

Success from Lease-based farming-a case study of Dalit women farmer group from Bhagwanpur Rural Municipality (RM), Siraha, Nepal

Abstract

The case study reflects the impact of lease-based farming on the livelihood of women group members in Bhagwanpur RM. The data for the analysis of results of leasehold farming were collected through survey of the individual farmer involved and key informant interview. The study revealed that people encouraged with the motivation from local government, supporting organizations and visitors of the site has brought measurable positive changes (food security, occupation, education, income, policy.) in the lives of the landless people and has set a good example among other local governments for its scaling.

Keywords: leasehold farming, landless, food security, scaling

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Introduction

Agriculture is the main source of livelihoods of the Nepalese people that contributes about 27 percent to total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Of the total cultivated land, only 21 percent (3,091,000ha) is reported to be cultivated and the remaining seven percent (1,030,000ha) is still kept fallow.¹ The land owners keep their land fallow may be due to the fear of tenant farmers claiming their tenancy rights on the land.² Among the total land holdings in Nepal, five percent are landless and 51.86 percent own less than 0.5 ha of land with average landholding of 0.68 ha.³ Landless people are mostly the Dalits and disadvantaged groups who are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and other disasters. Current reports indicate that 44 and 22 percent of the Dalits are landless in the Terai and hilly areas, respectively.² So, it is difficult for them to sustain their livelihoods with this amount of average. Reaching the target of reducing the poverty to less than five percent and undernourishment to less than 3 percent by 2030 of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is still challenging for Government of Nepal.⁴ A provision of availing abandoned land to the landless and people with small landholding on lease can play an important role in improving the food and nutrition security of the country. Leasing is the business agreement between the owner of the land and the cultivator, and is also a legal instrument for both of the parties.⁵

This paper has attempted to analyse the changes and consequences brought in the life of Dalit people of Bhagwanpur Rural Municipality by the climate resilient leasehold farming model initiated by National Farmer's Group Federation (NFGF), technically supported by Local Initiatives for Biodiversity Research and Development (LI-BIRD) and financially supported by CARE Nepal from 2013 to 2021 instead of now. This practice fosters the sense of collective responsibility to leased land and creates an opportunity for individual member household to own their share of land, produce more and generate income individually.²

The study area and methodology (key informant interview and survey)

The study was carried out in Dalit settlement of Bhagwanpur Rural Municipality, Siraha district, Province 2, Nepal. It is located nearly 14

km south of Lahan a small town in Siraha district. In order to obtain the information on impact of lease-based farming on livelihoods of people, a household survey was conducted in 40 households involved in the lease-based farming. Additionally, a key informant interview (KII) was also carried out through the personal communication with the facilitator and officer involved in the promotion of leasehold farming.

Background

Livelihoods of the people living at Dalit settlement, ward 1 of Bhagwanpur Rural Municipality was emotionally very distressing. They did not even have land for agriculture, jobs for earning money and food to eat. They were mostly sustaining their livelihoods the daily wages in the brick factory. None of the children in the community used to go to school and there were even no toilets within the whole community. Their lives were so miserable. Looking at the situation, NFGF through Right To Food (RTF) project and in technical support of LI-BIRD initiated the lease-based farming to support this community with financial support from CARE Nepal in 2013. Firstly, a group named Dalit Mahila Krishak Samuha was formed and registered at the Municipality. Then, 80 katthas (2.6ha) of land was taken on lease from the absentee land owner from that area for promoting leasehold farming. This land was then distributed among 40 households (HHs) at the rate of 2 katthas (0.06ha) per HH. Various activities related to awareness and capacity building in agriculture related work were conducted in the group along with the installation of solar water pump for irrigation by project. Time to time from then to now they are always encouraged to do well for the betterment of their lives. With the awareness, people were motivated and have taken more land on lease from others and started cultivating crops and vegetables and making income.

Source of motivation

Various stakeholders including local governments are the source of motivation of these dalit people. For the lease-based farming, RM supported in the land rent, NFGF engaged in facilitation and providing inputs and LI-BIRD played an important role in providing inputs and in installation of solar irrigation pump. After the establishment of the model the lease-based farming site, this site has been visited by many

people from governmental and non-governmental, within and out of the country. Prince from Denmark was also one of the visitors of the site and that encouraged them very much for engaging in leasehold farming. They were further encouraged by the participants of travelling seminars and monitoring visits organized by the supporting organizations which are also helping in the dissemination of the same practice in other places of the country.

Results

Socio-economic changes

From the study, it is revealed that out of the 66 school going children in the community, all of them are going to school and each household have toilet in their houses which was null before the support from the project. Previously, 97.5 percent of the household decision was made by husband and only 2.5 percent of the household decision was made together by both husband. Nowadays, there is a significant change in household decision making. Survey results show that percentage of household decision by both husband and wife has significantly increased to 87.5. and percentage of wife making household decision in the family is 10 percent, whereas the percentage of husband making household decision alone in the family has been decreased drastically to 2.5 percent (Figure 1).

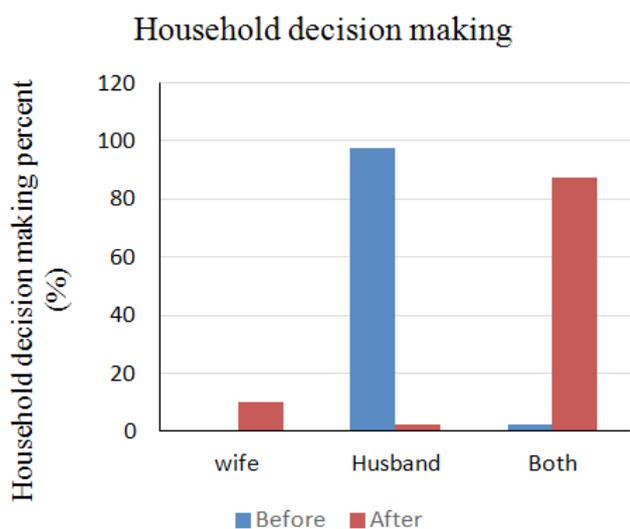


Figure 1 Percentage of people involved in household decision making.

All the people in the community used to depend on daily wages before the start of leasehold farming. The scenario has changed now and the source of livelihood of 85 percent of people is agriculture, 12.5 percent of people depend on both agriculture and daily wages for their living whereas 2.5 percent of them depend on agriculture and other services (Figure 3).

There are 32.5 percent, 55 percent, 10 percent and 2.5 percent of people who do farming in the land below 5katthas, 5-15katthas, 15-30katthas and above 30katthas, respectively taking on lease. Farming has a significant contribution in food security. Results show that 22.5 percent, 62.5 percent and 15 percent of HH have the food sufficiency for 3 months, 3 to 6 months and for the whole year, respectively. Now, over half of people (55 percent) have at least NRP 0-20,000 earning in a year from agriculture production. Whereas, 22.5 percent and 17.5 percent of the people have NRP 20000-40000 and above NRP 40000 earnings from agriculture production (Figure 3). Though there have been significant changes in the livelihoods of

the people, most of the male members and few women of the family still go for daily wages in their free time for earning some money. It is apparent that only 85 percent of the people were found to be benefitted from the solar irrigation pump installed. But, the 15 percent of people are not getting irrigation facilities because their leased land is far away from the irrigation source. After the installation of solar irrigation pump, they grow seasonal vegetables like cauliflower, cabbage, cowpea, cucurbits, eggplant etc. in their leased land after harvesting rice.



Figure 2 (A) Children from community in the regular tuition classes managed by RM (B) Gauri Sada in front of her eggplant field.

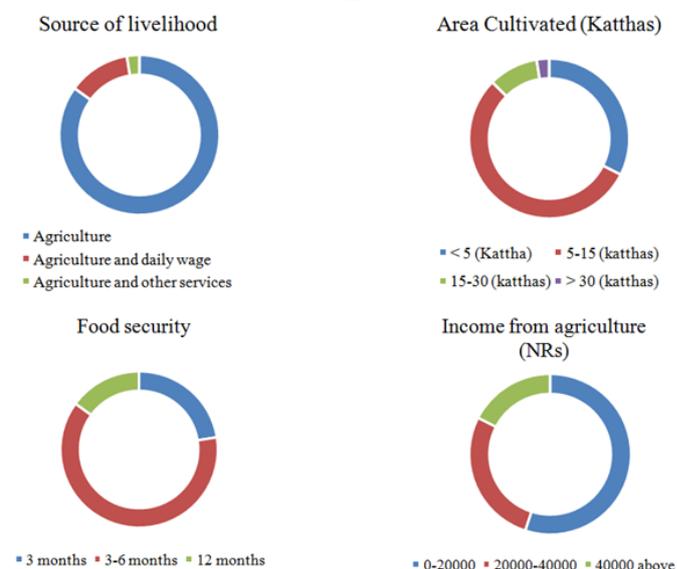


Figure 3 Showing the agricultural status of the HHs from leasehold farming site as of now.

Changes in policy level

Bhagwanpur RM has endorsed leasehold farming guidelines based on the learning from and impacts of Dalit Mahila Krishak Samuha. They have further replicated the model in other two wards of the RM. Similarly, two other leasehold farming sites have been scaled up in Sakhuanankarkatti RM, Siraha. Like Bhagwanpur RM, Belaka Municipality and Katari Municipality of Udayapur district have also endorsed the lease-based farming guidelines and has started lease-based farming in 4 different sites.

Conclusion

From the above result it can be concluded that leasehold farming has brought the significant positive changes on livelihoods of Dalit people from Dalit Mahila Krishak Samuha. This indicates that this farming practice can be the best option for uplifting the livelihoods of people ensure food security who do not have their own land for agriculture production. Furthermore, this practice can also help for the conversion of fallow land into agricultural land.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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