

Off-season vegetables: a reliable source of rural women empowerment

In the small village of Tallo Baraha, in the mid-hills of Sindhuli District, rural women have seen their nutrition and livelihoods improved. This was possible through the UN Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (RWEE), implemented in 7 countries, including Nepal. The RWEE targeted the existing rural women's associations in the region to put in place a comprehensive capacity development programme for rural women's economic empowerment with outstanding results. The story of Sumitra and her group is a prime example.

Like most of the farmers in the area, up until January 2016 Sumitra was cultivating traditional cereal crops like rice, wheat and maize in her small plot of land. But today, she is able to grow a great variety of vegetables, which has increased her income and food security.



Sumitra Thapa is 47 years old and lives in the village of Tallo Baraha, part of Bhimeshwore Village Development Committee. She is an active member of the Pachankanya Women's Group on commercial vegetable production, one of the rural associations targeted by the RWEE programme in the country.

Thanks to the specific training sessions on economic empowerment, conducted in the last 6 months by FAO technicians working under the RWEE, Sumitra has acquired competencies on vegetable farming adaptation and market skills, just like the other members of the women's group she belongs to.

Increased income for children's education

Within a period of 4 months, she was able to grow as many as 60 kg of tomatoes, 50 kg of brinjal (eggplants), 800 kg of cucumbers, 800 kg of bottle gourds and 50 kg of green chilies. She also managed to sell these vegetables in the local market, earning 80,000 Nepalese Rupees (US\$ 800), which is about 200 US\$ more than the previous year.

This additional income enabled her to support the schooling of her daughter who is pursuing her bachelors' degree in management in a local college. She also wishes her three sons –to continue their studies abroad.

Before the arrival of the RWEE programme in the region, "the lack of a collection center at local level was an obstacle to the sale of vegetables in time with good prices in big markets such as Kathmandu", Sumitra says.



Today, she is also aware of the need to use bio-pesticides and minimize the postharvest losses.

Women's empowerment for community development

“After the launching of RWEE project, all the villagers have been sensitized on improving food security and nutrition of rural women and their families”, she added.

The joint programme focused on building leadership skills of rural women, so as to increase their representation in local and national public policy making forum.

In the Sindhuli District, training on vegetable farming adaptation and market skills proved to be key to the socioeconomic empowerment of rural women, with obvious effects on food security and development of the whole community.

RWEE started training sessions of women groups in the region in January 2016, in coordination with District Agriculture Development Office (DADO) and District Livestock Service Office (DLSO). In total, 57 women groups were formed. Women farmers have started selling the commercial vegetables in May 2016 bringing back home substantial profit. Altogether, 1292 households – with 111 households in commercial farming and 1181 households in kitchen garden – have directly benefited from the programme.

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