)',

the Dalit Welfare Organization Salyan formed a group, registered the group, and with condition of the farmers themselves paying the rent in the fifth year, they provided 100 percent grant in the first year, 75 percent in the second year, 50 percent in the third year and 25 percent in the fourth year, and also provided bamboos to construct tunnel as well as technical support.

Through the project 'Improving the Livelihood of Marginalized Communities in Salyan District', LI-BIRD and RRN Nepal provided tunnel support, technical support, 100 percent vegetable seeds grant in the first phase, and 75 percent grant in the second and third phase. The project also supported the market access and marketing of the products. The farmers were also supported by some skill development training and exposure visits related to increasing production and marketing. The project was financially supported by Germany's BMZ and Welt Hunger Hilfe (WHH). The project worked for three years from 2072 Kartik to 2076 Baisakh in Salyan district's Kalimati Rural Municipality, Tribeni Rural Municipality and Bandgaard Kupinde Municipality.

Prepared by: Kartik Lal Chaudhary, Shyam Lal B.K. and Yuvaraj Gurung, LI-BIRD

