



**“ACCELERATING PROGRESS TOWARD THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN”**  
**FINAL PROGRAMME REPORT**  
**MPTF OFFICE GENERIC FINAL PROGRAMME<sup>1</sup> NARRATIVE REPORT**  
**REPORTING PERIOD: JANUARY 2015-SEPTEMBER 2021**

Programme Title & Project Number	Country, Locality(s), Priority Area(s) / Strategic Results <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme Title: Accelerating Progress Toward Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Nepal</li> <li>• Programme Number (<i>if applicable</i>)</li> <li>• MPTF Office Project Reference Number:<sup>3</sup> 00092004</li> </ul>	<p><b>Nepal:</b> Eight Municipalities and eight Rural Municipalities from three districts (Sindhuli, Sarlahi and Rautahat), in Bagmati Province and Province 2</p> <p><b><u>Sindhuli:</u></b>            -<b>Rural Municipalities:</b> Golanjar, Sunkoshi, Tinpatan            -<b>Municipalities:</b> Kamalai, Dudhauli, Kamalamai</p> <p><b><u>Sarlahi:</u></b>            - <b>Rural Municipalities:</b> Chandranagar, Brahmpuri, Basawariya and Dhankaul            - <b>Municipalities:</b> Bagmati and Barahathwa</p> <p><b><u>Rautahat:</u></b>            -<b>Rural Municipalities:</b> Yamuna Mai            -<b>Municipalities:</b> Gujara, Brindaban and Rajpur</p>
	<p><i>Priority area/ strategic results</i></p>
	<p align="center"><b>Programme Beneficiaries</b></p>
	<p><b>Direct beneficiaries:</b> 3,622 rural women farmers (3,622 when there were three districts selected in the beginning of the implementation of the JP RWEE, however, two districts were mostly covered during the programme implementation where the JP RWEE</p>

<sup>1</sup> The term “programme” is used for programmes, joint programmes and projects.  
<sup>2</sup> Strategic Results, as formulated in the Strategic UN Planning Framework (e.g. UNDAF) or project document;  
<sup>3</sup> The MPTF Office Project Reference Number is the same number as the one on the Notification message. It is also referred to as “Project ID” on the project’s factsheet page on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#).

team worked with 3,002 rural women farmers).  
**Indirect beneficiaries:** During the programme period, 16,381 family members (estimated)<sup>4</sup> of the 3,622 rural women, 101 (49 women and 52 men) government officials and locally elected representatives, 103 vendors (52 women and 51 men), and 11,629 community members and relevant district level stakeholders who participated in the events were reached.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Participating Organization(s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO, WFP, IFAD and UN Women</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Implementing Partners</b></p> <p><b><u>Government:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD)</li> <li>• Agriculture Knowledge Centers</li> <li>• Municipalities and Rural Municipalities</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Civil society:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Didi Bahini</li> <li>• FORWARD Nepal</li> <li>• Support Activities for Poor Producers of Nepal (SAPPROS Nepal)</li> <li>• Equal Access International</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Programme/Project Cost (US\$)</b></p> <p>Total approved budget as per project document: <b>US\$ 3,322,774</b>  MPTF /JP Contribution<sup>5</sup>:  <b>US\$ 3,322,774</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>by Agency (if applicable)</i>  Agency Contribution</li> <li>• <i>by Agency (if applicable)</i>  US\$ 37,414 from the Government of Finland, UN Women</li> </ul> <p>Government Contribution  <i>(if applicable)</i>N/A</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Programme Duration</b></p> <p>Overall Duration <i>6 years 9 months</i>  Start Date<sup>6</sup> <i>01/01/2015 (the actual implementation in Nepal started only from 2016 due to massive earthquake in 2015)</i></p> <p>Original End Date<sup>7</sup> <i>30/12/2020</i></p> <p>Actual End date<sup>8</sup> <i>30/09/2021</i></p>

<sup>4</sup> The average size of a household in Nepal is 5.3 persons per household. The number of indirect beneficiaries was calculated by multiplying 3,622 direct beneficiaries by 5.3 and subtracting 3,622.

<sup>5</sup> The MPTF/JP Contribution is the amount transferred to the Participating UN Organizations – see [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#)

<sup>6</sup> The start date is the date of the first transfer of the funds from the MPTF Office as Administrative Agent. Transfer date is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#)

<sup>7</sup> As per approval of the original project document by the relevant decision-making body/Steering Committee.

<sup>8</sup> If there has been an extension, then the revised, approved end date should be reflected here. If there has been no extension approved, then the current end date is the same as the original end date. The end date is the same as the operational closure date which is when all activities for which a Participating Organization is responsible under an approved MPTF / JP have been completed. As per the MOU, agencies are to notify the MPTF Office when a programme completes its operational activities. Please see [MPTF Office Closure Guidelines](#).

Other Contributions (donors) <i>(if applicable) US\$ 37,414          from the Government of          Finland, UN Women</i>	Have agency(ies) operationally closed the Programme in its(their) system? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (IFAD will complete it by December 2021 as per their extended timeline)
<b>TOTAL:</b>	Expected Financial Closure date <sup>9</sup> : 31 <sup>st</sup> May 2022
<b>Programme Assessment/Review/Mid-Term Eval.</b> Evaluation Completed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Date: <i>31.04.21 (Global Evaluation of the Programme was conducted)</i> Evaluation Report - Attached <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Date: <i>dd.mm.yyyy</i>	<b>Report Submitted By</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Name: Rachana Bhattarai <input type="checkbox"/> Title: Programme Analyst <input type="checkbox"/> Participating Organization (Lead): UN Women <input type="checkbox"/> Email address: <a href="mailto:rachana.bhattarai@unwomen.org">rachana.bhattarai@unwomen.org</a>

## ACRONYMS

ADS	Agriculture Development Strategy
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FFA	Food Assistance for Assets
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
HGSF	Home-Grown School Feeding
HGSFP	Home-Grown School Feeding Programme
HH	Household
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
IVR	Interactive voice response
JP RWEE	A Joint Programme on “Accelerating Progress Toward the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Nepal”
MoALD	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development
No.	Number
NPR	Nepali Rupee
NSMP	National School Meals Programme
PLW	Pregnant and lactating women
PSC	Programme Steering Committee
QFL	Query for My Leaders
RERP	Rural Enterprises and Remittances Project
SBCC	Social behaviour change communication
SNF	Specialised nutritious food
SIYB	Start and Improve Your Business
WEAI	Women’s Empowerment Agricultural Index
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme

<sup>9</sup> Financial Closure requires the return of unspent balances and submission of the [Certified Final Financial Statement and Report](#).

## Executive Summary

The Joint Programme “Accelerating Progress Towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women” (JP RWEE) was implemented as part of the global RWEE programme and a joint pilot contributing to the implementation of the Government’s Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS). The programme aimed to secure rural women’s livelihoods and rights in the context of sustainable development. As a result of the strong earthquake that hit Nepal in 2015, the programme’s implementation start date was delayed from 2015 to January 2016. Its focus was to pilot the positioning of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) at the core of ADS implementation, thereby ensuring that no one is left behind. The JP RWEE was mostly implemented in the Sarlahi and Rautahat districts<sup>10</sup> of Province 2 in the south east of the country under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD) and the joint efforts of FAO, IFAD, WFP, and UN Women.<sup>11</sup> These areas were selected because of their low women’s empowerment index,<sup>12</sup> prevalence of harmful traditional socio-cultural practices and the devastation caused by flooding in the region. In 2020-2021, the Sarlahi and Rautahat districts were also severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions of movement were imposed by authorities. As a result, a nine month no cost extension was granted until September 2021.

All four programme outcomes and their respective outputs have been achieved. Improved food security and nutrition (outcome 1) was achieved, as 3,002 rural women increased their food production outputs by 295 per cent, contributing to improved diet and food security of their 12,908 family members. A total of 80% of households improved their food consumption score. Outcome 2, which aimed at increasing income and livelihoods, was also attained with 85 per cent of the 3,002 rural women generating a total of Nepali Rupee (NPR) 35,540,000 (US\$ 300,168.91)<sup>13</sup> from selling part of their harvest which alleviated their poverty and helped them surmount the economic hardships spurred by recurrent flooding, poor agricultural harvest, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, a total of NPR 29,084,800 (US\$ 215,243) was generated by 70 per cent of the rural women beneficiaries through the sale of seeds and grains. The realization of leadership, representation and participation (outcome 3) was demonstrated in women’s ability to challenge gender norms such as restriction on rural women’s mobility, taking up non-traditional work roles and standing for positions of local leadership. The programme also contributed to improvements in a gender responsive policy environment (outcome 4) through the endorsement of the GESI strategy of the ADS in 2017, which was revisited in 2020-2021 to conform with the process of federalization in the country and the evolving context of the pandemic.

A Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) assessment conducted at the end of the programme showed that 83 percent of rural women in the treatment sample achieved empowerment, compared to 56 percent of women in the comparison sample. The overall pro-WEAI 3DE<sup>14</sup> scores measured were 0.94 for beneficiaries, and 0.82 for rural women in the control group sample. The global final evaluation, which included a case study of Nepal, and a GALS assessment undertaken in 2021 further testified to the empowering impact of the programme and the transformative change achieved for rural women within their households and communities.

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<sup>10</sup> JP RWEE phased out from Sindhuli district due to limited fund. The Sindhuli rural women continue to learn additional skills in vegetable production through their leadership in related initiatives, using the knowledge they learned from the JP RWEE.

<sup>11</sup> The acronyms stand for Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, World Food Programme and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

<sup>12</sup> This data was shared in the JP RWEE Work Plan of 2018/2019.

<sup>13</sup> US\$ 99,258.95 based on the UN exchange rate for October 2021, NPR 118.40/US\$.

<sup>14</sup> Overall empowerment is measured using the pro-WEAI 3DE score, which takes into account the number of women who are empowered, the number who are disempowered, and the depth of their disempowerment (Malapit et al., 2019). The pro-WEAI 3DE score ranges from zero to one, and a score closer to one means the individual is more empowered.

## Purpose

The JP RWEE's implementation in Nepal aimed to demonstrate how the Agricultural Development Strategy (2015-2035) of the government could be implemented with a focus on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. The programme was implemented in the context of the 'Leave No One Behind' principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also supported the intention of Output 1.1 of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2018-2022) in Nepal to strengthen the capacities of smallholder farmers for increased farm production and marketing. The implementation of the JP RWEE in Nepal focused on the following outcomes: (1) rural women have improved food and nutrition security; (2) rural women have increased income to secure their livelihoods; (3) rural women have enhanced leadership and participation in their communities and in rural institutions, and in shaping laws, policies, and programmes; and (4) a more gender responsive policy environment is secured for the economic empowerment of rural women.

## I. Assessment of Programme Results

### i) Narrative reporting on results:

#### **Outcome 1: Rural women have improved food and nutrition security**

Food and nutrition security of rural women and their respective families improved, as evidenced by a 295 percent increase in the production of wheat, maize, and rice by the JP RWEE participants, and thus, this outcome has been fully achieved. Before the implementation of the JP RWEE, the targeted families were not able to produce adequate and sufficient food for the household, nor able to provide full time employment in the farm. Hence, most family members were forced to seek non-farm employment. After their participation in the programme, rural women farmers' families did not only attain food and nutrition security but also improved their livelihoods by selling surplus food in the market. Through the support from the JP RWEE, their production increased from 1,337 kilograms (kg) per household (HH) in the baseline year to 5,280 kg/HH in 2021. This result can be attributed to a combination of approaches implemented by the JP RWEE, such as: adoption of higher-yielding crop varieties, development of irrigation systems, and enhancement of knowledge and skills of rural women farmers in crop production technology. The replacement of local seed variety by improved *Banganga* variety increased wheat yield by 30 percent; the Pioneer-3522 variety increased maize yield by 33 percent, and the *Haridnath-1* variety increased rice yield by 25 percent. The development of an irrigation system using shallow tube wells changed the cropping pattern from low to high yielding, high-value, and saleable staple crops, and resulted in 43 percent increase in the yield of wheat, 20 percent in maize and 50 percent in rice. The capacity of rural women for food production was enhanced through two residential trainings on cereal seed production, in which 56 beneficiaries (36 women and 20 men<sup>15</sup>) participated, and 40 field level trainings on health hazards and pesticide handling, in which 1,096 beneficiaries (917 women and 179 men) participated. The result of such interventions was a total yearly food production of 8,407.5 metric ton (mt.) (908 mt. wheat by 1,588 HHs, 960 mt. maize by 525 HHs, and 6539.5 mt. rice by 2,277 HHs). As these food products were consumed by rural women and their families and the surplus was sold locally, these achievements contributed to food security and nutrition in the programme districts.

A total of 3,002 rural women (50.3% Madheshis, 25.5% Janajatis, 10.1% Dalits, 9.3% Brahmins and Chhetris, and 4.8% Muslims) were engaged in vegetable production as members of 122 rural women's groups. In 2021, food and nutrition security of their respective households improved by 315 percent through the increase in vegetable production, generating a total of 2,918 mt. with an average production of 972 kg per HH against only 234 kg in the 2015 baseline year. The 3,002 households consumed 1,141 mt. of vegetables, which contributed to their improved nutrition. The production was year-round (summer, winter, and off-season) and

<sup>15</sup> The male participants who were included in the JP RWEE interventions were husbands and family members of the participants. Their participation supported rural women to have an enabling home environment that nurtures their empowerment.

highly diversified, with 20 different vegetable crops.<sup>16</sup> Thus, rural women's HHs consumed vegetables in sufficient quantity and frequency. The package of JP RWEE's interventions made this achievement possible through regular guidance and support, trainings/workshops on post-harvest and market management, exposure visits, precision farming (plastic house), irrigation and use of modern machinery. During field monitoring visits, rural women reported a meagre consumption of vegetables prior to their involvement in the JP RWEE, as vegetable crops were scarcely available prior to the implementation, and acknowledged the dramatic increase in consumption and improvement in nutrition and food security through learning modern agriculture production techniques. The vegetable production increased by 972 kg per HH in 2021 compared to the baseline of 234 kg per HH in 2015; and, respectively, 940 kg, 1,003 kg and 949 kg per household as of December 2018, 2019, and 2020.

In 2015, Nepal was hit by a 7.8 rector scale earthquake, which severely impaired the food and nutritional status of vulnerable communities. The programme helped to rehabilitate the food security and nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and children (aged 6 to 23 months) by providing specialised nutritious food (SNF) Super Cereal in 2016 and 2017 to meet their immediate nutritional needs. Through Food Assistance for Assets (FFA-cash transfer modality) work, the programme also supported the construction/restoration of productive assets that are critical to the food and nutritional security of rural women through the construction of four agricultural collection storage centers to support market linkages of agricultural products of rural women and strengthening the supply-chain of the HGSF modality.

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

This output has been achieved. A total of 3,002 rural women benefited from increased access to and control over resources, assets, and services, which helped to improve their agricultural production, and consequently, their food and nutrition security. These resources, assets and services included high-yielding variety of seeds, improved agricultural equipment/tools, cooperative development, access to markets and agri-inputs, capital loans, productive capital, and social development inputs, like gender sensitivity training and nutritional support.

Through the JP RWEE, rural women were provided with increased access to improved and high-yielding variety seeds of wheat, maize, rice and vegetables, irrigation equipment (electric motors pump sets for shallow tube wells), agricultural machinery and equipment, drip irrigation, plastic tunnels for off-season vegetable production, and seed bed preparation techniques. By 2021, 131 shallow tube wells had been installed with technical and financial support from the JP RWEE. As a result, 393 hectares of land of 1,310 rural women's households gained easy access to irrigation water. During the field monitoring visits, it was identified that tube-well water was also accessed by rural women for bathing and washing clothes on an occasional basis. This led to a significant reduction of work burden and more time for economic activities. Now, rural women farmers enjoy access to high-yielding improved varieties of seeds, like *Banganga* of maize, Pioneer-3522 variety of maize and *Haridnath-1* of rice. A total of 186 vegetable nurseries are now operating in their localities to obtain vegetable seedlings, and 24 bucks have been distributed for breeding and improvement of local goats. By 2021, 3,002 rural women were able to access modern agricultural machines, as the JP RWEE distributed 60 brush cutters, 8 power tillers with reapers, 79 corn threshers, 2 rice threshers, 40 jap planters, 6 weeders, 1,484 insect traps, and 150 plastic tunnels with drip irrigation, which resulted in better agricultural production. Furthermore, 3,620 plastic crates and 81 weighing machines were distributed, which facilitated the marketing of their produce.

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<sup>16</sup> The 20 vegetable crops are: cauliflower, cabbage, chili, tomato, radish, carrot, onion, broad leaf mustard, cress, spinach, coriander, eggplant, ladies' finger, cucumber, sponge gourd, bottle gourd, bitter gourd, ridge gourd, beans, and amaranths.

To ensure collectivization of rural women, a total of 48 groups, comprising of 1,014 rural women, have joined 5 cooperatives (3 in Sarlahi and 2 in Rautahat). This approach increased rural women farmers' access to and control over services that are being provided through cooperatives. Four women cooperatives have already been registered and the remaining one in the Rautahat district will be registered as soon as the Cooperative Act is approved by the Municipality Board in 2021. A total of four residential trainings have been organized – two on cooperative management and strengthening; one on cooperative account keeping; and one on business plan preparation – which enhanced rural women's knowledge and skills on effective planning, coordination, linkage building, book-keeping, account operation, conflict management, and holding of general assemblies. There has been an increase in rural women's participation in the cooperatives after the interventions of the JP RWEE because of rural women's improved capacity to effectively operate and manage cooperatives and the government's policy of supporting registered cooperatives. This was evidenced by the 56 percent increase in the number of rural women farmer groups in the cooperatives, namely from 16 groups in 2018-2019 to 25 groups in 2020. This has enabled women to access resources and support services that were previously unavailable to them, thereby increasing their ability to ensure the food and nutrition security and income of their households.

A total of 119 rural women's groups (out of the 122 formed) in Sarlahi and Rautahat districts, accumulated NPR 11,752,260 (US\$ 99,258.95)<sup>17</sup> which was made available to 2,860 rural women through a revolving fund scheme. This group financing scheme has empowered and enabled group members to buy agricultural inputs (e.g., seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and agriculture tools) as well as other essential goods and services during family emergencies, thus contributing to food and nutrition security. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the group members also spent this amount on buying masks and soaps to ensure the health safety and security of their families. Access to their own financial resources, through the group revolving fund, enabled rural women to avoid taking loans from local money lenders and financial institutions, which generally charge high interest rates, require complex documentation processes, and impose rules that are difficult for rural women to follow. Instead, through access to revolving funds, rural women have increased their access to and control over pre-production, production, and post-production resources, assets, and services, which are critical for their food and nutrition security.

In 2016-17, the JP RWEE distributed SNF Super Cereal (100 grams per person per day for seven months) to 4,023 PLW and 5,405 children aged 6-23 months (2,711 boys and 2,694 girls) which fostered immediate nutritional security among poor and vulnerable households in Sindhuli, Sarlahi and Rautahat districts. This support was provided in the two-year period after the major earthquake that hit Nepal in April 2015.

The JP RWEE also provided nutrition sensitization orientations, including activities that used social behavior change communication (SBCC)<sup>18</sup> methodologies, to key school feeding stakeholders (students, teachers, local government officials, school management committee and parents) on the importance of adequate, diversified, locally available, and affordable safe food intake for children, their parents, and communities. During the sensitization initiative, the implications of various existing food taboos – including storage, cooking and consumption habits and malpractices in households – forcing women members to a disadvantaged position for nutrition intake, as well as WASH issues, were analysed. These SBCC trainings improved knowledge of 1,579 participants (772 women and 807 men). This improved knowledge of rural women and their husbands/male family members was observed during field monitoring visits conducted by the JP RWEE team, and in case study testimonies. In the context of the reopening of schools after the first months of the COVID-

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<sup>17</sup> US\$ 99,258.95 based on the UN exchange rate for October 2021, NPR 118.40/US\$.

<sup>18</sup> SBCC activities are implemented for changing social norms and improving nutrition-related behaviors. The JP RWEE supported the SBCC discussions at schools involving students, their parents, teachers, and government officials to discuss the importance of balanced diet; WASH practices; existing food related taboos' nutrition needs of special groups like children and pregnant and lactating women; and good food habits for local context among participants.

19 pandemic outbreak, proper washing demonstration stations were constructed in 10 schools to improve the health condition of school children with the possibility of a replication of the technology in other schools.

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

Before the JP RWEE, targeted families had low crop productivity and grew limited food and vegetable crops. They could barely guarantee their food and nutrition security or produce surplus for sale. After their participation in the JP RWEE, rural women's families attained food and nutrition security and earned cash income from the sales of surplus products and, therefore, this outcome has been fully achieved. Despite the challenging COVID-19 context, there have been achievements in increasing the income of rural women, which contributed to securing their livelihoods. Of the 3,002 rural women supported by the programme, 2,542 HHs earned a total of NPR 35,540,000 (US\$ 300,168.91) by selling 20 types of vegetable crops. The remaining 618 rural women's families used their harvests for family consumption, securing their nutrition intake, especially in times of crises. In addition, among the 3,002 households, 1,568 earned NPR 5,084,800 (US\$ 42,945.94) by selling wheat seed and grain, and 525 earned NPR 20,400,000 (US\$ 172,297.29) by selling maize seed and grain. Generally, the income earned was used to buy seeds and fertilizers and to support the health, education, food and nutrition security of the family.

The JP RWEE helped to improve the market access of more than 2,000 smallholder rural women farmers. The programme piloted Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) as the modality to improve market access of rural women by connecting them to reliable and stable market opportunities and optimizing the demands generated in local schools due to the government's cash-based school meal programme. The JP RWEE also constructed collection centers and storage structures to facilitate the continuity of rural women's cooperatives' efforts to link rural women to schools. Smallholder farmers supplied collection centers with the vegetables needed by schools, and women cooperatives, in turn, purchased and supplied the schools with the required produce. To manage the demand and supply, the collection centers have storage rooms to store surplus vegetables for a few days. Cooperatives can also store collectively purchased inputs, such as seeds or fertilizers, for its members a few days before distribution. Furthermore, through the FFA (Food for Assets) modality, the JP RWEE was able to create opportunities for rural women to generate short-term cash earnings by working in community asset building activities through simultaneous contribution to the development of community assets, increasing market linkages, agriculture service delivery, and access to productive resources.

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

This output has been achieved. Out of 122 rural women's groups formed, from 3,002 rural women HHs, 103 groups (2,542 rural women HHs) were engaged in commercial vegetable production and value chains. Since 2016, about 186 field level vegetable nursery establishment trainings were held, involving 4,368 rural women in Sindhuli, Sarlahi and Rautahat districts. During the programme period, a total of 186 field level trainings on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) based vegetable production involving the same 4,368 women were organized to enhance their entrepreneurship skills and value chains in Sindhuli, Sarlahi and Rautahat districts. In 2019, one vegetable market promotion workshop was organized which involved 85 beneficiaries (61 women and 24 men) and one exposure visit to a cooperative, vegetable production technology and vegetable market was organized for 34 beneficiaries (31 women and 3 men). These efforts enabled rural women and men beneficiaries (rural women's family members) to establish sustainable marketing linkages with vegetable collectors, wholesalers, retailers, and vendors and enhanced their entrepreneurship skills. The linkages not only enabled rural women to access markets to sell their surplus vegetables but also encouraged them to produce more vegetables. A total of 195 drudgery reduction machines, namely 60 brush cutters, 8 power tiller, 79 corn threshers, 2 rice threshers, 40 jap planters, and 6 weeders were distributed to 4,405 rural women

beneficiaries. A total of 81 weighing machines and 3,620 plastic crates were also distributed to promote the use of standard weights and carry their products safely to the market. As a result of enhanced skills through trainings, exposure visits and materials provided, rural women beneficiaries have become more aware of market demand and more able to increase the market price and volume of their products. During the beginning phase of the JP RWEE, these women did not have any linkages with the market and were not adept at pricing and packaging their products for higher market value.

The JP RWEE piloted the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP), in collaboration with the Government of Nepal's cash-based National School Meals Programme (NSMP)<sup>19</sup>, in 56 community schools in the Sarlahi and Rautahat districts, benefitting 950 rural women. Among them, 45 community schools are already practicing the HGSFP while 11 other schools are in the process of initiating it (it was delayed by several months due to COVID-19 related school closures). In the HGSFP modality, the local production is targeted to meet demands in the schools (i.e., in schools that receive cash from cash based NSMP) so that schools may serve as sustainable marketing outlets for the products of rural women. The JP RWEE trained 150 beneficiaries (122 men and 28 women), comprising of municipality officials, school management, teachers, officials from the District Education Development Offices and District Health Offices, on the HGSF modality. In the training, the beneficiaries were trained on school meal implementation and management guidelines; school meal implementation processes among all schools and local areas; daily food preparation processes; and local working procedures for the effective implementation of the school meal programme. Other capacity building trainings delivered to rural women and stakeholders included: (a) production pocket mapping and price assessment trainings to 58 beneficiaries (50 women and 8 men), in which they learned how to estimate market demand and the required production volume, how to sustain/fulfil the demand, and how to determine the price for HGSF supplies; (b) supply chain management training to 140 beneficiaries (95 women and 45 men), including local producers, cooperatives and local government officials, in which they gained knowledge on supplying women farmers' agricultural products to schools and other market channels; (c) Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) training to 75 rural women beneficiaries who prepared their business plans for market-oriented farming by linking it to HGSF supply chains; d) school feeding menu planning trainings to 77 school teachers/members of school management committees, which enhanced their knowledge and skills to develop balanced food menu planning tools of school day meal (*Diwa Khaja*); and e) meal preparation trainings for school teachers and cooks from 57 schools.

The construction of four agro-product collection/storage buildings helped increase market access and efficiency for smallholder farmers by eliminating the services of middlemen who exploit the markets in their favor. It also created the opportunity for collective bargaining and transaction, which reduced costs and increased profitability.

The JP RWEE also enhanced the capacity of two rural women's cooperatives to supply the food products needed by the schools by implementing the HGSFP. The support consisted of: (a) facilitating orientation on farming as a business; b) providing seed grants of NPR 200,000 (US\$ 1,689.18) to each of the cooperatives so that they could pay cash to purchase vegetables by making an upfront payment to women farmers;<sup>20</sup> (c) distributing office equipment, computers, and furniture; (d) giving trainings on supply chain mapping and production planning for 140 beneficiaries (95 women and 45 men); e) handing over the agriculture collection center/storage structure where the cooperatives can store farmers' produce for a few days; and (f) supporting the building of linkages with local governments so that the cooperatives may receive continued support even

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<sup>19</sup> NSMP is a national programme being implemented in 43 districts of Nepal but is not necessarily implemented using HGSF approach. Because of this, students are not provided with balanced nutrition through their food ration. Through HGSF, schools buy farmers' products to provide cooked, balanced food, based on proper menu planning for nutritious food, maintaining hygiene and sanitation.

<sup>20</sup> The payment from schools happens periodically, e.g., after one month, whereas cooperatives need to pay farmers on a daily basis. Therefore, the JP RWEE provided seed grant support to cooperatives to ensure that payment is being made to rural women up front.

after the JP RWEE. The programme also facilitated the linkage and formalized contracts between schools and women cooperatives/groups to supply the required agricultural products for the school meal programme. As a result, the women cooperatives are now capable of harnessing the demand created by cash-based school meal programmes. The implementation of the HGSFP ensured that 10,774 students from 56 community-based schools had access to nutritionally balanced midday meals and ensured the linkages between 950 rural women and the localized market outlets. Building on the learnings from the JP RWEE, WFP is also scaling up the HGSF modality to other rural women-focused initiatives in Nepal.

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

This output has been achieved. A total of 2,034 rural women's households benefitted from short-term wage-earning opportunities, in the form of conditional cash transfers for participating in the construction of community infrastructure under the FFA modality, and they received NPR 7,881 (US\$ 66.56) on average (for 20 days spread over two months), as per the government's local wage rate in the programme districts. Although most of this cash income was used to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and children's education, some women also used it to invest in other income-generating activities such as goat and poultry raising and vegetable farming.

The JP RWEE, under the leadership of rural women's construction management committees, took a novel approach in the construction of local infrastructure. It worked with 68 rural women farmers' groups, directly reaching 565 rural women members (256 in decision-making positions) with capacity-building activities related to community asset planning, development, and maintenance. In the area of intervention, women hardly leave the house without permission from male family members. Their engagement in the construction of assets under the leadership of rural women has been heralded by the community as a success story.

Through Food For Assets works, the JP RWEE supported the construction/rehabilitation of 65 rural assets. This included: (a) rehabilitation of 1,345 kilometers of irrigation canals contributing to the reduction of drought risks and enabling rural women to adopt intensive market-oriented agriculture; (b) construction of four agricultural collection centers/storage structures to support market linkages of agricultural products of rural women and strengthening the supply-chain of the HGSF modality; and (c) construction of three Community Agriculture Extension Service Centers in the Sindhuli, Sarlahi and Rautahat districts. These constructions were completed with the supervision of construction management committees, led by women members, who were provided pre-construction management trainings. After completion, these assets were handed over to user groups or cooperatives which formed operation and management (O&M) committees for the operationalization of the assets and sustainability. The O&M committees were provided with post-construction trainings and business development trainings to manage these assets profitably.

During the construction of all these assets, ownership of the local government was ensured. The local government provided the land for construction and the design of the building was also approved by them. These works were constructed through FFA schemes where local communities were provided with the necessary technical support and equipment to construct social infrastructure. Additionally, unemployed rural women were provided with the opportunity to earn cash by working as unskilled laborers in the construction process. These infrastructures have improved market access for about 3,000 rural women farmers. Due to greater market access, combined with various production trainings provided by the JP RWEE, more than 2,000 rural women farmers have started selling their surplus vegetables in the market.

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

This outcome has been fully achieved. The leadership ability of 2,353 rural women in the Rautahat and Sarlahi districts was strengthened through a series of in-person leadership trainings and innovative radio programmes. Before the intervention of the JP RWEE, these rural women were mostly confined within their households and lacked confidence. After the JP RWEE's intervention, the same rural women gained confidence and were able to transform themselves by taking on positions of leadership in different committees and forums at the local level. As of 2021, 64.7 percent (1,065) of the rural women are in leadership positions in cooperatives in the two districts against the baseline of 43.6 percent before the programme intervention. Furthermore, by 2021, a 23.7 percent (552 rural women) increase in rural women's leadership in producers' organizations was achieved against the 2014 baseline of women leading only 2.9 percent of producers' organizations.

A total of 1,294 (out of 2,353) rural women and their families have enhanced their understanding of gender equality and social inclusion issues, local level planning processes, allocation of resources for women farmers at the local level, and how to access such resources. Participatory tools – such as reflective dialogues, discussions, and role plays – enhanced their life and leadership skills, including advocacy and coalition building skills. As a result, these rural women were able to demand their rights at home, in their community, and to relevant public offices, which was not the case before the programme implementation.

Despite the extremely challenging context of the pandemic, the leadership ability of 1,059 (out of 2,353) rural women from both districts was strengthened by the adoption of an innovative radio programming approach to overcome the restrictions placed on in-person meetings and gatherings. All the 1,059 rural women were provided with radio sets by Equal Access International, a JP RWEE implementing partner. The radio enabled them to learn from the broadcast lessons and improve their ability to engage with local leaders and officials on issues that are crucial to them, especially during the pandemic. The radio broadcasts also enabled women to assert their status in the family and it was found that a highly positive home learning environment has been created through the use of radios during the lockdown, turning family members into a captive audience for collective listening and discussion of the broadcasted messages. Women were also able to engage directly with local authorities. Through a 'Query for My Leaders' (QFL) episode of the radio programme, rural women had an opportunity to raise queries and get a direct response from their local leaders on issues related to irrigation facilities, seeds and fertilisers, COVID-19 relief packages, agricultural provisions by the local government, and delivery of local services<sup>21</sup>.

In addition, the JP RWEE strengthened rural women's leadership in community infrastructure planning, development, and operationalization (as described under Output 2.2). This effort challenged the existing traditional social norms as rural women's participation in construction related work is not the norm in Nepalese society.

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

This output has been achieved. The lockdowns imposed by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic in the last two years of the JP RWEE implementation provided an unintended positive impact for the realization of this output. It provided the JP RWEE team with an opportunity to implement the leadership related initiative through an innovative approach by using the radio as an empowerment tool. A total of 483 rural women were empowered and were able to put forward their issues and priorities with their local

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<sup>21</sup> Equal Access International's Report, 2021.

leaders/officials through the radios' interactive voice response (IVR)<sup>22</sup> system, CommCare application, and their participation in the QFL radio campaign. The queries and concerns of the rural women were addressed by the locally elected leaders through the live radio programs. A total of 15 episodes of a magazine format radio series, *Sambal* programme, were produced and aired, reaching an audience of approximately 229,548 population in the Rautahat and Sarlahi districts.<sup>23</sup>

The episodes highlighted key topics such as: gender identities, gender roles, gender equality, gender equitable households and community, women's empowerment and leadership, basic financial knowledge, diversity and social inclusion for gender equality and equity, gender-based violence (GBV), individual and community actions to combat GBV, access to justice, harmful social norms, and traditions and practices that underpin violence against women and girls. Furthermore, 8 out of 15 episodes of subsequent live call-in shows were produced and aired, which, in turn, were used as an open platform for discussions on the issues and priorities of rural women farmers among community members, local leaders and government officials in the intervention areas. The episodes focused on the same topics raised in the magazine show.

The first episode of the QFL campaign was also launched in 2020. Under the QFL campaign, some of the major themes for the queries/priorities that rural women farmers raised to their local leaders included: lack of irrigation, seeds and fertilisers, COVID-19 relief provisions by the local governments, and local level service delivery. In turn, encouraging responses from local leaders during the QFL included a commitment from the Mayor of Gujara to allocate additional budget for irrigation. The radio's impact was also felt beyond the JP RWEE programme areas. For example, in the Kathariya Municipality of the Rautahat district, there were instances of communities coming together, inspired by the radio discussions, to raise their voice against corruption in the local judicial committees.

A total of 103 (52 women 51 men) local vegetable vendors from the Rautahat and Sarlahi districts enhanced their understanding of the adverse social and economic norms and gender-based discrimination that impede the leadership of rural women in the family and community. The local vendors recognized the issues of rural women farmers and committed to cooperating with them in taking their produce to the market. Their knowledge and understanding of gender-based discrimination and structural barriers to women's leadership, including in accessing the market at the local level, were also strengthened. Therefore, the beneficiaries also committed to using the knowledge gained in the orientation whilst interacting with women farmers in their community. These gains resulted from four orientation-workshops conducted in September 2020 in Rautahat, Sarlahi districts. Among other issues<sup>24</sup>, the key issues discussed during the orientations were: (a) challenges faced by rural women farmers in the targeted communities; (b) ways to build effective communication and support among the rural women farmers and the vendors who are in regular contact with each other; and (c) the roles of local vendors in supporting rural women farmers to connect with the local market.

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

This output has been achieved. More rural women now have greater organizational capacities to establish, implement and sustain their own cooperatives. Since 2018, a total of 1,014 rural women (9% Brahmin and Chettri, 39% Janajatis, 7% Dalit, 43% Madhesi, and 2% Muslim) from 48 groups have been organized into

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<sup>22</sup> The IVR is an automated platform which allows the callers to call in and record their feedback for the radio program, and to put forward their priorities and concerns to be shared with the representatives of their local government units by recording their audio. This is then used by the radio production team to be included in the radio program or to be shared with the relevant government authorities/local leaders to elicit their response. The callers can participate either in Nepali or Bajjika - the local language. The system uses toll free phone numbers. Therefore, no cost is incurred by the callers.

<sup>23</sup> The radio reach has been calculated based on radio listenership findings from the National Media Survey 2019, which shows that 22 per cent of the population 16 years and above in Province 2 have daily access to radio.

<sup>24</sup> Equal Access International's Report, 2021.

five cooperatives (3 in the Sarlahi and 2 in the Rautahat district). Both the number of groups and members joining the cooperatives and the amount of revolving funds have been growing over time, compared to the previous reporting periods. In addition, eight family members (6 women and 2 men) of rural women benefited from employment opportunities in agro-veterinarian shops of rural women's cooperatives. The cooperative members and the farming communities are benefiting from these shops in terms of ease, fair price and timely availability of agro-inputs and borrowing from saving/revolving fund.

The JP RWEE has strengthened the capacity of four women's cooperatives in supporting the expansion of market linkages of their members, managing the supply chain linkage for home-grown school feeding, and encouraging their members to adopt market-based farming (adopting agriculture as business). In this process, 51 members of four cooperatives and women farmers received business plan training, 85 rural women attended SIYB training, and 83 farmers (76 women and 7 men) and cooperative members benefitted from post-harvest handling training. About 200 trained women were in a strong leadership position in women cooperatives, which, in turn, facilitated the economic empowerment of other members of the cooperatives. The JP RWEE has provided the cooperatives with office equipment (racks, office furniture, desktop computers) and helped develop the operation and management plan of all collection/storage centers. Now, all the four cooperatives are running their business, such as savings and credit management and account keeping. They are also planning to buy vegetables and cereals from rural women farmers and supply these vegetables to schools under the HGSFP. The programme has mobilized an all-women construction management committee for the construction and an all-women operational and maintenance committee for the operationalization of the collection centers. For this, 55 farmers (51 women and 4 men), who have built their capacity to lead the operationalization of the collection centers, were provided with trainings on operations and management of the agriculture collection centers/storage.

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

This output has been achieved. A total of 4,315 rural women farmers and their families enhanced awareness of their rights through a series of rights awareness sessions in their community. These changes were expressed by rural women during different field missions. The group discussions covered information on GESI issues, local planning process, allocation of resources for women farmers, and how to tap into such resources. Participatory tools, such as reflective dialogues, discussions, and role plays, were used to enhance rural women's life and leadership skills, including advocacy and coalition building skills.

The action oriented *Sahi Ho! (that's right!)* advocacy campaign was launched in January 2018 to enhance community awareness on the economic contributions and leadership of rural women farmers. Around 11 million individuals were reached through the campaign activities and media contents, out of which around 11,629 community people, including community leaders, were directly engaged in and mobilized through the community-based activities.<sup>25</sup> The activities included multi-format community dialogues, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), and policy dialogues in the three JP RWEE districts and Kathmandu. The campaign was designed to focus on creating a supportive and enabling environment for women through advocacy, policy influencing, and interactions with communities to address and challenge prevailing adverse gender norms and beliefs, while advocating for changes to the policy environment. As reported in the JP RWEE's Annual Report in 2019, several women's groups lobbied with local officials to ensure women's representation in the planning

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<sup>25</sup> The awareness of rural women farmers and other community members of women's rights and gender issues in the community was increased through a series of community-based discussions organized as part of an action-oriented advocacy campaign titled "*Sahi Ho!*" Mobilization and awareness raising activities organized under the campaign, highlighted the existing adverse social norms and cultural practices, such as unequal wages of women, mobility restriction, which limits women's direct access to the market, and double burden of household and farm work. Such norms and practices have been hindering women farmers' meaningful participation and contribution to the rural agro-based economy. This was observed during the community-based discussions where rural women raised issues, such as equal wage for women and gender-based violence in their communities.

process. This advocacy resulted in commitments by government representatives to address women's representation in the next planning process. After the campaign, rural women shared that they gained confidence from this experience and were inspired to raise their views in public hearings and community discussions. The topics they raised included rights of rural women farmers and challenges they face in their communities.

A total of 1,569 rural women (1,020 women and 549 men) of the Rautahat and Sarlahi districts were trained on GALS,<sup>26</sup> which helped enhance their self-esteem; improve planning, decision making and working together; foster stronger relationships; and increase the income and overall well-being of households. GALS households now have more diversified livelihood options and economic activities for women. The GALS exercises facilitated family members' reflections on their own aspiration, thinking, behaviour, actions, and a more enlightened perspective on their families' context. As women and men learned to set goals and act upon these, they began to change their behavior and actions to achieve the goals they set for themselves and their families. Marginalized women adopted GALS easily and quickly brought about meaningful changes, such as reducing family expenses, increasing involvement in economic activities and household planning, and demonstrating greater interest in learning.

Within the implementation period, 650 rural women became more knowledgeable and aware of women's empowerment and leadership, gender equality and equity, GBV, access to justice and positive and equitable gender norms and their manifestations in the pandemic. This was reported by the implementing partner Equal Access International, which implemented the leadership development interventions through radio programming during the pandemic. To enhance effectiveness, two tools - the IVR system and CommCare mobile applications - were used to assess the radio listening and analyze its impact on improving the listeners' knowledge of issues discussed. The GALS qualitative assessment reveals that rural women trained in GALS appear to be more empowered than rural women in the treatment group in terms of respect among household members, access to and decisions on credit, and mobility. The study also indicates that GALS beneficiaries' were more involved in decision making and had the opportunity to visit the city and new places. Further, findings point to the evidence that GALS accelerates progress towards the empowerment of rural women from more marginalized groups of the society.

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

A more gender-responsive policy environment has been secured for the economic empowerment of rural women through the endorsement of the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy of the Agriculture Development Strategy and review of the gaps and challenges for the implementation of the GESI strategy in the federal and humanitarian context. The review also provided recommendations to the MoALD for the effective implementation of the GESI strategy.

The GESI strategy for ADS was developed with technical and funding support of the JP RWEE in 2016 and 2017 and was endorsed by the MoALD in June 2017. The JP RWEE was the first programme to support the ministry with the GESI strategy of the ADS to ensure GESI responsive implementation of the ADS as the agriculture sector has limited GESI responsive approaches. The revision was expected to expand awareness and ownership of GESI across the government, facilitate its implementation under the federal set up, and make it responsive to the envisioned recovery from the pandemic. The review of the 2021 GESI strategy showed that there were gaps in the understanding of GESI among the locally elected leaders and in the appropriate institutional mechanisms and adequate capacities, especially at the provincial and local levels.

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<sup>26</sup> A total of 87 champions who were directly trained through six days of residential workshop had shared the GALS methodology and tools to their group members directly (521), family members (741), and neighbors (220). The GALS supervisors and staff backstopped and supervised these champions.

Other gaps were identified, such as lack of intra-ministerial coordination, need for coordination among the different agencies involved in GESI mainstreaming in agriculture, and weak alignment with the current constitutional spirit of co-existence, cooperation, and collaboration. Informed by lessons from the JP RWEE implementation, the review highlighted the need to recognize the roles and contributions of rural women as farmers and the importance of their leadership in their communities. The review was endorsed by the Programme Steering Committee (PSC) of the JP RWEE on 29 July 2021.

A gender responsive policy environment was further promoted, especially at the district level, for the economic empowerment of rural women. This was demonstrated in commitments, which representatives of local government bodies publicly made during their participation in multi-format community dialogues in the three districts under the *Sahi Ho!* campaign. One of such examples is the mayor of Malangwa Municipality in Sarlahi district, who expressed her commitment to allocate budget to programmes in her municipality to increase women's, especially women from marginalized communities, access to agricultural development activities.<sup>27</sup> The mayor shared that she had fulfilled this commitment through an allocation of NPR 3,000,000 (US\$ 25,828.98) for such purposes and another NPR 1,500,000 (US\$ 12,914.49) for the improvement of school attendance by girls from marginalized communities.

The women group members were also able to advocate for their collective priorities through constructive engagement with local government institutions and authorities. For the first time, a budget of NPR 2,000,000 (US\$ 1,759) was allocated for the construction of a collection center in the Brindaban Municipality in the Rautahat district. The local municipality authorities also made a commitment to supporting the inclusion of women's empowerment trainings in the next development plan. Furthermore, for the first time, local government authorities in the Barhathba Municipality in the Sarlahi district allocated NPR 15,000 (US\$ 131.92) from annual resources to support activities for women's empowerment. The advocacy of women farmers' groups in the Bagmati Municipality resulted in the local government's allocation of NPR 100,000 (US\$ 879.50) for the control of '*Phaujee*' insect infestation of maize crops. The Gujara Municipality also allocated NPR 1,000,000 (US\$ 8,795) to income-generating activities for women's groups.

#### **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**

This output has been achieved. A total of 101 government officials/elected leaders (49 women and 52 men) enhanced their knowledge of GESI and gender responsive planning and budgeting through a series of workshops from 2019-2021 in the Sarlahi and Rautahat districts. Their enhanced capacity is evidenced by the results of the pre- and post-tests of these workshops. These interventions were designed to encourage and influence leaders to use the learnings from the workshop to ensure meaningful participation of women and other disadvantaged groups in the local planning process and advance in the formulation and implementation of gender responsive budgets and programmes in the JP RWEE municipalities.

To contribute to this output, a thorough analysis of the GESI strategy within the ADS was conducted in 2020. The JP RWEE provided technical and financial support for this review. As the existing ADS GESI strategy was developed before Nepal's transition to a federal system, the review engaged key stakeholders from the local, provincial, and federal governments. The recommendations from the review included: (a) promoting a deeper understanding of the substantive meaning of GESI among key stakeholders; (b) enactment of a federal agricultural policy that explicitly states the entitlements of women and excluded groups; (c) clarification of the delineation of power and mandates among the three tiers of government; (d) addressing gaps in linkages between and among agencies, with federal agencies delegating powers and supporting the subnational governments; (e) creation of functional mechanisms for GESI in the oversight agencies; and (f) development of competent human resources to advance GESI at the provincial and local levels. These recommendations

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<sup>27</sup> This was reported in the JP RWEE's Annual Report 2018.

were accepted, which means that, through the JP RWEE, rural women farmers were able to position their agenda in the implementation of the ADS and could expect better representation, more opportunities and equal access to benefits and resources as farmers. It also means that the gains from the JP RWEE implementation will be sustained beyond its completion.

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

This output has been completed. Tools and data to track the progress of rural women's economic empowerment are now available with the completion of a WEAI study. The project-level WEAI survey tool proved to be valuable in estimating the impact on women's empowerment across multiple dimensions in the Sarlahi and Rautahat districts. The quantitative survey was administered to 1,300 samples from enumerated 2,145 households and detailed interviews were conducted with 980 rural women and men (typically rural women's spouses) from 980 households in the treatment group and 320 households in the control group for comparison.

Overall, 83 percent of rural women in the treatment sample (compared to 56 percent of women in the control group sample) achieved empowerment. The overall pro-WEAI 3DE<sup>28</sup> scores measured are 0.94 for beneficiaries, and 0.82 for rural women in the control group sample. Empowerment values for married women are virtually the same. The study found that the JP RWEE had a significant impact on women's overall empowerment and gender parity within the household. As expected, there were significant positive results in terms of group membership and membership in influential groups.<sup>29</sup> There were positive impacts on women's mobility (ability to visit important locations), input in productive decisions, and number of agricultural and non-agricultural assets owned, suggesting that the programme contributed to greater control over the use of the output from agricultural activities and greater asset ownership.

Additional analyses found that the programme increased an individual's ability to make important decisions about livestock farming and routine household purchases, yet that ability decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the programme increased women's access to and decision-making over financial services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, this suggests that, while women in the beneficiary group decreased their ability to make some important decisions during the pandemic, they had greater access to and ability to make decisions about financial services to cope with the effects of the pandemic. It seems that the purchasing capacity of rural women was decreased, whilst their coping capacity was increased.

Overall, the JP RWEE had tangible effects in the project area as it appears to have successfully empowered beneficiaries in the Sarlahi and Rautahat districts. The study shows that the benefits of the programme are detectable despite the negative consequences of COVID-19, which particularly affected rural women's livelihoods in the area, pointing to the relevance of adopting integrated programmes to accelerate progress towards rural women's empowerment.

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<sup>28</sup> Overall empowerment is measured using the pro-WEAI 3DE score, which takes into account the number of women who are empowered, the number who are disempowered, and the depth of their disempowerment (Malapit et al., 2019). The pro-WEAI 3DE score ranges from zero to one, and a score closer to one means the individual is more empowered.

<sup>29</sup> The mean score of women in group membership is 0.951 and membership in influential groups is 0.819 while this figure in control groups is 0.418 and 0.375 respectively. These two indicators were taken as collective agency, which were defined as group membership. This is determined by being an active member in at least one of the following types of groups: agricultural, livestock, fisheries producers' group; water users' group; forest users' group; credit or microfinance group; mutual help group; trade and business group; civic group or charitable group; religious group; or another group. Member of influential groups: being empowered in terms of leadership means the individual is an active member of at least one group that can influence the community to a medium or higher extent.

In addition to the WEAI study, a qualitative study was conducted to assess the effects of the use of GALS on rural women, by comparing them to rural women that did not receive GALS. The sample size was composed of 58 individuals that were either interviewed or had participated in Focus Group discussions. The analyses reveal that rural women who were also trained in GALS appeared to be more empowered than rural women in the treatment group in terms of respect among household members, access to and decisions on credit, and mobility. The study also indicates that GALS beneficiaries were more involved in household decision making and had the opportunity to go to the city and visit new places. The study findings point to the evidence that GALS accelerated progress towards the empowerment of rural women from more marginalized sectors of society. Further findings include: a) GALS contributed to an improved self-image amongst GALS champions;

b) the impact of GALS extends beyond the beneficiaries trained in GALS, as it is learned by others in the community; c) in the GALS training, both dreaming and planning contributed to changing cognitive and practical aspects of women (and men), making them aware and active and, thus, empowered; and d) GALS contributed to improving relationships within the household, especially between women and their husbands and children.

## **II. Qualitative Assessment**

The JP RWEE team has been able to demonstrate a strong example of 'delivering as one' to rural women and federal and local government partners. The coordination and collaboration among the four participating UN agencies through joint planning, implementation and missions was exemplary, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating that the JP RWEE is an effective joint programme. The previous UN Resident Coordinator cited the JP RWEE as the best example of "delivering as one" during a UN Country Team meeting. The government stakeholders addressed the team as the JP RWEE rather than as individual agencies of the United Nations. This practice has enabled the JP RWEE to gain the trust of the government as a unified team, working collaboratively to achieve common results.

The JP RWEE team observed positive qualitative changes in the programme districts through field visits and interaction with rural women's groups and relevant stakeholders in the programme districts. Positive changes include family members now working full time in their own farms instead of earning wages elsewhere, more children going to school regularly, increased quantity and diversity of vegetable consumption, enhanced capacity to determine prices resulting from strong linkages with the market, and improved hygiene and sanitation due to the use of tube well water. As a result of numerous capacity development efforts with the local government, members of cooperatives and schools in the local communities continue to demonstrate strong ownership of the JP RWEE. Strong positive responses were received from local government officials and communities regarding the sustained impact of the JP RWEE. The provision of land for the construction of Community Agriculture Extension Service Centers in each of the three districts. two agri-product collection/storage centres in Gujara and Bagmati in, respectively, the Rautahat and Sarlahi districts, and the leadership of local government in the construction process, helped to ensure the sustainable use of these facilities. Most of the works for the collection centers were led by management committees formed under the leadership of rural women farmers, including the construction management committee. The process also helped transform the perceptions of people toward rural women. They are now more supportive of women's involvement in the traditionally male-dominated construction sector and of women's visibility in the public sphere.

Finally, owing to the JP RWEE interventions, a number of positive responses to the COVID-19 crisis were seen among the beneficiaries. Despite the challenges encountered within the community (including limited access to markets, reduction of food availability and increased domestic violence), the JP RWEE participants were able to apply positive coping mechanisms and thereby mitigated the impact to their lives and livelihoods. Rural women were able to provide adequate nutrition for their family through home-grown vegetables,

income-generating activities were also able to continue, and adaptive responses to business, such as changing from selling vegetables at the marketplace to a 'door-to-door' sales modality, were also observed. Furthermore, in communities where women were traditionally excluded from public life and leadership, they were also able to take on coordination and awareness raising roles to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This included lobbying with authorities to ensure the inclusion of women in the COVID-19 response, distributing hygiene equipment, and carrying out awareness raising campaigns.

Additional positive changes were seen among women who were involved in the construction and management of agri-product collection centers and storage structures; as well as among women cooperatives involved in the management of the HGSF modality. Major improvements amongst these rural women are their improved confidence and leadership skills. Women leaders of cooperatives are now able to foster the cooperatives' business and support members to raise their concerns with government authorities. Likewise, local government, members of cooperatives and schools in the local communities continue to demonstrate ownership of the results gained through the JP RWEE. As there was strong support from local governments in the construction of agri-product collection/storage centers, local governments provided the lands for free and promised to provide continued support to the women cooperatives which oversee the management of the collection centers. Local government officials are more supportive of women's involvement in the traditionally male-dominated construction sector and their leadership in the HGSF implementation. Furthermore, GALS is also supported by the IFAD funded Rural Enterprises and Remittances Project (RERP), which is implemented in Provinces 1 and 2 under the leadership of the Ministry of Commerce, Industries and Supplies. Fourteen rural women farmers' groups of the JP RWEE are already linked with the RERP project.

**ii) Indicator Based Performance Assessment:**

	<b>Achievement of Indicator Targets</b>	<b>Reasons for Variance with Planned Target (if any)</b>	<b>Source of Verification</b>
<b>Outcome 1: Improved food and nutrition security</b>			
<p><b>Indicator 1.1:</b> % of increase in agriculture production of women farmers</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Food crops 1,337 kg/HH</li> <li>- Vegetables 234 kg/HH</li> </ul> <p><b>Planned Target (2020):</b> 200 % increase in vegetable production</p>	<p><b>Target 1.1:</b> This indicator has been achieved and exceeded its target by 95%. As of the end of 2021, the JP RWEE enabled the participants to raise the production of food (wheat, maize, and rice) per household (HH) by 295% - from 1,337 kg./HH in the base year to 5,280 kg./HH in 2021 in both districts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- By 2021, 3,002 rural women increased their food production outputs by 295%</li> <li>- The food and nutrition security of rural women’s households was improved by 315 per cent through the increase in vegetable production, producing a total of 2,918 mt. with an average production of 972 kg./HH against only 234 kg. in the base year 2015.</li> <li>- The 3,002 households consumed 1,141 mt. of vegetables, which contributed to their improved nutrition security.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Target 1.1:</b> The JP RWEE capacitated rural women on the modern agriculture production techniques that supported them to transform from subsistence to commercial farming which led to increase in their agriculture production.</p>	<p><b>Target 1.1:</b> Field monitoring report.</p> <p>Field monitoring report</p>

<p><b>Indicator 1.2:</b> Women’s dietary diversity or variety of households food consumption pattern</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b> 1.2.1. 62.2% of HHs (with kitchen gardening) surveyed with sufficient quantity and frequency of vegetable consumption Planned target: 1.2.1. 50% increase by quantity and frequency in vegetable consumption of kitchen garden (2017)</p> <p>1.2.2. 72.4% of HHs surveyed have minimum acceptable diet (MAD) Planned target: 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 2016,)</p> <p>1.2.3. Food Consumption Score of HHs surveyed is 67.3% Planned target: 1.2.3. 80% of the total HHs supported improve Food Consumption Score (FCS)</p> <p>1.2.4. Coping Strategy Index (CSI) Planned target: 1.2.4. CSI (5,280 HHs in five years and 2,720 HHs as of December 2016)</p>	<p><b>Target 1.2.1:</b> This target has been achieved and exceeded its target in 2020. As of December 2020, there was 100 percent increase in the quantity and frequency in vegetable consumption.</p> <p><b>Target 1.2.2:</b> As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this indicator has been achieved and exceeded its target by 12 per cent. As of December 2019, 97 percent of the supported HHs (143 HHs) have attained the minimum acceptable diet.</p> <p><b>Target 1.2.3:</b> As reflected in the 2019 Annual Report, this indicator has been achieved and exceeded its target by 17 per cent. As of December 2019, 97 per cent of the total HHs supported (143 HHs) improved their Food Consumption Score.</p> <p><b>Target 1.2.4:</b> This target has been partially achieved as it was dropped from the workplan due to inadequacy of funds. The HHs’ adopting stress coping strategies reduced to 10.6% of HHs in both districts in 2021 (from 16% in 2019) on an average. The number of HHs’ reducing CSI was not monitored by the project due to</p>	<p><b>Target 1.2.1:</b> The JP RWEE supported rural women with modern agriculture farming techniques, which led to increase in vegetable production and consumption.</p> <p><b>Target 1.2.2:</b> The nutrition support through vegetable production was the key factor that contributed to the positive variance of this target.</p> <p><b>Target 1.2.3:</b> Explained under 1.2.2</p> <p><b>Target 1.2.4:</b> The reason for variance is that the number of HHs’ reducing CSI was not monitored by the project due to the difficulty and risk of conducting a household</p>	<p>Field monitoring reports</p> <p><b>Target 1.2.1:</b> Field monitoring report</p> <p><b>Target 1.2.2:</b> Field monitoring report</p> <p><b>Target 1.2.3:</b> Field monitoring report</p>
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	<p>the difficulty and risk of conducting a household survey during the pandemic.</p>	<p>survey during the pandemic. In addition, it was also dropped from the workplan due to inadequacy of funds.</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><b>Indicator 1.1.1:</b> Number of rural women's groups/cooperatives accessing credit</p>	<p><b>Target 1.1.1:</b> A total of 119 rural women's groups have accessed credit from the US\$ 99,258.95 revolving fund</p>	<p><b>Target 1.1.1:</b> After the intervention of the JP</p>	<p><b>Target 1.1.1:</b> Field monitoring report</p>

<p><b>Baseline:</b> 30 women’s groups have access to credit within their own groups and from cooperatives outside</p> <p><b>Planned Target 1.1.1:</b> 157 rural women’s groups (two additional) have access to credits within their own groups and at least 10 rural women’s groups accessing credits from cooperatives</p> <p><b>Indicator 1.1.2:</b> Number of rural women farmers who have access to integrated agriculture/nutrition services <b>Baseline:</b> 0 <b>Planned Target:</b> 1,025 rural women farmers</p> <p><b>Indicator 1.1.3:</b> Number of rural women farmers who utilize improved agriculture production techniques <b>Baseline:</b> 287 households with 574 rural women farmers <b>Planned Target:</b> 3,000 women farmers</p>	<p>within their own groups that was accumulated through the group savings. A total of 25 rural women’s groups (375 rural women) are accessing credits from cooperatives.</p> <p><b>Target 1.1.2:</b> This indicator exceeded the planned target by 1,977. In 2021, 3,002 rural women farmers have access to integrated agriculture/nutrition services through kitchen gardening and commercial vegetable production. 1,579 participants (772 women and 807 men) received nutrition sensitization orientations, including activities that used SBCC methodology</p> <p><b>Target 1.1.3:</b> This indicator has been achieved in line with the target. As of 2021, a total of 3,002 rural women farmers have been utilizing improved agriculture production techniques through the adoption of modern varieties of wheat, maize, and rice, use of modern machineries, shallow tube well and drip irrigation, plastic tunnel, IPM, and seed multiplication.</p>	<p>RWEE, a series of capacity development trainings/orientations and hand-holding support to rural women ensured their access to credits. This encouraged the rural women to initiate the revolving fund schemes. These women have also started to access credits from cooperatives.</p> <p><b>Target 1.1.2:</b> The JP RWEE engaged rural women in kitchen gardening and commercial vegetable production through the formation of groups. This led to their access to integrated agriculture/nutrition services through vegetable production.</p> <p><b>Target 1.1.3:</b> The JP RWEE introduced the improved agriculture production techniques through the adoption of modern varieties of wheat, maize and rice. The programme also used</p>	<p><b>Target 1.1.2:</b> Field monitoring report</p> <p><b>Target 1.1.3:</b> Field monitoring report</p>
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<p><b>Indicator 1.1.4:</b> Number of rural women accessing community assets and agriculture infrastructure (including shored equipment and machineries)  <b>Baseline:</b> 0  <b>Planned Target:</b> 700 rural women</p>	<p><b>Target 1.1.4:</b> This indicator has been achieved and far exceeded its target, 3,002 against 700 rural women through rural women's increased access to modern and efficient agriculture equipment made available to them by the programme. By 2021, 2,076 rural women have received plastic crates and 2,029 weighing machines to facilitate marketing of their produce. These also included access to other assets like brush cutter, power tiller with reaper, corn and rice threshers, jap planter, weeder, insect trap, shallow tube well, and plastic tunnel with drip irrigation</p>	<p>the modern machineries such as shallow tube well, drip irrigation and capacitated rural women to use these techniques. This led to a higher number of rural women utilizing these services.</p> <p><b>Target 1.1.4:</b> The modern agricultural technologies distributed by the JP RWEE and ensuring rural women's access to these technologies made rural women convenient in agricultural production. This was a justification for exceeding this target.</p>	<p><b>Target 1.1.4:</b> Field monitoring report</p>
<p>Output 1.2 Rural women have greater capacity to enhance and control local food security reserves and their production</p>			
<p>Not applicable for reporting as the JP RWEE in Nepal does not target this output.</p>			
<p><b>Outcome 2 Rural women have increased income to secure their livelihoods.</b></p>			
<p><b>Indicator 2.1</b> Income generated from sales of rural women  <b>Baseline:</b> 49 rural women farmers  <b>Planned Target:</b> 1,320 rural women generated income from their sales market</p>	<p><b>Target 2.1:</b> Of the 3,002 rural women supported by JP RWEE, 2,542 HHs earned a total of NPR 35,540,000 (US\$ 300,168.91) by selling their 20 types of vegetable crops. The remaining 618 rural women's family totally used their harvests for family consumption, sparing them from starvation, especially in times of crises. In addition, among the 3,002 households, 1,568 earned NPR 5,084,800 (US\$ 42,945.94) by selling wheat seed and grain, and 525 earned NPR 20,400,000 (US\$ 172,297.29) by selling maize seed and grain</p>	<p><b>Target 2.1:</b> The JP RWEE capacitated rural women farmers on the modern agricultural techniques on farming. The programme also encouraged rural women to join the commercial vegetable farming for more production and market linkages where they sold their produce in</p>	<p>Target 2.1: Field monitoring report</p> <p>Evaluating the JP RWEE project in Nepal using the</p>

<p><b>Indicator 2.2:</b> Proportion of rural women with empowerment in the income domain of the WEAI (control over income)</p> <p>Baseline: There was no baseline study so the only baseline data that is possible to use is the value of this indicator with the control group.</p> <p>Target: +6% increase in the proportion of women that have control over the use of income</p>	<p><b>Target 2.2:</b> The proportion of rural women with empowerment in control over income was 97% among project beneficiaries, whereas in the control group it was lower at 91%.</p> <p>Empowerment over use of income means that for all agricultural activities, the individual participates in, and the individual has control over how any income earned from the activity is used and control over whether the output from the agricultural activities is used for home consumption. The individual also has control over the income over any non-farm, self-employment activities and wage or salary employment they engage in.</p>	<p>the market (after family level consumption) that increased their earnings.</p>	<p>project-Women's Empowerment in Agricultural Index (pro-WEAI) survey tool</p>
<p>Output 2.1 Rural women have enhanced entrepreneurship skills and value chains to access markets for their products</p>			

<p><b>Indicator 2.1.1:</b> Number of rural women farmers trained on entrepreneurial and /or vocational skills to have increased access to markets  <b>Baseline:</b> 0  <b>Planned Target:</b> 50 rural women farmers</p>	<p><b>Target 2.1.1:</b> This indicator has been achieved and exceeded the target by 22 per cent (61 rural women farmers against the targeted 50) by 2021. These rural women farmers/ entrepreneurs were supported to enhance their linkage with the market through an interactive workshop with local vendors, retailers, and wholesalers together with exposure visit to cooperative, vegetable production technology and vegetable market organized for 31 rural women farmer entrepreneurs. A total of 98 rural women entrepreneurs were trained on cooperative management and strengthening (48 rural women), cooperative account keeping (24 rural women) and business plan (26 rural women) to increase their access to market.</p>	<p><b>Target 2.1.1:</b> Once rural women started earning income from selling of their produce, they were encouraged to join trainings on increasing access to market for their sustainable livelihoods. This was one of the main reasons for exceeding the target.</p>	<p>Target 2.1.1: Field monitoring report</p>
<p><b>Indicator 2.1.2:</b> Number of rural women farmers increased their access to markets  <b>Baseline:</b>0  <b>Target:</b> 40 rural women farmers in commercial farming</p>	<p><b>Target 2.1.2:</b>  Out of 122 rural women’s groups formed from 3,002 rural women HHs, 103 groups (2,542 rural women HHs) were engaged in commercial vegetable production and value chains.</p>	<p><b>Target 2.1.2:</b> To provide sustainable livelihood opportunities to rural women farmers, the JP RWEE engaged 82 rural women’s groups (out of 122) in the commercial vegetable farming. This allowed rural women to increase their access to market and improve their livelihoods. This was one of reasons for the positive variance of the target.</p>	<p>Target 2.1.2: Field monitoring report</p>
<p><b>Indicator 2.1.3:</b> Number of shallow well tube wells installed; hectare land irrigated  <b>Baseline:</b> 0  <b>Target:</b> 20 number of shallow tube wells installed, 60 hectares of land irrigated, 200 household number benefited</p>	<p><b>Target 2.1.3:</b> Achievement of this indicator has exceeded the planned target by 555 per cent for installation of shallow tube well (131 shallow tube well against the targeted 20), 686 per cent in irrigated area (393 ha. irrigated area against the targeted 60 ha.), and 555 per cent in beneficiary HHs (1,310 HHs against the targeted 200) by 2021.</p>	<p><b>Target 2.1.3:</b> The JP RWEE realised the need to support more rural women with irrigation. During the course of programme implementation, the need to extend irrigation support was identified as key to sustain the</p>	<p>Target 2.1.3: Field monitoring report</p>

<p><b>Indicator 2.1.4:</b> Number of agriculture machinery and tools distributed to women farmer groups  <b>Baseline:</b>0  <b>Target:</b> 3,000 rural women</p>	<p><b>Target 2.1.4:</b> By 2021, a total of 195 drudgery reduction machines such as brush cutter (60 units), power tiller (8 units), corn thresher (79 units), rice thresher (2 units), jap planter (40 units), and weeder (6 units) were distributed to 4,405 rural women farmers, exceeding this target by 47 per cent. A total of 81 weighing machines and 3,620 plastic crates were also distributed to promote the use of standard weights and measures and carry their products safely to the market.</p>	<p>production of rural women. This was the main reason for the positive variance of this target.</p> <p><b>Target 2.1.4:</b> This number is the cumulative number of all three districts. Sindhuli district where JP RWEE was present for a short time period is also calculated here as the drudgery reduction machines were distributed in Sindhuli district too. Later, when the JP RWEE dropped Sindhuli due to funding constraint, the JP RWEE expanded the groups in Rautahat and Sarlahi districts. Hence, this figure was higher in the cumulative figure</p>	
<p>Output 2.2 Rural women have increased access to decent wage employment opportunities</p>			
<p><b>Indicator 2.2.1:</b> Number of rural women farmers who entered wage</p>	<p><b>Target 2.2.1:</b> This indicator has been achieved and exceeded its target by 1,734. By 2021, a total of 2,034</p>	<p><b>Target 2.2.1:</b> Under the Food Assistance for Assets modality, more</p>	<p>Target 2.2.1: Field monitoring report</p>

<p>employment with the support of the JP RWEE  <b>Baseline:</b> 922 rural women  <b>Planned Target:</b> 300 rural women farmers</p>	<p>rural women entered wage earning jobs with the support of the JP RWEE.    These rural women received NPR 7,881 (US\$ 66.56) on an average (20 days spread over two months), as per the government’s local wage rate in the programme districts.</p>	<p>rural women farmers expressed their interest to be a part of this short-term employment service. The COVID-19 pandemic also made more rural women engaged in this process to sustain their livelihood.</p>	
<p><b>Outcome 3: Rural women have enhanced leadership and participation in their communities and in rural institutions, and in shaping laws, policies and programmes.</b></p>			
<p><b>Indicator 3.1:</b> % of women elected as representative at local level/community level committees  <b>Baseline:</b> 43.6% (828 including 9 in leadership position in cooperatives)  <b>Planned Target:</b> 10% (2018-2020)</p>	<p><b>Target 3.1:</b> this indicator has been achieved and exceeded its target by 54.7 percent. As of 2021, 64.7 percent (1,065) of the rural women are now in leadership positions in cooperatives in the two districts.</p>	<p>Target 3.1: JP RWEE was able to empower rural women in two districts through a series of trainings, orientations and hand holding support. Continuous sensitization and empowerment efforts contributed to the increase in leadership role of rural women.</p>	<p>Target 3.1: Partner’s report</p>
<p><b>Indicator 3.2:</b> % of producer’s organizations led by women  <b>Baseline:</b> 2.9 % producers organizations led by women  <b>Planned Target:</b> 5% increase (against the baseline) in rural women leadership in producer’s organizations (2018-2020)    <b>Indicator 3.3:</b> Proportion of rural women famers with empowerment in the leadership domain of the WEAI (increased decision making)  <b>Baseline:</b> 0.4995 (=50)<sup>28</sup></p>	<p><b>Target 3.2:</b> This indicator has been achieved and exceeded its target by 18.7 per cent. As of 2021, 23.7 percent (552 rural women) increase in rural women’s leadership in producers’ organizations has been achieved.    <b>Target 3.3:</b> This indicator has achieved its target. Overall, 83 per cent of rural women in the beneficiary sample compared to 56 per cent of rural women in the comparison sample achieved empowerment.</p>	<p>Target 3.2: JP RWEE was able to empower rural women in two districts through a series of trainings, orientations and hand holding support. Continuous sensitization and empowerment efforts contributed to increase in the leadership role of rural women. This was the main reason for the positive variance of this target.</p>	<p>Target 3.2: Field monitoring report    <b>Target 3.3:</b> Evaluating the JP RWEE project in Nepal using the project-Women’s Empowerment in Agricultural Index (pro-WEAI) survey tool</p>

<p><b>Planned Target:</b> Average of (Group Membership 0.951+ Membership in Influential Group 0.828) = 0.8895</p>	<p>The overall empowerment measured Pro-WEAI 3DE scores are 0.94 for beneficiaries, and 0.82 for women in the comparison sample. Leadership domain in WEAI is calculated under ‘Collective Agency’ which has two indicators: (a) Group Membership, and (b) Membership in Influential Groups. The 3DE mean score calculated for beneficiary women is 0.951 for Group Membership and 0.828 for Membership in Influential Groups, while it is 0.411 and 0.369 for control group women respectively.</p>		
<p>Output 3.1 Rural women, including young women have enhanced confidence and leadership skills to participate in local governance</p>			
<p><b>Indicator 3.1.1:</b> Number of rural women farmers who participated in the local policy discussions and/or formal decision-making processes <b>Baseline:</b>723 rural women <b>Planned Target:</b> 3,000 rural women farmers</p>	<p><b>Target 3.1.1:</b> This indicator achieved its target. As of December 2019, 1,180 rural women visited and held a dialogue with government officials during the local-level planning process. In addition, 483 rural women again participated in 'Query for My Leader' radio campaign and put forth their concerns and queries to the local representatives and received responses from them in 2020. A total of 15 episodes of a magazine format radio series (Sambal programme) were produced and aired, reaching an audience of approximately 229,548 population (reaching about 3,000 rural women) in Rautahat and Sarlahi districts.</p>	<p><b>Target 3.1.1:</b> The JP RWEE capacitated rural women on their rights and also ask questions to the local policy makers. This supported these women to participate in the local policy discussions.</p>	<p><b>Target 3.1.1:</b> Partner’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><b>Indicator 3.2.1:</b> Number of rural women’s groups who join formally registered cooperatives or registered themselves in relevant local government offices  <b>Baseline:</b> 14 rural women’s groups joined cooperatives  <b>Planned Target: 14 rural women’s groups</b> (300 rural women farmers)</p>	<p><b>Target 3.2.1:</b> This indicator has been achieved and exceeded the target by 714 (1,014 rural women against the targeted 300). A total of 48 rural women's groups (against the targeted 14) have joined five cooperatives (3 in Sarlahi and 2 in Rautahat) by 2021. Out of five cooperatives, one in Rautahat district municipality office, is yet be registered. It will be registered after the Cooperative Act is approved by Municipality Board in 2021. This will continue to be monitored by JP RWEE’s staff members responsible for the field initiatives beyond the programme duration.  In addition, the capacity of 51 rural women were enhanced to provide leadership in operationalization of four agri-product collection centers in 2021.</p>	<p><b>Target 3.2.1:</b> The JP RWEE empowered rural women farmers, which enabled them to join cooperatives and take leadership role in the operation of cooperatives. This resulted to the positive variance of the target.</p>	<p><b>Target 3.2.1:</b> Field monitoring report</p>
<p>Output 3.3: Rural women, including young women, have increased capacity to engage in and influence relevant policy forums at national and regional levels</p>			
<p>Not applicable for reporting as the JP RWEE in Nepal does not target this output.</p>			
<p>Output 3.4: Rural women, including young women have enhanced awareness on their rights in a more supportive community/local environment.</p>			
<p><b>Indicator 3.4.1:</b> Number of rural women who are aware of women’s human rights and GESI responsive approaches  <b>Baseline:</b> 5 rural women  <b>Planned Target:</b> 3,000 rural women</p>	<p><b>Target 3.4.1:</b> This indicator has been achieved and exceeded its target by 1,315. In total, 4,315 rural women were sensitized on women’s human rights and GESI responsive approaches. In 2019, a total of 1,312 rural women (18 female facilitators and 1,294 rural women) were reached by JP RWEE through weekly discussions on women’s human rights and GESI-responsive approaches. In 2020, over 650 rural women, contacted through IVR and mobile survey for assessment on radio listenership, have reported increased awareness on the issues raised by radio programs. In 2021, 2,353 rural women strengthened</p>	<p><b>Target 3.4.1:</b> The JP RWEE team identified the need to reaching out to more rural women as it was important to sensitise rural women farmers on relevant topics on women’s human rights and GESI responsive approaches and to ensure their voice, agency and influence at the local level.</p>	<p><b>Target 3.4.1:</b> Equal Access International’s report</p>

<p><b>Indicator 3.4.2:</b> Number of families/households mobilized and increased their awareness and support rural women’s economic empowerment  <b>Baseline:</b> 0  <b>Target:</b> 610 rural women champions and 1,070 of their family and community members second level champions</p>	<p>their capacity through a series of leadership in-person trainings and innovative radio programming.</p> <p><b>Target 3.4.2:</b> This indicator has almost achieved its target. A total of 608 rural women champions and 961 family and community members (1,020 women and 549 men) of Rautahat and Sarlahi districts were trained on GALS,<sup>30</sup> and became champions, which helped enhance the self-esteem of the rural women, fostered better planning, decision making and working together, strengthened their relationships, increased their income, and improved the overall well-being of the households.</p>		<p>GALS Assessment Report</p>
<p><b>Outcome 4: A more gender responsive policy environment is secured for the economic empowerment of rural women</b></p>			
<p><b>Indicator 4.1:</b> % of government budgets and donor funding (on budget) allocated to programme benefitting rural women  <b>Baseline:</b> 5%  <b>Planned Target:</b> 20 % of Government budgets and donor funding (on budget) allocated to programme benefitting rural women</p>	<p><b>Target 4.1:</b> This indicator has been achieved and exceeded its target by 18.65 percent, 38.65 percent of federal government budget and donor funding for the fiscal year 2018/2019 were allocated to programmes benefitting rural women.</p>		<p>Government of Nepal’s budget, fiscal year 2018/2019</p>
<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>			
<p><b>Indicator 4.1.1:</b>  Extent to which national land, food, nutrition, agricultural and rural development policies and laws make provisions for gender equality and women’s empowerment    <b>Baseline:</b>  61 land, food, nutrition, agricultural and rural development policies and</p>	<p><b>Target 4.1.1:</b> This target was achieved in 2017. The GESI strategy of the ADS was endorsed by the MoALD on 20 June 2017. The review report of the gaps of implementation of the ADS in the current federal and COVID-19 context was approved by MoALD in 2021. JP RWEE provided technical support to the review process.</p>		<p><b>Target 4.1.1:</b>  Partner’s report</p>

<p>laws make provisions for gender equality and women's empowerment</p> <p><b>Planned Target:</b> The GESI strategy of the ADS endorsed by the MoAD by 2017</p> <p><b>Indicator 4.1.2:</b> Number of local government representatives/officials who enhanced their knowledge and capacity to mainstream, monitor and report issues of rural women farmers <b>Baseline:</b> 0 <b>Planned Target:</b> 65 local officials (30 women and 35 men) in two events (one in each district)</p>	<p><b>Target 4.1.2:</b> This indicator has been achieved and exceeded its target by 36 government officials/elected leaders. By 2021, 101 government officials/elected leaders (49 women and 52 men) enhanced knowledge on issues related to rural women farmers as a result of the workshop on GESI and gender responsive budgeting.</p>	<p><b>Target 4.1.2:</b> During the course of programme implementation, the JP RWEE team decided to include more government representatives and local elected leaders as it was critical to sensitize them on rural women's issues and to mainstream and monitor them.</p>	<p><b>Target 4.1.2:</b> 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><b>Indicator 4.2.1:</b> Number of countries where the WEAI is piloted <b>Baseline:</b> 0 <b>Planned Target:</b> Five countries</p>	<p><b>Target: 4.2.1:</b> This indicator has achieved the target. The WEAI study was piloted and completed in Nepal</p>		<p>WEAI study report</p>
<p>Output 4.3: An enabling environment is promoted to reflect rural women's priorities in regional policy processes.</p>			
<p>Not applicable for reporting as the JP RWEE in Nepal does not target this output.</p>			

### **III. Evaluation, Best Practices and Lessons Learned**

#### **Evaluation**

The JP RWEE conducted a global evaluation of the programme in 2021, which included a country case study and field level data collection in Nepal. Key findings, lessons learned, and recommendations in relation to Nepal include: (a) mainstream and prioritize climate change across all activities, with a focus on capitalizing on the role that women play in leadership and advocacy on climate change to strengthen preparedness and recovery to climate related disasters; (b) build on market linkages to ensure the gains from the programme can be sustained to enhance the transformative potential of the JP RWEE in the future; and (c) tangible intervention for social norm change should continue in a second phase of the programme. WFP conducted an outcome monitoring survey of the JP RWEE in 2019, in which 143 beneficiaries were interviewed in two programme districts, to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation by the targeted women beneficiaries. The survey showed that the programme activities brought intended changes to the beneficiaries, such as empowering women through increased knowledge, behaviour changes (mainly in decision making), better utilization of the cash received, and better implementation of the acquired information through the training. The survey also assessed the food consumption score, stress coping strategy and level of satisfaction of beneficiaries with the contents of the training and capacity building support. The outcome of the survey was used to update the programme log frame in the 2019 and the recommendations were used to plan the activities for the 2020-2021 period.

#### **Challenges**

The programme faced three main challenges. First, the COVID-19 related lockdowns and the inaccessibility of many participants seriously disrupted the implementation of GALS, which requires face-to-face interaction with participants. This intervention had to be stopped during the prolonged lockdowns in the first and second waves of the pandemic. This challenge was addressed through a special arrangement, linking its implementation with the Rural Enterprises and Remittances Project (RERP) of IFAD Nepal. Under a memorandum of understanding signed with RERP, the JP RWEE trained its field level personnel to follow up and supervise the GALS participants which enabled the GALS implementation during the period.

There were also challenges in using online platforms for GESI sensitization of local vendors and training of local radio partners and community reporters. The challenges included lack of access to mobile phones, networks, and internet and the limited technical aptitude of the participants. This challenge was mitigated by conducting meetings in smaller groups, and ensuring physical distancing and other safety measures, such as the use of masks and sanitizers. For leadership related interventions, rural women were provided with a radio set and learned how to operate the radio, including how to charge the radio set.

The third challenge was the inadequate understanding of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion issues by local government representatives. The JP RWEE team held a series of trainings to sensitize local government on GESI issues and the importance of GESI responsive planning and budgeting.

#### **Best Practices and Lessons Learned**

*Adopting innovations to sustain implementation amidst the pandemic* – Restrictive government protocols to contain the pandemic threatened to stop the implementation of the JP RWEE. The team responded by adopting innovative implementation methods that moved the programme forward despite extreme constraints. Radio programming, on topics related to women's empowerment, gender equality and social inclusion, proved to be effective in capacitating rural women on life and leadership skills, resulting in their meaningful

participation in the local response to the pandemic. The radio programmes also raised awareness and improved the attitudes toward rural women among people in the community. In addition, women developed assertiveness and confidence to raise their concerns with local officials and received attention and response in return.<sup>30</sup>

***Breaking perceptual barriers and transforming social norms*** – In the Rautahat and Sarlahi districts, women rarely left their houses due to the negative attitudes of male members toward women’s visibility and movement in public spaces. After the intervention of the JP RWEE, rural women began to challenge these traditional social norms through rural women farmers’ groups and the rural women-led construction management committee, which supported rural women to work in a non-traditional sector like construction of the agro-product collection/storage structures. This provided rural women with an opportunity to take on leadership and decision-making roles, earn income through short-term job opportunities, and demonstrate that women can be equally effective in traditionally dominated male occupations. These initiatives under the JP RWEE supported rural women to strengthen their agency and enabled them to re-orient negative perceptions of society while embracing an image of economically empowered women.

***Policy inputs to advance GESI in ADS implementation*** - Among the most significant lessons learned were the policy inputs generated through the JP RWEE, which are now adopted and incorporated into the updated GESI for ADS.<sup>31</sup> The GESI strategy was revised and updated based on the current federal structure and COVID-19 pandemic. These revised inputs now serve as additional guidance in ensuring that the implementation of ADS will advance the status and concerns of rural women farmers. The inputs highlight: (a) the need for a deeper understanding of GESI among stakeholders; (b) a policy that explicitly addresses the entitlements of women and excluded groups in the sector of agriculture; (c) a clear delineation of powers and responsibilities among the three tiers of government, and stronger linkages among agencies, including in the promotion of GESI; (d) creation of monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the GESI strategy; and (e) the development of competent human resources to advance GESI at the provincial and local levels. The GESI strategy needed to be revised in the context of federalism and COVID-19 where many issues are evolving in the agriculture sector in relation to rural women.

***Significance of women’s roles and contributions in the agriculture sector*** - The JP RWEE implementation also demonstrated that supporting women’s roles and contributions as farmers results in tremendous benefits to the agricultural sector. The combination of support needed to raise the agricultural productivity of women farmers are the same as those needed by male farmers. Thus, rural women farmers should be central to the planning, budgeting, delivery of services and opportunities, and decision making and leadership in the sector. More importantly, the implementation of ADS must recognize and address the gender-related factors that constrain women’s productivity as agricultural agents, which include domestic drudgery and disproportionate burden of housework and caregiving, restrictions to their mobility, control of family members, traditional gender norms, and lack of attention to their health and total wellbeing. These are all integral to the fulfillment of women’s human rights and, in implementing the ADS, rural women farmers must be provided with support to assert their rights, as the JP RWEE has demonstrated.

***Promotion of appropriate agriculture mechanization*** - Out-migration of rural youths has negatively impacted agriculture in Nepal. It has created an acute shortage of human labour, increased burden and hazards on rural women and increased the cost of production. The introduction of appropriate agriculture machines through the JP RWEE has tremendously reduced the need for human labour and reduced production costs. In addition, it has considerably reduced drudgery and the time rural women spend on farm activities and, in turn, encouraged

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<sup>30</sup> Equal Access International’s Report, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> The Review Report on Gaps and Challenges on the Implementation of the GESI Strategy of the ADS.

them to start commercial farming for sustainable livelihoods. The selection of appropriate drudgery reduction tools for rural women helped them to look after their own health and wellbeing.

***Catalytic benefits of GALS*** – Empowerment through GALS spurred participants’ ability to think creatively about their lives and livelihood strategies. Rural women who were empowered through GALS adopted self-developed strategies to enable their families and communities to deal with the challenges caused by the pandemic. Actions taken by GALS champions include: holding open and constructive discussions with family members; finding appropriate ways of continuing their economic activities’ and raising awareness among neighbours and community people to follow the public health protocols.

***Positive impact through Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF)*** – The home grown school feeding component of the programme led to positive impacts in terms of rural women’s empowerment. First, the HGSF improved the food and nutrition status of girls and children from poor households, helping in the retention of these children in schools. Second, a cash-based school feeding programme signified a stable market for rural women to sell their products locally. Finally, HGSF also supported rural women’s social empowerment (leadership and capacity), as women’s cooperatives or women farmers were responsible for managing the supply chain for the HGSF. Through the support of the JP RWEE, the leadership of rural women in cooperatives helped them gain confidence and increased their capacity to deal with external agencies and business entities by being engaged in the implementation of the HGSF.

***Effectiveness of radio programme in the pandemic context*** - Radio remains the most effective medium to reach the rural target groups with limited/no literacy, means or skills to use the internet.<sup>32</sup> Although the face-to-face approach is still preferred, radio emerged as the most feasible option for programme delivery among the target group of the JP RWEE in the pandemic context. The use of the IVR system as a digital platform enhanced the quality of interaction with listeners. To achieve optimum results, it proved important to orient the key participants on the use of IVR and incorporate surveys using the mobile application to assess the listening and collect feedback from the audience. The JP RWEE will continue to optimize the use of these tools in furthering the implementation of the JP RWEE in the context of the pandemic and beyond, during the second phase of the programme.

***Establishment of digital learning community*** - Given the current digital gap, the establishment of a digital learning community centre in the targeted communities is important. This should incorporate activities on enhancing the basic digital literacy for rural women where the required infrastructures exist. This will help promote further empowerment of rural women for their engagement with local government units. It will also ensure stronger linkage of their products with the market and foster their overall growth as individuals, leaders, and entrepreneurs.

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<sup>32</sup> Nepal Media Survey 2019: National Survey on Nepali Media Landscape. Sharecast Initiative Nepal, 2019.

## V. Specific Story: The empowerment journey of Arati

### *Ending gender inequality in my family*

Kritika, a 13-year-old girl, is trying to do her homework after school. Her brother, who is two years younger than her, comes home after playing with his friends outside their house. He asks Kritika to give him something to eat as he is hungry. Kritika stops doing her homework and gets up. Arati, Kritika's mother just walks in while this scene unfolds. She tells her son, "Have you not listened to the *Sambal* radio program? Your sister is not responsible for feeding you. She is responsible for her future and needs to study so that she can have a better future. You can get the food yourself."



Kritika, studying together with her brother, Aaditya in 2020 (Credit: Equal Access International)

*I strive to promote gender equal relations with my husband*

Arati Devi Karna is a 40-year-old rural woman who lives in Gujara, Rautahat district; one of the remote parts of Southern Nepal where Madhesi and Muslim communities mainly reside. In Nepal, these have been reported as the communities with persistent high indicators of gender disparity. Deeply entrenched social norms and customs perpetuate women and girls' low status in society. Arati is a farmer who belongs to these communities and has been facing gender bias throughout her life. "A few years back, my husband wouldn't even trust me to go to the markets. I would have to rely on him to buy the seeds and fertilizers."

Many rural women involved in JP RWEE program from Sarlahi and Rautahat have shared their experiences of mobility restrictions on women and girls owing to traditional mindset. Arati, a Madhesi rural woman, joined the JP RWEE programme in 2016, which aimed to empower rural women farmers in vegetable production and community-based asset creation. The programme further strived to develop the overall leadership capacity of these women at home and at the community by equipping them with the necessary leadership and life skills and creating an enabling environment for those



Arati pumps water while her husband washes the dishes in 2020. (Credit: Equal Access International)

women to flourish by increasing their community participation. Since then, Karna has progressed leaps and bounds. "After being involved in the JP RWEE, I have gained a lot of skills and confidence. These days, I go to the market myself. Due to my increased confidence after being engaged in the RWEE programme, my husband supports me while doing my work and no longer restricts me," she says.

To advance the empowerment of these rural women farmers, the JP RWEE in Sarlahi and Rautahat districts worked with and supported them to increase their participation and agency at home and in the community. For this purpose, a comprehensive Social Behavior Change Communication radio programme "Sambal" was developed. *Sambal*, a two-part radio program, was designed and aired, which raised issues like women's meaningful participation and leadership at home and community, and harmful social norms that sustain gender disparity. Arati is one of the regular listeners of the radio program.

### ***The inter-generational cycle of gender inequality must end***

"I have learned a lot of things from the radio program. I have a daughter and a son. I used to ask my daughter to help me with the housework, as my mother did with me. It never occurred to me to ask my son to help me as well. But listening to the radio programme, it made me realize that I need to treat my daughter and son equally. I have faced many biases in my life because I am a woman. I didn't even realize that I was continuing this cycle of discrimination in my own home until I listened to the programme. Now, I no longer treat them differently. I tell them both that they need to prioritize their education and need to be independent. These days, I divide the house chores equally between them. If I want others to treat me

as equal to men, then I need to start that from my own house. I want my daughter to know that she is not inferior to anyone else just because she is a girl.”

In the ongoing crisis of COVID-19, Arati could not interact regularly with her colleagues in a group that was formed as part of the JP RWEE. The *Sambal* programme was designed in this context to bring these rural women farmers together in solidarity to address the issues faced by them. “When the lockdown began due to the crisis, I was confined within my home and was not able to get in touch with my friends. Listening to *Sambal* helped me feel that I was not facing challenges alone. I could hear the voices of other women farmers like myself. The programme gave me hope and gave me the information I needed. It has also increased the level of gender awareness among my children and my husband,” says Arati.



Arati is listening to the *Sambal* radio programme with her family. She shares that the content of the programme is useful for the whole family. So, listening to the radio programme every week has been a family ritual for her in 2020. (Credit: Equal Access International)