

Knowledge and skill for change: leasehold vegetable farming a case study of landless poor people from Nepal

Abstract

Leasehold vegetable farming project was implemented in Kashani Village Development Committee of Morang district in Nepal to improve the livelihood of landless poor people. It was joint project of District Agriculture Development Office, District Development Committee and Kashane VDC. In the beginning 5000 square meter of land was leased and distributed equally among 10 participants. Rent of that land was paid by the VDC, technical support was provided by the DADO and the financial support was given by the DDC. In the first year all inputs (seed, fertilizers, and pesticides), tools and equipments were provide to the participants free of cost. Next year participants invested 50% of the cost of the inputs followed by 75% in 3rd year. After three year all subsidies and financial support was removed except technical support. From second year farmers were increased the areas of leasehold land by double and paid the rent of increased land by themselves. During the project regular technical support on vegetable farming was provide by the DADO. Later farmers have developed necessary linkage with DADO and other line agencies. They visit or phone to DADO staffs whenever they need technical support. In 2011 I conducted a short study on the impact of that joint leasehold vegetable project and it reveals a very encouraging impact of that project. Eight out of 10 participants have been involving vegetable farming in larger areas. Two participants has purchased their own land and built new houses. Participants start to send their children to school. Son of one widow is graduating from the college whose study was blocked before due to lack of money for college fees. Two participants who left vegetable farming has been doing vegetable business and earning their livelihood. Besides this many other surrounding farmers start vegetable farming to increase their income. That small project produced remarkable impact within the group and surrounding community.

Keywords: leasehold vegetable farming, landless people, livelihood

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Introduction

Agriculture is a main occupation of livelihood for most of the Nepalese people live in rural areas. Rural people depend on agriculture for food, income and employment. There are more than 26 thousands landless households living in Nepal (CBS 2002). In Morang district the number of landless household is 1425 another 18,177 household have less than 0.1 ha of land (DADO Morang 2010). Detail distribution of land holding is given in Table 1. Most of them depend on agricultural employment for their livelihood. PLAN Nepal stated leasehold vegetable farming before 1995, for landless people to improve their livelihood in Morang and Sunsari districts of eastern Nepal. That initiative runs some years with full financial (for seed, fertilizers, pesticides, and land lease) and technical support. During the program most of the participants earning was increased but that program demonstrated dependent syndrome among participants on implementing agencies for free inputs and other logistic supports. After termination support from the project most of the participants left vegetable farming and started to work as wage labor again as past. Such results encouraged development workers to think about new modality of leasehold farming especially for the landless people.

As a new collaborative initiation, in late 2002, District Development Committee (DDC) Morang, District Agriculture Development Office

(DADO) Morang and Kashani Village Development Committee (VDC) started new model of leasehold vegetable farming as a new intervention for a group of 10 landless people in Kashani to correct the weakness of Plan Nepal leasehold vegetable program. That program started to leased 5000 square meters of land from a local farmer. That land divide 10 equals part and distribute among 10 landless farmers. Out of 10 nine participants belong to indigenous Tharu community and one member was hill migrant.

Program was started with preparatory meeting between technicians and participants. Those meetings decided to install two hand-pumps for irrigation, lease rent provided by the VDC, financial support for the program came from DDC and technical support was the responsibility of DADO. Same meeting decided that full support of input provided for the first year and it would reduce 50% and 25% for succeeding second and third year. Project was terminated after completion three years of technical and financial support at the end of 2005. There was provision of monthly two visits from DADO for technical support. Such visits were intensive for first season and in rest season it depends on need of farmers. During technicians visit farmers and technicians jointly monitor vegetable crop/management and aware about the problems and respective solution. There was maintaining of crop diversity (two farmers grow one vegetables) to expose wider knowledge and skill among participants and to reduce

competition for marketing (because they were targeting to sell their vegetable in weekly local market at the beginning). This study was conducted to access the impact of that leasehold vegetable farming

of Morang district in Nepal six years after termination of the project in 2011.

Table 1 Distribution of cultivated land in Morang district Nepal (2010)

Land size of the farmers	Number of household	Irrigated land (ha)	Rainfed upland (ha)	Total land (ha)
Landless	1425	0	12.3	12.3
<0.1 ha	18177	87.2	722.8	810
0.1-0.5 ha	27009	4603.6	2927.3	7570.9
0.5-1.0 ha	24958	13411.9	4388.2	17800.1
1.0-2.0 ha	27751	30779	7974.3	38753.3
2.0-3.0 ha	9915	19427.5	4347.2	23774.6
3.0-4.0 ha	2849	8346.5	1483.9	9830.4
>4.0 ha	3078	15478.3	2499.2	15977.5
Total	113737	92133.8	24382.9	117516.7

Source: DADO Morang annual progress report 2010.

Materials and methods

Morang is a main industrial area and second big producer of agricultural production after its eastern neighbor Jhapa in Nepal. In other way its population is in second position after capital district Kathmandu. There are 113,733 families living in Morang district majority of them are small farmers, holding less than one hectare of land. Among those family 29,745 were using rented land for cultivation. Total cultivated area of Morang district is 117,516 hectares and half of it has better irrigation facility. This study was conducted in Kashani VDC which is centrally located in the district. It is an impact based case study of small program terminated six years ago. All information was collected by interviews, group discussion and group register for record keeping. Study tried to explore present situation of leasehold vegetable farming in the program area, livelihood situation of participants and its overall impact within the village and other areas of the district.

Results and discussion

Leasehold vegetable farming in Kashani

Vegetable farming became popular in Kashani after successful completion of leasehold vegetable farming for the landless people. Six year after the completion of project 8 out of 10 participants' main occupation has been vegetable farming for their livelihood. They have been continuing in vegetable farming with area expansion. Now they were paid the rent of leased land and covered all input expenses themselves which was provided by the VDC and DDC during project period. Two participants leave vegetable farming and start vegetable business in local market. They purchased vegetable from local growers or wholesale market and sells in local market.

Now that small group converted as a viable community organization with 46members. Majority of them were growing vegetables for home consumption and extra income. The name of this organization is Bijayajyoti Community Organization. This organization has more than 100 thousands Nepalese rupees (1500US\$) in its saving. That saving has been using by the members during their necessity at 18% annual interest. The average area of leasehold vegetable farming

has increased 1500 square meter (range 1000 to 3350 square meter) which was 500 square meter during project period. Five participants still have been cultivating on original land left three have leased another land from other land owner and cultivating vegetables. I am still remembering the first meeting with those farmers to explore possibility of that project. There were 10 poor agriculture labors they never did their own farming

Livelihood situation of the participants

Livelihood situation of 9 participants has improved. Two participants already purchased their own land built new houses. They also increase their vegetable areas 4-6 folds. Bholu Das the leader and largest vegetable grower in the village has property more than 250 thousands Nepalese rupees and his annual saving was about 35,000. He has three children; two of them are now studying in high school. His first daughter is still illiterate. She didn't get chance to went school because of his economic condition in the past. Other participants also start to send their children to school after increase their income. Son of one widow is now graduating from the college whose study was blocked before due to lack of money to pay his college fee. Two participants who left farming were start vegetable business and earning for their livelihood. Besides this many other within the village start vegetable growing to increase their income. That small project produced remarkable impact within the group and surrounding community. Now several other leasehold vegetable farming is running in 8 other VDCs within the district. Kashani VDC already completed 4 such project for other landless people. Now this VDC is able to producing and supplying vegetable in local markets as well as wholesale market in the district headquarters Biratnagar. In this way some hundreds landless poor people were getting their better livelihood through leasehold vegetable farming in Morang district.

Kashani leasehold vegetable farming as a learning center

The success story of Kashani was reporting by several local and national media houses (newspaper/magazine/television). That publicity brought several visitor groups from different part of the country to learn from those helpless people before leasehold farming.

They develop expertise on vegetable cultivation after three years long technical support from the DADO technical staffs. Those farmers always remember three names Mr. Rewati Timsina (social mobilizer), Mr. Kashi Kumar Chaudhary (Horticulture technician) and Mr. Sagar Bhattraï (Plant protection technician) for their immense social and technical support during initial days. In this way Kashani leasehold vegetable farming converted as a good learning center for many people who are looking solution for landless poor and small farmers.

Conclusion

Livelihood improvement of landless poor people is not an easy task. It is further difficult if we are thinking about rural poor living far from urban areas or city centers where agriculture is only one option of employment and earning. Vegetable farming will be a good opportunity to increase income of poor people in short time period. Income from vegetable is much more than other agriculture production. But vegetable farming is not easy. Vegetable growers must have sound knowledge and skill about varieties, management practices, plant protection measure and information of seasonal market demand for better price. Result showed that long term technical support will be more valuable than monitory support. Regular technical support at the beginning facilitate to acquired sufficient knowledge and skill

for vegetable farming especially for the landless poor people who were working as agriculture labor before. That also helps to develop linkage with support organizations which is very useful for later stage when there is no regular visit from technicians. Gradually reductions of input support develop resource management skill among farmers and correct dependency syndromes as in other fully supported/funded leasehold vegetable program. Short technical training and support wouldn't work much for such people. They need regular update and support on technical part and they were linked able to contact such agencies later on. The main driving force behind the success of this project is the capacity development of participants that make the able to explore further possibility and linkage necessary for their work.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.