

Spotlight Analysis: Young Farmers

In many developing countries like Nepal, young workers must travel far from their homes and families in search of employment opportunities. To many, Nepal's main industry, agriculture, is not seen as a viable economic option. Many young Nepalis from rural communities cross the border to India to work as day laborers in difficult conditions for little pay, others will try their chances in the Gulf countries or Malaysia.

This trend could be changing thanks to programs like the United States Agency for International Development's Nepal Flood Recovery Program (USAID-NFRP), which is working with rural farmers to move them away from subsistence farming to more profitable and sustainable commercial agriculture.

Under the commercial agriculture component of USAID-NFRP, farmers are organized into irrigation clusters based on geographic location. Each group consists of five to 15 members. Participating farmers receive training in crop selection, nursery management, and transplanting, as well as in production techniques. Last quarter 3,143 farmers received training and an additional 141 neighboring farmers, inspired by the program's initial success, enrolled as trainees.

In many areas where USAID-NFRP works, young people are getting involved in the commercial agriculture component. Of the 7,578 farmers supported since the beginning of the program, more than 25 percent are under the age of 30. In some areas, such as near Dhangadhi municipality in Kailali district, nearly half of the participating farmers fall within this range. These young farmers represent the future of the agriculture sector in Nepal.



Photo by Fintrac Inc.
USAID-NFRP client, Ramdin Rana, right, took first prize for his vegetable crop at the recent "Economic Development for Sustainable Peace" festival in Dhangadhi. His winning crop was judged on productivity, quality, taste, and size.

In the small Tharu community of Shantipur in Kanchanpur district, USAID-NFRP is working with 50 farmers, 40 percent of whom are under the age of 30. They are planting cauliflower, cabbage, chili, tomato, and other greens for sale to local buyers. After the initial harvest of the first crop cycle, which represented one-third of total production, the group reported \$14,085 in net sales. For farmers who had previously been planting low-grade crops on a subsistence level, this kind of income is truly transformational.

Last year, Pani Ram Chaudhary returned to his family farm from India, where he worked as a day laborer and porter. In the year before USAID-NFRP intervention, he earned about \$330 from his small plot of basic crops. After working with program technicians, he tripled his production area and introduced new crop varieties. These changes are paying off – Ram Chaudhary reported more than \$1,100 in income after early sales of his cauliflower crop. In just one crop cycle, he earned nearly four times what he did all of last year.

These opportunities are ensuring that, in communities like Shantipur, younger generations remain in Nepal as productive members of society contributing to a growing economy. In recent years, only one person from the entire village has emigrated.

In Birsana, another farming community in Kailali district, USAID-NFRP is working with a group of 11 farmers, helping them develop irrigation systems and providing ongoing technical support. Nearly half of these farmers are under the age of 30. The group recently harvested its first crop of high-value vegetables with impressive results.

Muliya Rana primarily grew low-value cereals and potatoes prior to working with USAID-NFRP. Now she produces high-value vegetables such as chili, cabbage, cauliflower, eggplant, and tomato on 0.73 hectares of land. After the first crop cycle, Rana has already earned more than \$3,000 in income. She hopes to earn an additional \$3,000 in the next crop cycle.



Photo by Fintrac Inc.

Muliya Rana, second from left, is one of the leading farmers in her village. Thanks to USAID-NFRP support, she is earning significantly more by planting high-value crops like cabbage using good agricultural practices.

Rana's plot is one of the best in the area and she is now serving as a model for other farmers. Seven farmer groups from surrounding VDCs, and various district government officials, have visited to observe her nursery and farm.

"Vegetable farming is a better source of income than other food grain crops. I am satisfied to see the healthy vegetable crops in my field," Rana said. "I have already started harvesting the vegetable crops from my field and I am confident in getting good returns in total."

The Birsana farmers, inspired by their early success, are ready to invest even more into their farms. The group approached USAID-NFRP for additional seed varieties and expressed interest in further extending their growing plots.

Their success is not going unrecognized. At a recent FNCCI-sponsored regional agricultural fair in Dhangadhi, USAID-NFRP took first prize in 11 out of 12 categories of a vegetable competition.

In these communities, young farmers are learning to view farming as a viable business, investing both their time and money into its growth. USAID-NFRP is able to provide technical advice and introduce best practices from the first stage of planting, ensuring that these groups have the most productive and profitable crops possible.

The transformational increase in incomes experienced by these farmers is not only life-changing, but is also inspiring, empowering them with the knowledge and skills they need to cultivate sustainable commercial farms and contribute to the overall food security of their country.