



**ACCELERATING PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN IN NEPAL
BI-ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT
REPORTING PERIOD: 1 JANUARY – 30 JUNE 2020**

<p align="center">Programme Title & Project Number</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Title: Accelerating Progress Toward Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Nepal • MPTF Office Project Reference Number: 1 	<p align="center">Country, Locality(s), Priority Area(s) / Strategic Results</p> <p>Nepal: Five Municipalities and five Rural Municipalities from two local units Sarlahi and Rautahat</p> <p>Sarlahi: Rural Municipalities: Chandranagar, Brahmpuri, Basawariya, and Dhankaul Municipalities: Bagmati and Barahathwa</p> <p>Rautahat: Rural Municipalities: Yamuna Mai Municipalities: Gujara, Brindaban, and Rajpur</p>
<p align="center">Participating Organization(s)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAO, IFAD, UNWOMEN, WFP 	<p>Direct beneficiaries: 3,000 rural women</p> <p>Indirect beneficiaries: In this reporting period, the JP RWEE team was unable to conduct field work since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The team spent January and February in planning and coordination with the JP RWEE participants.</p> <p align="center">Implementing Partners</p> <p>Government: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD), in close coordination with the relevant municipalities and rural municipalities at the local level</p> <p>Civil Society: Equal Access International (EAI), Support Activities for Poor Producers of Nepal (Sappros Nepal)</p>
<p align="center">Programme/Project Cost (US\$)</p> <p>Total budget as per project document: USD 3,277,774</p> <p>MPTF Contribution: USD 3,277,774</p> <p>Government Contribution: Not applicable Other Contributions (donors): Not applicable</p>	<p align="center">Programme Duration</p> <p>Overall Duration 8 YEARS</p> <p>Start Date (15 10 2012) End Date (31 12 2021)</p>

¹ The MPTF Office Project Reference Number are as follows: ETHIOPIA: 00092000; GUATEMALA: 00092001; KYRGYZSTAN: 00092002; LIBERIA: 00092003; NEPAL: 00092004; NIGER: 00092005; RWANDA: 00092006

Programme Assessment/Review/Mid-Term Eval.

Assessment/Review - if applicable please attach

Yes No Date: dd.mm.yyyy

Mid-Term Evaluation Report – if applicable please attach

Yes No Date: dd.mm.yyyy

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Food and Agriculture
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Investing in rural people



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Programme



List of Acronyms

ADS	Agriculture Development Strategy
EAI	Equal Access International
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
HGSFP	Home Grown School Feeding Programme
JP RWEE	Accelerating Progress Toward the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Nepal
Kg.	Kilogram
MoALD	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development
MPTF	Multi Partner Trust Fund
Mt.	Metric Tons
NPR	Nepali Rupee
NSMP	National School Meals Programme
UN SERF	United Nations Socio Economic Recovery Framework
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USD	United States Dollar
WEAI	Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index
WFP	World Food Programme

NARRATIVE REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Nepal, a nationwide lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic was imposed from March 24 to June 14, 2020, which severely hindered the implementation of the JP RWEE activities during the reporting period. In terms of progress on indicators, as of this reporting period, four of the six outcome indicators have already been fully achieved and exceeded their targets; one has been partially achieved; and one has no substantial progress to report yet. Of the 15 output indicators, 10 have been achieved, seven of which surpassed their respective targets. Three have partially achieved their respective targets; and two are yet to achieve substantial progress.

At the impact level, there have been emergent gains related to increased ability of 2,258 (96.8 %) women to access capital assistance through a revolving fund that was established with support from the JP RWEE. Also, a total of 222 rural women now experience more positive attitudes from their family members through the application of Gender Action Learning System (GALS) principles and tools learned through the JP RWEE. This change includes a more equitable redistribution of domestic responsibilities among the family members. A total of 1,294 rural women, who acquired leadership skills in 2019, have been exercising leadership in helping other marginalized women and their community to deal with the challenges of the pandemic. These women also meet once a month to discuss and address the challenges faced by rural women in the current context.

In regard to Outcome 1, 2,333 rural women continued to benefit from technical and material support on kitchen gardening and commercial fresh vegetable production from the JP RWEE. The winter vegetable crops harvested from January to the third week of March, shortly before the start of the nationwide lockdown on March 24, increased by 184 per cent, with a total annual harvest of 1,551 metric tons, as of June 2020 (see details under Outcome 1 of the section on Results). This makes an average of 665 kg. production per household. In total, 478 metric tons of vegetables were consumed by the 2,333 rural women and their family members as of June 2020. Of these, 937 benefitted from 7.5 metric tons of high-yielding variety of wheat, resulting in 244 metric tons of wheat production during the period. A total of 93 women farmers' groups, with 2,258 members, accumulated Nepali Rupee (NPR) 6,538,485 (USD 54,144)² through a 'group revolving fund scheme' established with facilitation support from JP RWEE. The number of women farmers' groups increased from 93 in 2019³ to 122 as of this reporting period, with corresponding increase in membership, from 2,333 to 3,000 rural women.

In line with Outcome 2, a total of NPR 21,177,000 (USD 175,364) was earned by 1,855 rural women who comprise 80 per cent of the 2,333 rural women who received support in this reporting period. This amount was generated from the sale of 1,551 metric tons of fresh vegetables they produced with support from JP RWEE. The remaining 478 rural women self-consumed their products. To support the marketing outlets established in Sarlahi during the previous reporting period, two market management committees were formed and the capacity of their 22 members (11 per committee) was strengthened. They were trained on marketing management by the JP RWEE, in collaboration with the relevant local municipalities.

On Outcome 3, to enhance leadership and participation of rural women in their communities, the leadership manual developed in 2018 in Nepali language, was refined to incorporate inputs related to COVID-19, with attention to an increase in violence against women and girls, loss of income, health concerns and the added workload of women during the lockdown and 'eased-lockdown' contexts. Emerging issues during the pandemic and their impacts on rural women were identified through a rapid gender assessment that was completed during the reporting period. As mentioned above, a total of 245 rural women from nine rural women farmers' groups continued to apply GALS principles and tools in their families and experienced positive behaviour changes among their family members during the lockdown.

In regard to Outcome 4, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD) was brought on board to revisit the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy of the Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) to promote a gender-responsive policy environment for the economic empowerment of rural women. Questionnaires for assessment and checklist for key informant interviews were also drafted to gather information from relevant stakeholders to inform the review.

I. Results

Outcome 1: Rural women have improved food and nutrition security

From January to June 2020, a total of 3,000 rural women (Janajatis-25.5%; Dalits-10.1%; Muslims-4.8%; Madhesis-50.3%; and Brahmins and Chhetris-9.3%) who were engaged as members of 122 women farmers' groups, were able to improve their food and

² USD 54,144 with the UN exchange rate for July 2020, NPR 120.76/USD.

³ A total of 96 women farmers' groups was reported in 2019 but majority of the members of three groups migrated to different places, together with their family members.

nutrition security with support from the JP RWEE. A total of 2,333 rural women in 2,333 households were able to increase their vegetable production by 184 per cent. This is based on a baseline of 234 kg. per household in 2015; 940 and 1,003 kg. per household produced as of December 2018 and 2019, respectively; and 665 kg. per household produced as of June 2020. The summer production of the vegetables, including the produce of 771 new rural women who were reached during this reporting period, will still be harvested in October and will be included in the 2020 Annual Report. These gains resulted from on-farm on-site trainings and guidance to apply the knowledge, skills and agricultural technologies provided by JP RWEE since 2016 to the rural women to enhance their agricultural productivity. In this reporting period, the total volume of the production was 1,551 mt. for 2,333 households. The average vegetable production per household was 665 kg.

A total of 478 mt. vegetables were consumed by 2,333 rural women and their family members, contributing to improved nutrition security at their home. The harvesting of winter vegetable crops took place in January and the third week of March, before the nationwide lockdown. The winter vegetable cropping was less impacted by the lockdown, as 90 per cent of the production was harvested and sold by rural women before the lockdown. However, the summer vegetable production, which was planted from November 2019 to February 2020, was affected by the lockdown as harvesting began by the end of March and continued until the end of July. During the lockdown, rural women were not able to harvest the produce on time, which also impacted their livelihoods. Some of them, who managed to sell their produce in the nearby market, had to sell it for a lower price. The report, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Households in Nepal", prepared by the World Food Programme (WFP) through the leadership of the MoALD under the Food Security Cluster, reveals that Province 2 is one of the most affected provinces, having the highest reported income reductions. Female-headed households were found to be more food-insecure than male-headed households and were severely impacted by the current crisis.

Data for the report on the summer vegetable production is still being collected by the JP RWEE team and will be included in the Annual Report of 2020. The JP RWEE team had to postpone the paddy plantation and maize (under the cereal crop) support to rural women due to the lockdown. The cereal crop support will take place in 2021.

A total of 244 mt. of high-yielding variety of wheat (*Banganga*) was produced by 935 rural women in two districts. The rural women have saved the wheat grain in their store as seed for the next wheat cropping season. This activity will support the effort to increase cereal crop production per unit area and further contribute to food security in the programme districts.

A total of 180 rural women (150 women and 30 men) enhanced their knowledge and skills on health hazard and pesticide management through six trainings. The 30 men were husbands and family members of the rural women. The training created awareness among rural women and their family members on the effects of pesticides to human health and environment. They were also capacitated on alternative chemical pesticides; safe use and required quantity of pesticides; use of organic pesticides; handling and safe disposal of pesticides; and use of protective measures to avoid the ill effects of pesticide exposure.

Output 1.1: Rural women have increased access to and control over resources, assets and services critical for their food and nutrition security

Out of 122 rural women's groups formed in Sarlahi and Rautahat districts, 93 groups⁴ accumulated a total of NPR 6,538,485 (USD 54,144), which was made available to 2,258 (83% of all direct beneficiaries) JP RWEE women through the revolving fund scheme. The group finance scheme has empowered the members to acquire the needed agricultural inputs (e.g. seeds, chemical fertilizer, pesticides and agriculture tools) and other essential goods and services during the time of urgency. Access to their own financial resource (a group revolving fund) has enabled rural women to avoid taking loans from local money lenders and financial institutions, which generally charge a high interest rate, require complex legal application processes, and impose rules that are usually difficult for women to follow.

Outcome 2: Rural women have increased income to secure their livelihoods

Out of the 2,333 rural women in two districts, 1,855 earned a total of NPR 21,177,000 (USD 175,364) by selling vegetables produced with the support of the JP RWEE. The vegetables include tomato, chillis, cauliflower, radish, onion, carrot, broadleaf mustard, cabbage and beans. The remaining 478 rural women used their agricultural products for self-consumption. Through the support of the JP RWEE, the increased agricultural production enabled the rural women to sell more vegetables in the nearby markets.

⁴ In the Annual Report 2019 of the JP RWEE, total of 96 groups of women farmers were reported. However, the members of three groups (out of 96), migrated to other districts. This brings the total number of women farmers' groups to 122 (93 old groups plus 29 new groups formed in this reporting period). The 122 existing groups are made up of 3,000 rural women from Rautahat and Sarlahi.

Two management committees, each composed of 11 rural women (out of 22 rural women, 5 are Tharus and 11 are Madhesis), were formed to oversee two market outlets in Sarlahi district, which were constructed in the previous reporting period with support from JP RWEE. A total of 22 members of the management committees were capacitated during this reporting period on 'effective management and operation of cooperative for sustainability' in close coordination with their respective local municipalities. The two market outlets are now actively running and providing easier market access to more than 2,000 rural women in the region. The engineering design of two additional vegetable collection centers planned in the programme districts has been drafted. While designing the collection center, special attention has been given to make the centers disabled-friendly. The construction work, however, has been delayed due to the lockdown.

A commercial vegetable producer initiated home delivery for marketing of vegetables during the lockdown⁵

Punam Devi Mahato, 26 years old, is a resident of Barhathawa Municipality of Sarlahi District. She is living in a nuclear family, along with her husband and two children. To support her family, Punam works hard on her farm, growing different seasonal and off-seasonal vegetables (mostly cucumber grown in plastic tunnel) in an eight *Kattha* (0.27 hectares) of leased land. She is a member of a farmers' group named, "*Shree Krishna Mahila Krisak Samuh*",⁶ which was formed under the JP RWEE. Punam received training on both seasonal and off-seasonal vegetable production farming through the JP RWEE, which sharpened her farming skills. Punam also took a six-week leadership and life skill sessions under the JP RWEE, which helped enhance her knowledge and skills on commercial farming and leadership.

Like other farmers, Punam faced challenges in selling her vegetables during the lockdown. However, she adjusted her business approach by adopting home-delivery service to customers in neighbouring villages. She followed all health safety measures, such as wearing face masks, using hand sanitizer and maintaining physical distancing. As a result, she now earns around NPR 100,000 (USD 828.08) monthly from selling different seasonal and off-seasonal vegetables. She serves as an inspiration to her family and other farmers in her community. Other rural women have also adopted the home-delivery approach and continued to earn income to sustain their livelihoods despite the pandemic.

Output 2.1: Rural women have enhanced entrepreneurship skills and value chains to access markets for their products

As of June this year, out of the 122 rural women farmers' groups, 82 groups are engaged in commercial vegetable production. Out of the 82 groups (2,003 rural women), 40 groups (957 rural women) were supported by JP RWEE with marketing equipment, such as weighing machines and plastic crates, to handle and carry fresh vegetables safely to the market. The vegetable marketing workshop and exposure visit to the vegetable market center, organized by JP RWEE in 2019, helped rural women to establish vegetable marketing linkages with wholesalers, vendors, collectors and retailers. Rural women were also able to sell their surplus vegetable products to the market and more farmers were encouraged to expand the areas they cultivate for vegetable production.

The JP RWEE plans to pilot the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) with the Government of Nepal's cash-based National School Meals Programme (NSMP), which is being implemented in 42 community schools in the two districts where the JP RWEE is implemented. The main objective of HGSFP is to link local production with local demand (i.e. in schools implementing NSMP) so that schools may become important markets for rural women. The NSMP trained different stakeholders,⁷ including municipality officials from JP RWEE municipalities, school management of representative schools, both District Education Development Offices and District Health Offices, on March 4-7, 2020. The staff members of JP RWEE's local NGO implementing partner also attended the training. The participants were trained on two days of School Meal Implementation and Management. The training was organized by the Education and Human Resource Development Center of Sanothimi, Bhaktapur, a center under the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, with a resource person from the WFP. In the training, the participants were orientated on school meal implementation and management guidelines; school meal implementation process among all schools and local areas; daily food menu preparation processes; and local working procedures for effective implementation of the school meal programme. Once the cash-based school meal programme is initiated after the reopening of schools, JP RWEE will work with HGSFP on providing local market outlets to the products of rural women.

Output 2.2: Rural women have increased access to decent wage employment opportunities

⁵ It has been difficult to take good photos from the field due to the fast-rising COVID-19 contagion across the country.

⁶ *Sri Krishna* Rural Women Farmer's Group

⁷ A total of 50 participants attended the three-day training. However, not all of them were from the JP RWEE project sites. Since no resource from JP RWEE was used for this training, which was organized by another project, the details about the 50 participants were not elaborated in this report.

Rural women have increased their access to decent wage employment opportunities through the opening of agro-veterinarian shops in both districts. A total of 24 rural women, including a few of their family members were trained on agro-veterinarian in 2019. Among them, five farmers (four women and one man) opened agro-veterinary shops in their respective districts. The agro-veterinary shops are selling chemical fertilizers, seeds, micronutrients, and pesticides. The shops also provide technical support to farmers in their community. In Rautahat district, the shop is located in the premises of the *Shree Bhawani* women's multipurpose cooperative. The community farmers benefit from these agro-veterinary shops by receiving timely and good quality agricultural inputs in the required quantity. The shops enabled the farmers to save time and money as they no longer need to travel to procure their agricultural inputs elsewhere.

During the reporting period, no further progress was made on the short-term employment opportunities for 300 rural women (through cash assistance for assets programme for the construction of agri-product storage facilities) due to the lockdown. As mentioned above, the design of two collection facilities has already been drafted and the government has agreed to resume the construction in August 2020 with strict adherence to the required COVID-19 safety protocols.

Outcome 3: Rural women have enhanced leadership and participation in their communities and in rural institutions, and in shaping laws, policies and programmes

To strengthen the leadership capacity of 1,039 rural women in both districts, the leadership manual developed in 2018 was revisited to make the content relevant to the current COVID-19 context. The manual now addresses issues related to violence against women and girls, loss of income, health concerns and the added workload of women during the lockdown and 'eased-lockdown' contexts.

The feedback previously received by the group facilitators and the local partner, Mandwi (an organisation based in Gaur, Rautahat), to tailor the content to the capacity of rural women with low literacy, was also incorporated during the revision. This manual will be used to launch the six-week, weekly facilitated sessions with 1,039 rural women, each consisting of two to three hours. The sessions aim to enhance their overall leadership and meaningful participation in their communities, especially in engaging with their respective local government units.

To complement the manual, five posters were developed, highlighting different information on COVID-19. These will be used by the facilitators to raise awareness on COVID-19 during the weekly sessions. The manual, posters and audio content in local language will be used during the weekly group sessions by 17 women's group facilitators. A total of 1,294 rural women were already capacitated on leadership in 2018/2019.

Equal Access International (EAI) was re-selected in April 2020 to provide follow-up support to the rural women focusing on leadership trainings, capacity strengthening of both duty bearers and rights holders and community engagement in the two JP RWEE districts. This will build upon and reinforce the results, achievements and lessons learned from the *Sahi Ho!* advocacy campaign.⁸

Output 3.1: Rural women, including young women, have enhanced confidence and leadership skills to take an active part in local governance systems.

There is no progress to report under this output in this reporting period as the JP RWEE team could not operate in the field due to the lockdown. The progress under this output will be captured in the Annual Report of 2020.

⁸ In 2018, UN Women launched a one-year action-oriented communication and advocacy campaign, *Sahi Ho! (that's right!)*, to raise public awareness, increase political will, and encourage allocation of increased resources to support women's leadership roles and economic empowerment in Nepal. The campaign directly contributed to UN Women's three women's economic empowerment programmes namely: (a) the JP RWEE, (b) Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, and (c) The Future We Want Project. The campaign was successfully completed on 31 March 2019, and was able to directly engage 11,629 people through community-based activities and reached approximately 11 million individuals through campaign activities and mass media/social media outreach.

Shining light in the community during the COVID-19 crisis

Roshani Kumari Chaudhary lives in Pipravita of Bahathawa Municipality in Sarlahi district with her family of six, and their main source of livelihood is agriculture. Roshani was one of the rural women who took part in the six-week leadership and life skill sessions designed to enhance the overall leadership capacity of rural women in Sarlahi and Rautahat districts. After taking part in the programme, Roshani shared that her confidence has significantly increased. Thereafter, she began to participate in various community initiatives to address the issues faced by rural women like herself. Another noteworthy change was her membership in the health committee of her village. As a member, she has been helping pregnant and new mothers in her community to access proper health services. Along with other members of the committee, she also raised local funds to support women who could not afford the services.



Photo shows Roshani inaugurating a community-level event by lighting a candle. She was invited as one of the special guests by the community members during the event, held before the lockdown in March 2020. (Credit: Nikesh Tripathi)

In the recent COVID-19 crisis, Roshani has been out again, helping her community members. She supported several events to demonstrate hand-washing techniques and raised awareness about preventive measures against infection. The committee members and Roshani also distributed essential groceries, like rice and lentils, to people in the community who lost income due to the pandemic and were unable to feed themselves or their families. Roshani is the epitome of female leadership. She demonstrates to her community that if women are equipped with necessary skills and opportunities, they become catalysts in lifting their lives and the well-being of people around them. ‘Roshani’ means light, and just like her name, she continues to shine light in her community.

Output 3.2: Rural women have greater organizational capacities to form, sustain and participate into Producer Organizations, cooperatives and unions

Rural women in the two JP RWEE districts enhanced their organizational capacity to sustain and participate in cooperatives. During the reporting period, one multi-purpose cooperative was formed in Sarlahi district. Around 135 rural women from eight rural women’s groups joined the cooperative. The rural women are currently working for the official registration of the cooperative with the municipality.

In Sarlahi and Rautahat, there were already two cooperatives (one in each district) formed with 350 members from 16 rural women farmers’ groups and registered in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Once the newly formed cooperative in Sarlahi is officially registered, there will be three cooperatives formed by rural women in Sarlahi and Rautahat districts. In Rautahat, the number of women who are now members of a cooperative has increased from 150 in 2019 to 375 in 2020 and the number of groups has increased from 8 to 15. The registered cooperatives are providing rural women with an opportunity to approach banks, or local financial institutions/cooperatives, for individual or group loans. The women are also given access to incentive packages provided by the government, such as relaxation of tax and interest rates and access to subsidies.

The established cooperatives have initiated a savings and credit scheme for their members. They also established an agro-veterinary shop within the cooperative’s premises, as reported under Output 2.2. The cooperative members and farmers from neighboring communities continue to be benefited by these shops through accessible high-quality agricultural inputs.

Output 3.4: Rural women, including young women, have enhanced awareness on their rights in a more supportive community/local environment.

To create supportive family and community environments, a total of 222 rural women from nine groups (115 Madhesi; 69 Tharu; 4 Dalits; 23 Muslims; 2 Janajati-Hill; and 9 Brahmin/Chherti-Hill) who were trained on GALS in 2019, continued to apply GALS principles and tools to their lives, particularly in relation to their family members and peers. They applied GALS tools during their consultations with their family members to identify and implement approaches to adapt to the lockdown situation. They were also able to understand and apply the precautionary health and hygiene measures, which they shared with family members and neighbors in their respective communities.

A total of 23 rural women from 10 groups participated in six days of GALS ‘change catalyst workshops’ conducted in February and March 2020. The 23 participants consisted of six Madhesi; nine Tharu; three Dalits; one Muslim; two Janajati-Hill; and two Brahmin/Chherti-Hill.

Four champions, who learned GALS in 2019, facilitated a few workshop sessions for the new batch of change catalysts. They shared how they used the GALS tools at home, which resulted in the development of positive behaviours of family members, such as sharing in domestic chores and general improvement of gender relations within their respective households. This was described by women and their family members during the monitoring visits of the JP RWEE’s team. The experiences of the four champions inspired the participants. The champions’ confidence and self-esteem were remarkably enhanced through their exposure to GALS tools. These champions also worked as volunteers to disseminate the GALS methodology, raise public awareness about COVID-19, and help vulnerable women during the lockdown period. The GALS manual was also developed during this reporting period.

Outcome 4: A more gender-responsive policy environment is secured for the economic empowerment of rural women

To promote a gender-responsive policy environment, preparatory activities for the review of GESI strategy of the ADS, in the context of the federal architecture and humanitarian crisis, were initiated in this reporting period. An expert to provide technical support to the MoALD is now on board. An initial meeting was organized with the Under Secretary/Gender Focal Point of the MoALD on 28 June to ensure the Ministry’s ownership of the review process. In this reporting period, questionnaires for a quick assessment and key informant interviews were also drafted for the consultations and gathering of information from MoALD and other key stakeholders. The results of the consultations and information gathering will be used to inform the review process.

Output 4.1: Policy makers and parliamentarians have enhanced capacities to effectively mainstream gender into land, food, agriculture, nutrition and rural employment policies, laws and budgets

There is no progress to report under this output in this reporting period as the JP RWEE team could not operate in the field due to the lockdown. The progress under this output will be captured in the Annual Report of 2020.

Output 4.2: Greater availability of tools and data to track progress in the economic empowerment of rural women

The selection of a service provider to conduct an end-line survey through Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), along with an in-depth assessment of GALS, was completed in this reporting period. This survey will be rolled out in July.

II. Describe any delays in implementation, challenges, lessons learned and best practices

Challenges:

- Execution of programme activities during nationwide lockdown - The JP RWEE team faced a challenging operational context during this reporting period due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The nationwide lockdown since March 24 restricted movement, banned public gatherings, and imposed physical distancing, which made it impossible to roll out the field-level activities in accordance with the agreed workplan. As a mitigating measure, an alternative implementation modality for each activity was discussed and more feasible options were considered, based on the findings from a rapid assessment of the status of rural women in the relevant districts. While these mitigation measures remain, an assessment and consultation carried out in June in the programme districts indicated the viability of rolling-out some of the activities from the original implementation plan. In case the situation worsens, implementation will shift to the revised plan. It will adopt alternative implementation modalities, such as the use of online platforms for orientations and radio broadcasts, to reach out to the community members.

Voice from the field

“My self-esteem was enhanced through GALS. It helped me to develop coping strategies for my family and extend cooperation to my neighbours and other group members.”

Reeta Chaudhary

GALS champion from Rautahat district

- High demand for immediate employment - Due to COVID-19, there has been a huge influx of unemployed people to the rural areas. These rural population have lost their wage work and are desperately in need of a source of income. In a quick assessment conducted by JP RWEE as part of the UN Socio Economic Recovery Framework (SERF) for Nepal, it was found out that there is a high demand for immediate jobs among the rural poor to recover from the crisis. This may lead to a high demand for short-term employment that JP RWEE has planned under the cash assistance for assets programme. To mitigate this, JP RWEE will coordinate with the local government and rural women farmers' groups to identify rural women for short-term employment, which would help mitigate potential conflict in the competition for limited job opportunities. Realigning the activities to increase the opportunities for rural employment may also be necessary, once the lockdown is over and recovery works begin.

Lessons learned

- The return of male migrant workers from abroad during the lockdown has been gradually hampering the leadership roles that rural women had begun to take on. These women used to sell the produce and had control over their income, which is gradually being passed on to their husbands. Rural women's engagement in various local-level groups in their community has also been limited due to physical distancing requirements resulting from the COVID-19 crisis. During the lockdown and post-lockdown contexts, many families have been coping with limited economic resources. In this case, the male family members have become active in controlling and managing family income. Limited livelihood options have also led to increased incidence of domestic violence at the household level. Alcohol intake in the family is also said to be increasing within several households in the JP RWEE districts. In Nepal, especially in the villages, people still live in joint families, with family members who used to live elsewhere to earn livelihoods, now back. Many households also have limited private spaces for women. Further, the rights of elderly people have been curtailed as they now have to share spaces with family members who have returned. Since local-level justice mechanisms, such as police and local Judicial Committees, were almost dysfunctional during the lockdown, this has also hindered the ability of women to seek and access justice, impacting the overall well-being of families. Children were also affected by the incidences of violence at home. As such, the JP RWEE team learned that there has to be a different approach for the current phase of the programme. More engagement of the family members in the programme is key to ensuring an enabling environment at home, where family members are informed of their individual rights and treat each other with dignity and respect.
- Given the magnitude of issues faced by the programme amidst the challenging context of the pandemic, it was recognized that a strong component on 'humanitarian crisis preparedness and response' should have been incorporated into the design and work plan from the beginning of the JP RWEE implementation in 2016. This preparedness and response component should have included specific measures to support rural women to better prepare for any humanitarian crisis. This insight should be considered in the planning of future interventions in the country, especially in rural areas.
- The nature of the current pandemic limits social and physical interactions. In this case, rural women's inaccessibility to online meeting platforms limited their ability to continue smooth interactions with the JP RWEE team. During the lockdown situation, phone was the only possible medium of reaching the participants. However, in several cases, there were connectivity issues and the interactions were not fully productive. In such cases, the JP RWEE will have to consider supporting rural women to connect to online platforms with assistance from the implementing partners and available local digital linkages to minimize the digital divide issue.
- Rautahat and Sarlahi districts are affected by monsoon rains every year. The JP RWEE team has learned that there is a need to invest on climate-smart agricultural measures, such as providing reliable forecasts of weather to farmers by connecting them with digital technology and introducing new varieties of climate-resilient crops through demonstrations. Some Terai districts (less infestation reported in Rautahat and Sarlahi) were already impacted by the first wave of locust invasion and, based on precedents, a second wave of invasion may occur and impact the programme districts. The four participating agencies will have to continue working in this area through new resource mobilization approaches, as the current phase has limited resources to address all of these issues.

Further Reflection of the JP RWEE team on the COVID-19 impact in agriculture sector:

The rapid assessment study conducted by MoALD, FAO and WFP under the food security cluster reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated harsh disruptions in the food supply chains. Losses in agricultural harvests and agro-based enterprises have impacted farm and off farm incomes. This is likely to push highly vulnerable populations into the brink of severe food insecurity and extreme poverty. Poultry, dairy and perishable fresh vegetables are the most affected sub-sectors in agriculture. Strict travel and vehicular restrictions not only constrained people's movements, but also impaired the flow of agricultural products from farms to markets. The closure of hotels, restaurants, schools and colleges and the physical distancing measures have further led to significant decline in consumer demands, particularly in urban areas. Food price volatility added additional

uncertainty to many consumers, particularly to the poor, excluded and most vulnerable population. If the lockdown situation would prevail longer, it may force more people to consume an imbalanced diet, thereby falling into the state of food and nutrition insecurity.

In this context, the JP RWEE team reflected on the following key measures to support rural women to adapt and thrive in the lockdown and post-lockdown contexts:

- Continue support for the distribution of improved agricultural inputs, such as quality seed, small irrigation, organic/inorganic fertilizer and agricultural equipment for drudgery-reduction. The MoALD is also focusing on the distribution of agricultural inputs, emphasizing the need for quality seeds to rural farmers to support economic recovery;
- Promote food production for local consumption (rice, wheat and maize) to address food insecurity in the immediate/short term,⁹ in addition to supporting commercial farming for rural women in the medium to long-term periods;
- Promote the strengthening of nearby local markets, where women have direct access to sell their produce. During the lockdown, rural women in two districts sold their winter produce in the nearby local market. Some of them used bicycle and those who did not have bicycle took their harvest in a basket and sold it in the nearby local markets;
- Enable women to have direct access to commercial market to sell their produce. For this, they need to be connected with efficient and affordable transport facilities to move their products to the market. Transport (e-rickshaw/local van) run by women for women should be explored to ensure that the rural women would have direct access to commercial markets. Women-led cooperatives should also be empowered/capacitated and provided with vehicle support to facilitate the collection of vegetables and subsequent transfer to the market; and
- Address the gap in digital divide, as many rural women do not own mobile phones. Provide rural women with support and enhance their capacity to access online platforms through digital technology. This has been recognized as an urgent need in the agricultural sector. As the lockdown and post-lockdown contexts require physical distancing, it was recognized that rural women's access to digital technology, such as smart mobile phones, is another area where the JP RWEE team would invest in, going forward. Once they are capacitated, they will be able to efficiently access agriculture and market-related information through their phones.

The JP RWEE team also discussed that all interventions may not be managed within the current resources. Thus, the imperative of prioritizing additional resource mobilization has been recognized. In close coordination with MoALD, the JP RWEE team is in the process of drafting a concept note for this purpose.

Best practice

The JP RWEE team has been able to present itself 'delivering as one' to the rural women and federal and local government partners. With the federal and local governments, the team organized joint meetings to ensure a unified voice in interacting with representatives of the government units. This enabled the four participating agencies to avoid confusion and to be on the same page at all times. The government stakeholders address the team as JP RWEE rather than as individual agencies of the United Nations. This practice has enabled the JP RWEE to gain the trust of government as a unified team working collaboratively to achieve common results.

III. Qualitative assessment

During the lockdown, collaboration and regular coordination among the four participating UN agencies was sustained through zoom meetings. All of the four agencies updated each other regarding the status in the field and the situation of rural women in the lockdown context. This enabled the JP RWEE team to discuss and decide on the appropriate approach to physically move to the field once the lockdown has been eased. The JP RWEE team has also proposed a joint meeting with the new Secretary of the MoALD to brief him on the programme status and share few ideas about in-country resource mobilization for the immediate future. The meeting is likely to take place in the first week of July 2020. Overall, the JP RWEE team in Nepal has been successful in demonstrating how they could operationalize the principle of "delivering as one" even under the challenging context of the pandemic.

⁹ The specific objective of this activity is to introduce good quality of rice, wheat and maize seeds in the project areas to increase the production and productivity of these crops. The farmers could keep the seed for three years and replace it after three years. It was observed that the rural women are traditionally using old seeds, which are highly susceptible to diseases and insects and demand more water. Most importantly, the per hectare productivity of the new seed varieties is more than double, in comparison with the old seed varieties.

The involvement of the four collaborating UN agencies in the broader COVID-19 efforts is framed within the on-going initiatives of the UN Country Team to localize the UN Socio-Economic Recovery Framework (SERF). The SERF will serve as a roadmap for recovery, concurrent to, and beyond the health and humanitarian imperatives in the country. The agenda of rural women farmers is a priority that will be kept at the core of discussions and decision making leading to the completion of the SERF and its implementation in the next 18 months. Also, as explained above, the interventions of the programme in relation to the COVID-19 crisis consisted of reviewing learning materials developed through the programme, to incorporate the concerns and realities related to the pandemic. It also included assistance to rural women to ensure sustained marketing of their products despite the pandemic and the conducting of a rapid gender assessment, which will help ensure that the concerns of farmers are not missed out in the process of the planning and allocation of resources in the both pandemic and post-pandemic scenarios.

The status of indicators and case stories from the field indicate some observable success in the attainment of the objectives of JP RWEE. A global final evaluation of the JP RWEE, including Nepal, will take place from October 2020. This will provide evidence-based data on the overall achievements of the JP RWEE, which will be reported in the same year.

A small-scale rapid gender assessment was conducted to assess the situation of rural women, including young women, during the lockdown. A total of 15 rural women and 8 local key stakeholders were interviewed and consulted virtually during the assessment. The objectives of the assessment were to: (a) identify and document the emerging issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and their impact on rural women including the impact of COVID-19 on agricultural production and the value chain and the influx of male migrant returnees affecting women's roles and responsibilities (unpaid care work) at home and on the farm; (b) assess the awareness level and accessibility of rural women to the government's relief packages for the lockdown period. The assessment focused on the nine municipalities of the programme districts and it incorporated both primary and secondary information about the districts.

The assessment revealed that rural women have reasonable awareness of the main preventive measures, including the use of soap and water, maintaining cleanliness, wearing masks, staying at home, and practicing physical distancing to prevent COVID-19 transmission. Some of them did not have a mask, which was difficult for them to procure due to the lockdown. In some communities, ward offices distributed masks and soaps to the residents. The rural women stated that their major sources of information about COVID-19 were their family and community members and public announcements by the ward offices. Six out of fifteen women respondents (40%) were not aware of the quarantine facilities in their respective wards.

The assessment also revealed that the majority of rural women play a major role as caregivers in their family while they are also equally active in agriculture. At present, they are bearing the brunt of economic fallouts due to their inability to sell agricultural produce and their increased care burdens at home, with children no longer in school. They are also responsible for taking care of sick parents and other family members. Another major impact is the loss of jobs of male family members abroad and their journey back home with uncertain livelihood options. Similarly, the lockdown has caused delays in harvesting due to the lack of human resources and equipment. As a result, farmers suffered huge losses due to crop wastage. The assessment also revealed the increasing rate of gender-based violence during the lockdown period due to increased economic and social pressures at home. Many rural women were unaware of the relief packages of the Nepal Government. Even among those who were aware, based on their past experiences with government response during natural disasters, such as flooding, they were not convinced that the government support would be adequate. (Please refer to Annex A for the detailed report.)

ii) Indicator Based Performance Assessment:

	Achievement of Indicator Targets	Reasons for Variance with Planned Target (if any)	Source of Verification
Outcome 1 Improved food and nutrition security			
<p>Indicator 1.1: % of increase in agriculture production of women farmers</p> <p>Baseline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food crops 1,337 kg/HH - Vegetables 234 kg/HH <p>Planned Target (2020): 200 % increase in vegetable production</p>	<p>Target 1.1: This target remains in progress and has been partially achieved. During this reporting period, the increase in agricultural vegetable crops production in Sarlahi and Rautahat districts was already 184 per cent, which is only 16 per cent short of the 200 per cent targeted increase in vegetable production. There is no additional progress to report in this period.</p>	<p>The summer production of the participants will only be harvested in October 2020. Thus, the progress could only be reported in the Annual Report of 2020.</p>	<p>Production data of targeted beneficiaries and field observation</p>
<p>Indicator 1.2: Women’s dietary diversity or variety of house holds food consumption pattern</p> <p>Baseline:</p> <p>1.2.1 62.2% of HHs (with kitchen gardening) surveyed with sufficient quantity and frequency of vegetable consumption</p> <p>1.2.2 72.4% of HHs surveyed have minimum acceptable diet (MAD)</p> <p>1.2.3 Food Consumption Score of HHs surveyed is 6.73%</p> <p>1.2.4 Coping Strategy Index (CSI)</p> <p>Planned Target:</p> <p>1.2.1 50% increase by quantity and frequency in vegetable consumption of kitchen garden (2017)</p> <p>1.2.2 At least 85% of the total HHs supported have minimum acceptable diet (MAD) (5,610 HHs in five years, and 2,890 HHs as of December</p>	<p>Target 1.2.1: As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this target has already been achieved and exceeded by 19.9 per cent. There has been 69.9 per cent increase by quantity and frequency in vegetable consumption of HHs with kitchen garden.</p> <p>Target 1.2.2: As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this target has already been achieved and exceeded by 12 per cent. As of December 2019, 97 per cent of HHs (143 HHs) supported have minimum acceptable diet.</p> <p>Target 1.2.3: As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this target has been achieved and exceeded by 17 per cent. As of December 2019, 97 per cent of HHs (143 HHs) supported improved Food Consumption Score.</p> <p>Target 1.2.4: An average of 16 per cent of HHs in both districts adopted stress coping strategies.</p>		<p>Vegetable consumption data of targeted beneficiaries and final evaluation report of the JP RWEE</p>

<p>2016,) 1.2.3 80% of the total HHs supported improve Food Consumption Score (FCS) 1.2.4 CSI (5,280 HHs in five years and 2,720 HHs as of December 2016)</p>			
<p>Output 1.1 Rural women have increased access to and control over resources, assets and services critical for their food and nutrition security</p>			
<p>Indicator 1.1.1: Number of rural women farmers who have access to integrated agriculture/nutrition services Baseline: 0 Planned Target: 3,000 rural women farmers</p> <p>Indicator 1.1.2: Number of rural women farmers who utilize improved agriculture production techniques Baseline: 287 households with 574 rural women farmers Planned Target: 3,000 women farmers</p> <p>Indicator 1.1.3: Number of rural women accessing community assets and agriculture infrastructure (including shored equipment and machineries) Baseline: 0 Planned Target: 700 rural women</p>	<p>Target 1.1.1: This target has already been achieved. As of 2019, a total of 3,000 rural women have access to integrated agriculture/nutrition services through kitchen gardening and commercial vegetable production.</p> <p>Target 1.1.2: This target has already been achieved. As of 2019, a total of 3,000 rural women have been utilizing improved agriculture production techniques.</p> <p>Target 1.1.3: As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this target has already been achieved and exceed by 100 rural women. A total of 800 rural women in two districts have access to shared equipment and agricultural machineries, such as power tillers, corn shellers, paddy/wheat harvesters and shallow tube well. The 800 rural women from 40 groups have received marketing equipment, such as plastic crate and weighing machine.</p>		<p>Field monitoring report</p>
<p>Outcome 2 Rural women have increased income to secure their livelihoods.</p>			
<p>Indicator 2.1 Income generated from sales of rural women Baseline: 49 rural women farmers Planned Target: 1,320 rural women generated income from their sales market</p>	<p>Target 2.1: As of June 2020, 1,855 rural women earned a total of NPR 21,177,000 (USD 175,364) by selling vegetables. The number comprises 80 per cent of the total of 2,333 rural women supported by the JP RWEE in this reporting period.</p>		<p>Fresh vegetable sales data of targeted rural women and field report</p>

Indicator 2.2: Proportion of rural women with empowerment in the income domain of the WEAI (control over income) Baseline: IFAD to set the baseline Target: IFAD to set the target	Target 2.2: This target is still in progress. The service provider to conduct the assessment of WEAI has been selected during this reporting period (January-June 2020). The task will be rolled out starting July 2020.		
Output 2.1 Rural women have enhanced entrepreneurship skills and value chains to access markets for their products			
Indicator 2.1.1: Number of rural women farmers trained on entrepreneurial and /or vocational skills to have increased access to markets Baseline: 0 Planned Target: 50 rural women farmers	Target 2.1.1: As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this target has already been achieved and exceeded by six rural women. Out of 122 rural women farmers' groups, 56 rural women from 55 rural women farmers' groups were supported to enhance their market linkages through an interaction workshop with local vendors, retailers, and wholesalers.		Data of vegetable linkages development interaction workshop and exposure visit
Output 2.2 Rural women have increased access to decent wage employment opportunities			
Indicator 2.2.1: Number of rural women farmers who entered wage employment with the support of the JP RWEE Baseline: 922 rural women Planned Target: 200 more rural women compared to the target rural women	Target 2.2.1: This target is in progress and is still short of completion by 65 rural women. So far, 135 rural women have already received short-term wage employment through cash assistance for assets activities. They earned a monthly average income of NPR 8,500 (USD 74.7), as per government's local wage rate in both districts. This is a result of short-term wage employment in the construction of two market outlets. There is no progress to report in this period.	The construction work could not be implemented during the reporting period due to the COVID-19 lockdown. This activity will be implemented from August 2020-March 2021.	Field monitoring report
Outcome 3: Rural women have enhanced leadership and participation in their communities and in rural institutions, and in shaping laws, policies and programmes.			
Indicator 3.1: % of women elected as representative at local level/community level committees	Target 3.1: As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this target has already been achieved and exceeded by		Equal Access International's report

<p>Baseline: 43.6% (828 including 9 in leadership position in cooperatives) Planned Target: 10% (2018-2020)</p>	<p>54.7 per cent. As of December 2019, 64.7 per cent (1,065) of the rural women are now in leadership positions in cooperatives in two districts.</p>		
<p>Indicator 3.2: % of producer’s organizations led by women Baseline: 2.9 % producers organizations led by women Planned Target: 5% increase (against the baseline) in rural women leadership in producer’s organizations (2018-2020)</p>	<p>Target 3.2: As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this target has been achieved and exceeded by 18.7 per cent. As of December 2019, 23.7 per cent (552 rural women) increase in rural women’s leadership in producer’s organizations has been achieved.</p>		Field monitoring report
<p>Output 3.1 Rural women, including young women have enhanced confidence and leadership skills to participate in local governance</p>			
<p>Indicator 3.1.1: Number of rural women farmers who participated in the local policy discussions and/or formal decision-making processes Baseline:723 rural women Planned Target: 20 increased against the baseline (2018-2020)</p>	<p>Target 3.1.1: As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this target has been achieved and exceeded by 1,160 rural women. As of December 2019, 1,180 rural women visited and held a dialogue with government official, which resulted in the enhancement of their knowledge and understanding of local-level planning process.</p>	<p>The JP RWEE team was unable to operate in the field since March 2020. Further progress on this will be reported in the Annual Report of 2020</p>	<p>Equal Access International’s report</p>
<p>Output 3.2: Rural women have greater organizational capacities to form, sustain and participate into POs, cooperatives and unions</p>			
<p>Indicator 3.2.1: Number of rural women’s groups who join formally registered cooperatives or registered themselves in relevant local government offices Baseline: 14 rural women’s groups joined cooperatives Planned Target: 2 additional cooperatives joined by rural women (2018-2020)</p>	<p>Target 3.2.1: As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this target has already been achieved. It is likely that the target will be surpassed by an additional cooperative in the coming reporting period. Eight women’s groups formed two cooperatives and registered them in 2018 and 2019, respectively. In 2020, a new cooperative has been formed in Sarlahi district, consisting of eight women’s groups. It is in the process of being registered at the municipality’s office. Once it is registered, there will be three cooperatives in two districts in which rural women have joined as members.</p>		<p>Field monitoring report</p>

Output 3.4: Rural women, including young women have enhanced awareness on their rights in a more supportive community/local environment.			
<p>Indicator 3.4.1: Number of rural women who are aware of women’s human rights and GESI responsive approaches Baseline: 5 rural women Planned Target: 1,500 rural women</p>	<p>Target 3.4.1: This target remains in progress and is 188 (rural women) short of achievement. In 2019, a total of 1,312 rural women (18 female facilitators and 1,294 rural women) were reached through weekly discussions on women’s human rights and GESI responsive approaches. There is no additional progress to report on this period.</p>	<p>In the reporting period, the JP RWEE team was unable to operate in the field because of pandemic-related constraints. Targets 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 are envisioned to be achieved and captured in the 2020 Annual Report.</p>	<p>Equal Access International’s report</p>
<p>Indicator 3.4.2: Number of families/households mobilized and increased their awareness and support rural women’s economic empowerment Baseline: 0 Target: 1,620 rural women</p>	<p>Target 3.4.2: This target remains in progress and has been partially achieved. It is short of completion by 1,430 families/households. In 2019, 190 households were mobilized and increased their awareness and support for rural women’s economic empowerment. There is no additional progress to report on in this period.</p>		<p>Field monitoring report</p>
Outcome 4: A more gender responsive policy environment is secured for the economic empowerment of rural women			
<p>Indicator 4.1: % of government budgets and donor funding (on budget) allocated to programme benefitting rural women Baseline: 5% Planned Target: 20 % of Government budgets and donor funding (on budget) allocated to programme benefitting rural women</p>	<p>Target 4.1: This target has already been achieved and exceeded by 18.65 per cent. As captured in the 2019 Annual Report, 38.65 per cent of government budget and donor funding for the fiscal year 2018/2019 was allocated to programmes benefitting rural women.</p>		
Output 4.1: Policy makers and parliamentarians have enhanced capacities to effectively mainstream gender into land, food, agriculture, nutrition and rural employment policies, laws and budgets.			

<p>Indicator 4.1.1: Number of local government representatives/officials who enhanced their knowledge on issues of rural women farmers Baseline: 0 Planned Target:30 (2018-2020)</p>	<p>Target 4.1.1: As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this target has already been achieved and exceeded by eight local government representatives/officials. The surplus would have been increased further by additional 60 elected leaders and officials, but implementation during the reporting period was hampered by restrictions related to COVID-19. In 2019, a total of 38 locally elected leaders (22 women, 16 men) from Rautahat and Sarlahi districts enhanced their knowledge on gender equality and social inclusion, including issues of rural women, and gender-responsive budgeting in local-level participatory planning processes.</p>	<p>The implementation of activities during the reporting period was hampered by COVID- related restrictions. Progress will be reported in the 2020 Annual Report.</p>	<p>Equal Access International's report</p>
<p>Output 4.2: Greater availability of tools and data to track progress in the economic empowerment of rural women</p>			
<p>Indicator 4.2.1: Number of countries where the WEAI is piloted Baseline: IFAD to set the baseline Planned Target: IFAD to set the target</p>	<p>Target: 4.2.1: Nepal will be one of the countries where the WEAI will be piloted. This will be rolled out from July 2020. The service provider to conduct the WEAI end line survey has been selected.</p>	<p>The JP RWEE team was unable to fully operate during the reporting period due to COVID-related restrictions.</p>	