

Uplifting the lives of the marginalized communities through collective action and cooperativism: The Kalika Land Rights Agriculture Cooperative Ltd.



A. Context

Sehari means place of taking rest in the Rana Tharu language. Rana Tharu is an indigenous community in the west of Nepal. Sehari Tole in Beladebipur is located in the Southeastern part of Godabari Municipality 9 and the Northeastern part of the Dhangadi Sub-metropolitan city of Kailali district in Sudurpashchim province in Nepal. It is 5 kilometers from Dhangadi Bazar and Mahendra Highway.

The village has sixty households composed of Dalit, ethnic and indigenous groups, and so-called higher caste; and they have been living together on the government land since 1985 because they were displaced by landslides and floods. Most of them are landless and are considered resource poor. Their men would go to India for work and would return home when it is a good season to do farming. The women who are left behind engage in farming throughout the year, this is in addition to their daily housework and caregiving responsibilities. The women regularly borrow money from local teachers or the more well-off people with 5% interest per even if it's only five hundred to one thousand rupees. There were no groups or cooperatives in the village and they were unaware of land rights. Most of them were unaware of government agro-inputs and subsidies. Besides, the government's policies and programs do not benefit them because they were living in unregistered land and did not have land certificates.

To further advance land rights, the National Land Rights Forum (NLRF) together with the Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC), the leading NGO for land rights in Nepal, formed the Kailali District Land Rights Forum in 2004. Group formation is a key strategy in education and advocacy work. Members of the Land Rights Forum are expected to practice the Code of Conduct (COC) that promotes social harmony, in particular Sehari. These are: No corruption, no domestic and sexual violence, no child abuse, no gender, and caste-based discrimination, produce foods and vegetables

for self-sufficiency, maintain basic sanitation and hygiene, educate children, and keep good relations among friends, relatives, and neighbors.

B. The Cooperative

In 2007, Mr. Prem Sing Biswakarma, the Full-Time Worker (FTO) of the Kailali District Land Rights Forum (Kailali DLRF), started to do organizing and sensitization work with community members. With support from the National Land Rights Forum Nepal (NLRF), the Sehari Village Land Rights Forum (Sehari VLRF) was set up and members were organized in groups. Members had to contribute to the movement fund so they can carry out land rights advocacy. Mr. Biswakarma played an essential role in the establishment and strengthening of the cooperative as well as bridging it with government offices.

After the formation of the Sehari VLRF, women members started to save 10 rupees per person every month to support the land rights movement. As per the NLRF movement fund policy, each Village Land Rights Forum must have 2000 rupees to make the Village Land Rights Forum self-sustaining and able to mobilize to struggle for ownership rights.

Their fund gradually increased and they started to invest in livelihood activities, health services, family events, and emergency response. Aside from advocacy and livelihood, the District Land Rights Forum also conducted awareness raising to end violence and discrimination so they can expand and sustain their collective work. The group saw that agriculture subsidies and inputs provided to farmers have a lower price than those in the market. They decided that they want to establish a women agro-cooperative; and after a series of meetings, sensitization and planning they had 25 members who are willing to start the process of cooperative formation. Mr. Prem Sing Biswakarma mentored them and helped them in registering the **Kalika Land Rights Agriculture Cooperative Ltd.** with 12,500 rupees shares at the Division Cooperative Office in 2013. They took capacity enhancement training from government offices and tapped government agriculture support such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. The training broadened their knowledge, skills, and practices and this led to an increase in their agriculture production. It motivated them and it gave them the confidence to manage the locally available barren land for collective farming.

The process they have undertaken was not an easy one. When they decided to form the cooperative, they learned that they need to show 50 thousand rupees in their account and had to undergo three-day cooperative management training from the government office, the Division Cooperative, at their own expense, including 12 thousand per day as a payment to trainers. They only had 16 thousand in their movement fund. They requested from the government officers to be given a discount for the trainers' fee, and then they borrowed 50 thousand rupees from a businessman in their village as show money in their bank. They also asked CSRC for the management trainers' fee. They managed to pay for their accommodation and food. At that time, they did not know how to draft their cooperative laws and by-laws so they asked the trainers to formulate their by-laws for them. After completing all the processes and procurement, they filled out the application for registration. However, they faced discrimination from the government staff, especially since they are poor and women. They continuously followed up for 10 days. Traveling to Dhangadi from their village is not easy and the fare was so expensive. They had to walk for 3 hours going to the government office. In 2013, they received the registration certificate from the Division Cooperative.

The cooperative is affiliated with the District Cooperative Federation which also provides support when needed. BBC has featured the community in the Nepali radio service, Alternative way.

Testimonials from members

"In past, we grew 75 kg paddy in 126.441 sq. m. of land, now it increased into 200 Kgs and I am now producing 1500 kgs potatoes in 379.32 sq. m. Indian retailers frequently visited our village to sell vegetables and potatoes, but now we are the ones selling as we can grow different crops. We have access to more diverse food now." – Radha B K

"I took 20 thousand loans from our cooperative and started a tailoring shop. Now I have four machines and employed one person while four women are being trained for tailoring skills." – Anita Chaudhari

Mr. Dhan Bahadur B K. and Bal Bahadur B K took loans for machinery and are earning from it. They used to collect and sell firewood in Dhangadi Bazar by spending 7 hours per day. Collecting firewood in dense forests is very risky.

Vision, Mission, and Goals

- Improve income and regular savings of the members
- Contribute to a self-reliant and independent community by enhancing the individual and collective capacities of members
- Meet the basic needs of members and the livelihood opportunities of members through collective economic activities
- Provide economic services to improve member's production and cooperativism
- Educate and raise awareness among members and their families.

Membership and governance structures

Most members are landless and women. Currently, there are 49 members (46 females, 3 males) composed of Dalit (19), indigenous people (14), and the so-called higher caste (16). The cooperative prioritizes community members, both women, and men, that are resource-poor and are willing to participate in the programs such as savings and credit programs, agriculture production, and entrepreneurship development.

Decision-making is done democratically by doing periodic meetings. Saving and credit issues are resolved in every meeting. The dispute has been mitigated collectively. If it cannot be solved internally, they consult with DLRG.

Services and activities

Kalika Land Rights Agriculture Cooperative mainly provides agriculture services such as loans, subsidies, and equipment in collaboration with government agencies. It provides loans and programs

to members of small entrepreneurship schemes and collaborates with local and district governments to leverage resources.

The cooperative was able to implement projects such as the construction of local roads, irrigation canals, drinking water tube wells, and communal buildings. Distribution of seed, fertilizer, and agricultural services is done by public notice.

Women are key to conflict resolution in the community. They helped resolve the conflict involving road access going to Saraswati Secondary Schools despite the threats. A landlord had illegally blocked the access road. After this was resolved, it saved the children's time walking to school from 1 hour to 15 minutes.

Landlessness is a major issue that the community members continue to face. The cooperative and DLRF have been advocating for land rights and have filled the applications for land registration with the National Land Commission of Nepal.

Cooperative property and assets

SN	Description	Amount
1	15*36ft two rooms building	400000
2	2 Katta Land	16,00,000
3	1 Computer	40,000
4	2 Cup board	16,000
5	2 Chair	1000
6	18 Mtr. Carpet	9000
7	1 Power Tiller	200000
8	5 Boring Engine	250,000
9	Stationary (Register, file, Punching, Scale...)	5000

Strategies for Sustainability

- Promote agriculture-related programs to provide loan process
- Get a government license for purchasing and distributing agriculture equipment
- Strengthen monitoring mechanism to ensure quality results
- Promote members and/or their families to be involved in income-generating work
- Enhance organizational capacity in cooperative management
- Manage cooperative staff regularly
- Apply banking system of all transaction

Collaboration and policy advocacy work

The cooperative had previously collaborated with District-level Agriculture and Livestock Office and Domestic Cottage and Small Industries Office and has been collaborating with Godabari Municipality Agriculture and Livestock branch. Cooperative members have participated in district-level programs and national-level workshops organized by NLR Nepal.

The Division Cooperative provided seed fund NPR 30,000 for one time. The Small Farmers Cooperative Bank provided subsidy loans to agro-cooperatives for their member in agro production, agro-entrepreneurship, and business development.

C. Impacts

The cooperative worked with other members of the community and was able to lead the construction of the embankments in the Khutiya river in collaboration with the District Water and Disaster Risk Management Office of Dhangadi. They also red the reforestation of the barren area and the community forest. With this work, flooding was controlled and the forested area increased. This work benefited around 70 hectares of agricultural land, where 70 households are farming. The Community Forest was a source of raw materials for their livestock, in particular their draft animals, which in turn helped them in plowing their farms and has been their source of dairy products.

The irrigation work has led to increased rice production, from 75 kilograms to 200 kilograms of rice, and allowed them to cultivate vegetables throughout the year. The vegetables are both for consumption and income. There shifted from mainly subsistence farming to subsistence and commercial farming with diverse crops produce all year round.

The training and seminar contributed to enhancing the skills of women members. The cooperative chairperson, Ms. Kalawati Chaudhari has led many of the community projects and programs. Because of the excellent work they have demonstrated, they are well-recognized in the municipality and also receive notification from the Agriculture and Livestock Branch of Municipality when there are seed, fertilizer, and agro-equipment being distributed. The collective effort of the community and the regular coaching and mentoring from NLRF, CSRC, and DLRF were instrumental in the success of the cooperative.

D. Future Plans

- Recruit a cooperative manager
- Apply for a government license to procure and sell agro equipment to farmers at a reasonable price.
- Increase share up to 500 rupees and monthly savings of 100 rupees
- Improve the cooperative building and use of office equipment
- Continue to develop member's entrepreneurship skills by leveraging external resources
- Enhance members' capacities for agro-entrepreneurship and legal support