

SYSTEMS-LEVEL CHANGE EVALUATION BRIEF SERIES NEPAL



Evaluating System-level change and impact Findings from the evaluation of the SAMARTHYA project in Nepal

Key takeaways

- The project strengthened the technical and operational functions of two large social movements in Nepal, increasing their legitimacy and enabling them to secure land certificates for the first time
- Project advocacy led to the adoption of Local Government Agricultural and Land Act to strengthen a focus on service provision, subsidies, registration and finance for landless and small-scale farmers
- Women increased their participation, leadership, and economic empowerment in communities
- Agricultural services were strengthened and made available to the target group for the first time
- The project had significant success scaling-up climate resilient models with government and locally
- The project greatly improved the lives of the farmers and communities in which it worked

Background

CARE's ten-year strategy, [Vision 2030](#), seeks to deepen the organizational focus on systems-level change and impact to support CARE's mission to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice. To support this, CARE launched a systems-level impact initiative to **measure the effect of our programs that have influenced or changed systems, and the impact that this systems-change had on people's lives**. The initiative also increased capacity across the CARE confederation to design and implement high-quality systems change programs, and to strengthen the focus on systems-level change within our Country Office organizational frameworks and strategies. Four CARE Country Offices were selected to evaluate one systems-level program, and to synthesize the results and learning of this evaluation for national and global knowledge translation.

CARE's pathways for Systems-Level Change

Systems-level change goes beyond the individual-level to achieve positive shifts in the underlying structures and supporting mechanisms which cause interpersonal, community, organizational, institutional, corporate and other systems to operate in particular ways. CARE achieves systems-level change through the cumulative effect of its own and its partners' programs and actions across multiple systems-level "pathways to scale", namely: 1) Advocacy to influence policies, programs and budgets of governments and other power holders; 2) Supporting and advancing social and gender norms change; 3) Supporting social movements to take collective action for change; 4) Service system strengthening and citizen social accountability; 5) Inclusive market-based approaches for economic and environmental sustainability; and 6) Scaling and adapting proven models through CARE and our partners, and indirectly with governments, private sector or the social sector. CARE conceptualizes **systems-level impact** as the changes people experience in their lives because of effective systems-level change through these pathways.¹



¹ CARE is focused on systems-level change impacting the lives of people in six different domains (or "impact areas") – 1) gender equality, 2) right to health, 3) right to food, water, and nutrition, 4) climate justice, 5) women's economic justice and 6) humanitarian response.

1. Systems-level challenges in Nepal and SAMARTHYA project

Problem: Social movements in Nepal struggle with systematization, and have limited ability to influence decision-makers. Landless people² have had the right since 1990 to farm the land on which they reside, but this land has remained unregistered and cannot be used for any economic purposes. Policies on land, agriculture and food security in Nepal are not sufficiently supportive of the needs of landless people and marginalized farmers, and government lacks the knowledge to work with these groups. Community-led models to build climate resilience remain small-scale and are not integrated within government systems.

Solution: CARE Nepal's 'SAMARTHYA: Promoting Inclusive Governance and Resilience for the Right to Food' project was implemented in Udayapur, Siraha and Okhaldhunga districts between July 2018 and December 2021, with funding from CARE Denmark. The project was implemented in partnership with social movement organizations, Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC), the National Farmers Groups Federation (NFGF), and the National Land Rights Forum (NLRF, see box). Technical backstopping and mentoring support were provided by resource partners, Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LIBIRD), Clean Energy Nepal (CEN) and UN-Habitat. SAMARTHYA collaborated with local and provincial government to improve the policy context related to land, agriculture and food security for landless people and marginalized farmers, and supported these movements to engage with government and mobilized them to undertake advocacy to facilitate policy change and to hold duty bearers accountable. The project also strengthened government systems, and developed and institutionalized climate resilient scalable models in land and agriculture within government. SAMARTHYA further strengthened the internal systems and capacity within these social movements, supporting them to become more established and sustainable.

CSRS, NFGF and NLRF are national people's organizations/individual member organizations with a strong history of supporting and uniting disempowered farmers and communities and advancing their land and agricultural rights in Nepal.

Expected outcomes and impacts: The project aimed to increase momentum for the Right to Food (RtF) agenda in Nepal, making it more contextualized, concrete, and systematic. Through employing a number of system-level pathways the project anticipated systems-level change, particularly supporting social movements, social accountability, advocacy for policy change and systems strengthening. SAMARTHYA also expected to improve the lives of the target group around food and nutrition security.

2. Evaluation questions and methodology

The evaluation sought to explore the following questions. **1) Process:** What did the program do and how were the systems-level pathways integrated across its activities? **2) Systems-change:** What changes were achieved by the project through different systems pathways (applying the Vision 2030 pathways to scale framework)? How did the systems-level changes across these pathways reinforce or support each other? **3) Population-wide impact:** How did those systems-level changes result in changes in individual level impacts on people's lives?

The evaluation employed the Outcome Harvesting (OH) methodology (see box) to answer these questions. Using the OH six steps detailed below, the evaluation harvested data on SAMARTHYA outcomes,³ the significance of the outcomes and the contributions of the project to the outcomes.

Outcome harvesting is a participatory approach in which the harvester facilitates the collection of evidence of what has been achieved and works backward to determine whether and how the project or intervention contributed to the change.

Preparatory work (March-May 2022): Training was provided for CARE Nepal staff and the appointed consultants on both CARE's systems-level approach and the OH methodology. A

² In Nepal, the landless lack formal documentation for the land they have been living on and farming on for generations, or they have no land at all and are either tenant farmers or farming on government land without permission

³ A change in the behavior, relationships, activities, actions, policies or practices of individual, group, community, organization, or institution with whom a program works directly, Canadian International Development Research Center

matrix was developed to map different components of the SAMARTHYA project to each of CARE’s systems level pathways. An outcome description formulation meeting was held to explore draft outcome descriptions under each relevant system level pathway. **Step 1. Design the outcome harvest (May 2022):** An outcome harvesting design workshop was held with the harvesters (3D), change agents and social actors (CARE Nepal, CSRC, NLR, NFGF and local government, among others) and the Harvest Users (CARE Nepal) and independent facilitators who were familiar with the project activities. The first half of the workshop finalized the design, identified useful questions to guide the harvest, and agreed on the stakeholders to be consulted and sources of data collection. The study questionnaire/survey went through several rounds of revisions and were separated for relevant stakeholders. The survey on individual HHs level change was digitalized using KOBO for data collection. **Step 2. Gather data and draft outcome descriptions (May 2022):** The second half of the workshop provided inputs to draft outcome descriptions. Harvested outcomes include a description of who changed what, when and where it took place, significance and how the change agent contributed to that outcome.⁴ A desk review of SAMARTHYA project reports, publications and related documents was also undertaken. **Step 3. Engage with informants (June 2022):** Field visits were undertaken to specific project sites⁵ and local language in-depth consultation was held with stakeholders at all levels (community to federal) to review and complete the outcome descriptions or collect additional outcomes. A participatory mixed methods approach was used, comprising 82 key informant interviews (KII), 23 Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) and 23 field observations, along with 105 household surveys. **Step 4. Substantiation (June 2022):** The harvested outcomes were substantiated⁶ in meetings with individuals, community leaders and agencies with an understanding of the project (but independent from it). Substantiators were asked to score relevant outcome descriptions using a five-point Likert Scale, and to provide justification for this scoring. **Step 5. Analyze and interpret (June 2022):** The outcome descriptions were finalized, reorganized, analyzed and interpreted. The findings were aligned with the five systems-level pathways to show verifiable and credible contribution of the project to the evaluation questions above. **Step 6. Support use of findings (June-July 2022):** The harvesters presented the evaluation findings and recommendations to CARE Nepal and other stakeholders. CARE Nepal then identified ways to disseminate and use the findings to support learning, to inform new project design and to feed into broader strategic processes. Further details on the methodology are available in the full Nepal evaluation report.

3. Evaluation findings

The evaluation found the SAMARTHYA project achieved both system-level change and impact. This section explores these achievements by systems-level change, population-wide impact and sustainability.

(i) Systems-level change related to the different pathways

The harvesting process identified 11 system-level changes or outcomes. These are summarized for each of the systems-level pathways below. Under each pathway a key related outcome description example is provided. The complete outcome descriptions can be found in the full evaluation report.



Supporting Social Movements (5 outcomes identified)

Through assessments, trainings and joint exercises, the SAMARTHYA project succeeded in strengthening the organizational capacity, leadership and institutional systems and governance (technical, human resources, financial and administrative) of NFGF and NLR and expanding the geographical presence of these social movements (see box); increasing their reach and inclusiveness with small holder farmers and landless people, strengthening their sustainability and increasing their constituency and effectiveness in undertaking internal and external lobbying and advocacy (based on the needs of these groups).

NLR expanded the size of its movement from 48 to 63 districts, increasing from 42,000 to 93,000 member landless and smallholder farmer households. NFGF expanded its reach from 53 to 60 districts, increasing from 4,013 to 5,120 member groups. Women’s participation in these movements increased to above 51%.

⁴ Wilson-Grau, R and Britt, H (2013). Outcome Harvesting. Ford Foundation, November 2013.

⁵ Molung and Sunkoshi of Okhaldhunga district, Belaka and Chaudhandigadhi of Udayapur district and Bhagawanpur and Dhangadhimai of Siraha district along with their respective agencies at province level and national level.

⁶ Confirmation of the substance of an outcome by an informant knowledgeable about the outcome but independent of the program

These movements were further organized into groups, each led by an Executive Committee, were supported to develop internal policies and procedures (including commitments on women's participation), and were formally registered with the government at ward, district, province and federal level. As a result of their increased advocacy, and the ability of these networks to better represent themselves (due to their formalized structures), the project succeeded in being invited to municipal land and agricultural meetings and securing individual land certificates from the government; a huge step in registering the settlements on which these landless people have worked for many years (see outcome description below). The Land Reform Commission has subsequently distributed land cards for others waiting for their certificates, and the registration process has been digitalized (see scaling below). The focus on technical skills supported these movements to implement gender-inclusive climate resilient agriculture, leaseholder farming and home garden management. Digital platforms (Facebook) supported exchange of issues and strategies across the movements. Allyship was also built among likeminded CSOs (see advocacy pathway) to advance movement building in land, agriculture, food security and climate change concerns. Unexpected changes were that NLRF and NFGF's expansion and ability to undertake campaigning on the rights of landless and marginalized farmers increased their legitimacy and recognition among those groups, other CSOs and the government; further strengthening sustainability. Female participants said they felt respected for their voices and their social status had increased.

Outcome Description example: social movements pathway		
Outcome: Landless people are organized into groups and are supported and mobilized to claim their land rights, succeeding in receiving land certificates from the government for the first time. These groups reporting being extremely happy to secure their land certificates.	Significance: Prior to the project, most farmers were unorganized and had little state recognition, despite working in unregistered land for decades. They did not know how to secure individual land certificates. Now all these farmers in the target sites have these certificates. Many had strived for this before, but it had never materialized.	Contribution: SAMARTHYA organized farmers and piloted an Identification, Verification and Recording (IVR) model of these farmers in one ward. This model was then scaled-up by CSRC, NLRF, NFGF, UN-Habitat and CARE. Farmers were supported to collectively advocate for their rights.



Advocacy to Influence Policies, Programs and Budgets (1 outcome identified)

The project successfully advocated to, and supported, government to formulate and amend its relevant regulations, policies and programs at the federal, provincial and local levels to better support the rights of landless and small-scale farmers. To do so, the project used a range of different insider and outsider advocacy tactics, such as multi-stakeholder dialogues, action planning, mapping of key duty bearers and service providers, developing policy briefs and model acts, government submissions, public campaigns and demonstrations. A key impact of this advocacy was to achieve changes in local level policies and programs so that these newly formalized farmers groups had access to subsidized production input seeds and saplings and climate resilient

Six local governments provided USD\$20,5000 in 2020 to support contract farming. USD\$95k was made available in 2020 to support climate change adaptation plans (water, irrigation, electricity, access roads, training, afforestation), and \$95k in 2021.

farming technologies from government, including solar irrigation, improved tools, stress resistant crop varieties, diversified home gardening, locally made organic pesticide and drip irrigation. Key policies influenced included the Local Government Agricultural Act and Land Act, to include a stronger focus on climate resilient agriculture and the needs of landless, small-holder farmers, climate vulnerable communities and women. These Acts have incorporated the categorization-based Farmer ID card (FID) developed by CARE and NFGF, which provides details of the farmers in each municipality

who should benefit from production inputs and services. The FID compelled the government to revise its subsidy provision to reach those needing the most support. An unexpected outcome was that local governments not targeted by the project have also adopted these Acts. Engagement with local insurance companies, previously reluctant to go to the target villages, led to an increase in available agricultural insurance which has supported

scale-up (see below). Advocacy to the National Planning Commission (NPC) of Nepal, and NLRF and NFGF membership of government Commissions and Steering Committees discussing land reform, supported the aforementioned land registration of these farmers. An impressive outcome of the project was an increase in financial resources from local government to farmer groups (see box). Farmers groups also collaborated with other CSOs to support their advocacy, including the Human Rights and Environmental Center and Women’s Rehabilitation Center (WOREC) Nepal; who became champions for this project. This outcome was supported by the changes in structures and enhanced lobbying, networking and communication skills supported through the social movements pathway, which included a specific focus on empowering female farmers to claim their rights. These changes have continued after project phase out (see sustainability section 3.iv below).

Outcome Description example: advocacy to influence policies and programs pathway		
Outcome: NLRF, CSCR and NFGF strengthened policies and budgets, at all three tiers of government, related to land, agriculture, climate change and food security needs for landless and marginalized farmers, through collective actions and a clear advocacy agenda	Significance: Agricultural policies, guidelines and procedures are formulated and owned by local government and disseminated to municipalities. These guide annual plans and programs at local levels. Prior to the project, these policies existing but did not specifically address the needs of landless and marginalized farmers and women.	Contribution: SAMARTHYA undertook meetings, coalition building, rallies, briefs, and lobbying and advocacy to elected and government officials at all levels. This was supported by the capacity building for NLRF and NFGF on technical skills and institutional strengthening.



Promoting Social Norms Change (1 outcome identified)

SAMARTHYA supported NFGF and NLRF to increase a focus on women’s participation and voice within their own technical work and decision-making structures. As such, the formalization of the social movement structures included a requirement for women to fulfil five of the key positions in their committees, ensuring that their food security needs were reflected. A minimum 50% female participation was adopted, and in some locations 60% of project participants were women. The collective actions by these CSOs also included a strong focus on empowering women. For example the policy advocacy, collective actions undertaken on International Women’s Day and 16 Days of Activism against GBV, and climate resilience scalable models developed by SAMARTHYA - Farmer ID Cards (FID), climate resilient leasehold farming, Agro-met advisory services and Community based land management - included a focus on shifting harmful social norms among communities and norms holders in formal and informal systems around the rights of women, leading to more meaningful participation by these groups in public and municipal forums and other planning and decision-making processes, and greater focus on responding to their economic and social transformation. It also empowered these groups as leaders and change agents, including as community leaders. The FID was mainly focused on women-headed households and female framers. The project’s climate adaptation technologies targeted men and women, with both becoming economically empowered. Women were also supported to form groups to address their needs (see box). These project actions by the farmers groups and their networks, and increased income among women, also led to significant change in household-level gender relations and decision-making, with men more supportive of women’s rights, which influenced the individual lives of women who were hitherto the least priority in access to government resources and services (see individual-level change below).

In Okahdhunga, women came together regularly to address challenges related to agriculture, support income generation schemes and to map local harmful social practices. They increased women’s access to localized livestock insurance, and embedded a focus on addressing gender and social norms within local climate resilience models

Outcome Description example: social norms change pathway		
<p>Outcome: Women play a more meaningful role in decision-making within NFGF and NLRF. Policies and proven land and agricultural models have a stronger focus on gender and social inclusion, and women have increased access to government services and resources</p>	<p>Significance: Prior to the project, women felt unable to voice their opinions and social and gender norms restructured their participation. They were unaware of their rights and entitlements, and left behind in accessing land and agricultural resources</p>	<p>Contribution: SAMARTHYA supported NLRF and NFGF to develop women-friendly policies and guidelines, including minimum participation requirements. Policy advocacy and scalable models developed included a strong focus on gender, inclusion and women's rights.</p>

 **System Strengthening and Social accountability (1 outcomes identified)**
 SAMARTHYA adopted an integrated systems strengthening and social accountability approach. The project strengthened the capacity of government and its resource partners to ensure quality and responsive services in land, agricultural, climate change and food security, including to develop posters and leaflets for mass dissemination, supporting the delivery of quality seeds and supplies, strengthening the timing of service delivery and the availability of human resources. A key success was the agreement with local government for one technician to be made available per ward, who provided agricultural extension services to

Products: Service center units were found to have the required inputs and materials.
Reliability: Designated staff, timely inputs and updated farmer records.
Responsiveness: Timely communication, support and flexibility to farmers' input needs. **Assurance:** Staff skills and credibility.
Empathy: Considering each farmers needs, empathy and convenient service distribution

producer groups, which significantly improved service delivery mechanisms. This led to enhanced quality and quantity of agricultural extension services and subsidized production inputs support, such as seeds, irrigation facilities, tools, agricultural insurance, and minimum support price for farmers' products. This minimum price support covered major cereal crops, including rice, maize and wheat. Overall the evaluation found these steps enhanced products, service reliability, service responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (see box on these findings). The provision of these services, particularly subsidized production inputs (which as noted

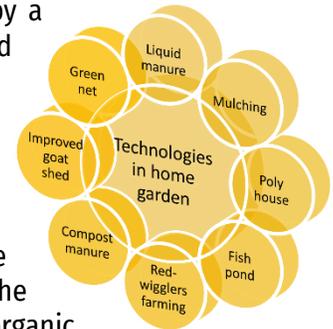
were previously unavailable to the target groups) were strongly facilitated by SAMARTHYA supporting government to adopt The Farmer Identity Card (FID, see further below) and the Identification, Verification and Recording (IVR) model. The FID not only improved access to inputs, but motivated farmers to expand their products to a semi-commercial scale, reflecting intersections between supporting systems strengthening and inclusive markets approaches. These activities were complemented by social accountability actions on their right to food by the organized and mobilized farmers and landless groups. The project supported these groups to hold duty bearers accountable for the services they provided, particularly within local-level committees, leading to service provision that is more response to the needs of landless, women, and marginalized farmers.

Outcome Description example: systems strengthening and social accountability pathway		
<p>Outcome: Local government deliver quality services related to land, agriculture, climate change and food security incorporating NFGF, NLRF, CSRC and other CSO partners needs in their plans and processes</p>	<p>Significance: Essential agricultural services are now provided to the target communities. Pre-project, the target groups had far less access to government services, which were poorly staffed and implemented. Now farmers receive good quality services.</p>	<p>Contribution: SAMARTHYA continually coordinated with local government and supported its work. It co-piloted the proven models with local government, strengthening government understanding on the services required by the target group</p>



Scaling and Adopting Proven Models (3 outcomes identified)

Prior to the project, the municipal government developed and scaled-up approaches to food security which did not address the specific needs of landless, women and marginalized farmers, and did not engage them in developing these plans. SAMARTHYA therefore facilitated strong coordination and trusting collaboration with government for the co-creation of a range of climate resilient land and agricultural models⁷ specific to the needs of this group. These models were co-designed, piloted, a proof of concept generated (to provide sufficient evidence), and then scaled by government and reflected in their annual workplans and programs. The FID, adopted by the National Land Commission, was integrated into the work of 12 local governments, with four allocating USD\$27,000 for the implementation of this FID in 2020. The FID is digitalized, and has since been institutionalized by other districts. Building on the success of SAMARTHYA, The National Land Commission adopted the project IVR model and developed the Land Issues Resolving Information System (LIRIS) system – based on an electronic system developed by UN-Habitat and the project called Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM) - to collect, verify and record landless and informal settlers (replacing the traditional paper-based system). The IVR process was adopted by several local governments, supported by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the project. Resources to make localized insurance available were found in a number of locations; a context which motivated farmers to scale-up their farming in the knowledge that they could cover any animal health losses and still meet their livelihoods needs. The project enhanced coordination with the National Association of Rural Municipalities (NARMIN) to scale these models, particularly localized insurance, climate resilient leaseholder farming practices – such as lemon farming, turmeric farming and fish farming - and FID, across the country. These practices were systematically included and institutionalized through the local Agriculture and Land Acts. An unexpected outcome was that this became an organic process, with local levels owning these models and incorporating them into their own Agriculture and Land Acts (even in areas not directly targeted). In addition, landless families started market-led production of some high value crops, accessing production resources (pond and land). The FID provides a newly introduced local government system changing model, which categorizes farmers in different categories based on their possession of production resources, their production yield and their vulnerability to climatic hazards.



SAMARTHYA’s scaling success was also local (not only institutional). With support from LIBIRD, NLR and NFG were capacitated and supported to scale-up these models across their members. 82% of the project-supported farmers were found to know about low-cost climate resilient agriculture farming technologies, of whom 96% said they had adapted to these models, reducing their climate vulnerabilities. Home gardens for food and nutrition security and income generation were found across the target areas, with eight related technologies identified (see figure). These farmers had previously reported challenges with crop loss and low production, and had never heard of climate smart approaches. Now they had increased yield.

Outcome Description example: scaling and adapting proven models pathway		
<p>Outcome: Local government jointly planned, piloted and finalized climate resilient land and agricultural models together with CSO partners, and scaled-up these practices within their plans, policy and programs</p>	<p>Significance: Models formulated and scaled-up by municipal bodies previously took place without any formal consultation with CSOs and rights holders. Now, co-creation approach has reduced bureaucracy and ensures a strong focus on the needs of landless and marginalized communities within plans and operations.</p>	<p>Contribution: SAMARTHYA enhanced coordination on scalable models with federal and local government structures, and with duty bearers within the National Association of Rural Municipalities (NARMIN). Joint planning and pilot demonstrations facilitated effective scale-up</p>

⁷ Models include: 1) Climate Resilient Household Farming Practices 2) Farmers' Identity Card 3) Localized Agriculture Insurance 4) Identification, verification and Recording (IVR) of Landless and Unplanned settlers 5) Formulation of Participatory Land Use Plan at Municipality 6) Community Based Land Management Practice 7) Agr-Met advisory Services and 8) Climate Resilient Local Seed Model System.

(ii) Systems pathway Integration

The integration of systems-level pathways (using more than one pathway concurrently) can support systems-change and impact. SAMARTHYA integrated its work on social movements and policy advocacy with significant success – capacitating these movements as advocates leading to changes in policies, programs and budgets. This grassroots advocacy approach also became self-sustaining, with members of these movements outside the target areas collaborating with government to achieve similar policy changes. The project also integrated a focus on social norms change within its movement building approach, increasing women’s inclusion and participation within these movements and ensuring the work taken forward challenged social norms and increased gender equality. Movement building, policy advocacy and system strengthening also dovetailed with inclusive markets – where land certificates, a more support policy ecosystem and improved client resilient agricultural services and the FID not only allowed the target group to address their immediate needs but to expand their livelihoods through commercialization of their yield (previously not possible). Finally, scale-up and policy change had a symbiotic relationship, where increased scale-up by government of SAMARTHYA models to new sites and necessitated amendments to the local Agricultural and Land Acts (and vice-versa).

(iii) Impact on people’s lives (due to systems change)

The SAMARTHYA project systems-change had a significant impact on people’s lives, including the following:

- **Empowerment and leadership skills:** Increased life skills and leadership skills among landless and smallholder farmers to claim their rights. Increased participation in the municipal decisions which affect their lives. Dignity through land certificates and the FID.
- **Technical skills:** Greater understanding and skills on climate agricultural models and farming practices among target group, increasing their production and reducing crop loss
- **Access to resources:** Greater access to direct resources from local government to support climate smart farming production, including subsidies (benefiting 1069 households)
- **Gender equality and women’s empowerment:** Women now play a greater role in decision-making structures, and benefit from more inclusive social movements. Women show leadership in model development and scaling. Significant changes at household level in gender relations, with women having greater mobility, financial decision-making, improved reproductive autonomy, and reductions in violence against women.
- **Livelihoods and economic development:** Target group generates income through selling their extra production in local markets. They are transitioning from subsistence farming to semi-commercial activities. Women recognized as farmers and entrepreneurs due to their new land entitlement and FID, with greater access to trade opportunities and local markets, reinforcing the changes in their empowerment.
- **Food and nutrition security:** Landless people, marginalized farmers and women increase their food intake. Strengthened climate resilience among these groups supports responses to climatic shocks and stresses.
- **Health outcomes:** Significant improvement in health of women and children due to consumption of diversified food and reduced incidents of low birth weight of a newborn children.

82% of farmers interviewed during the OH said that the individual and community level impacts they experienced due to changes in systems were highly satisfactory and 18% said these were satisfactory. No one interviewed said SAMARTHYA did not have an impact on individual lives (n=206)

(iv) Sustainability of systems-change effects

The evaluation identified several areas of sustained system level effects due to SAMARTHYA, including:

- The institutional, operational, financial and technical capacity building of NLRF and NFGF has supported the ongoing work of these movements, not only around future impactful systems-level programs, but their ability to raise resources, support staff, manage grants and function effectively; all central to their sustainability.
- The increased legitimacy, credibility and reach of NLRF and NFGF is enabling these movements to continue facilitating collective action among target communities and to expand their advocacy to other locations.

- While challenges remain, changes in social norms, women’s participation and household gender norms are creating an environment more conducive to gender equality and women’s greater say in decision-making.
- NLRG and NFGF have continued to facilitate land registration certificates from the government since project phase out, with increased registration among the landless not reached by the project. This is crucial to sustaining the improved livelihoods opportunities (as these farmers can then leverage their land for income).
- The successful formulation of new acts, policies and guidance, and amendments to existing acts, at local, provincial and national levels, further created a new political, legislative and programmatic environment which will sustain well beyond the project. These changes have institutionalized the land certification process, the FID and several climate resilient models in the policies, program and budget of government, which will further support their ongoing use. Local constituencies of NLRG and NFGF are engaging with their respective level of government in order to continue these initiatives started by the project.
- The climate resilient models and farming practices which have been scaled are now widely embedded within local government systems and accepted by duty bearers, which will sustain their continued use and effect.
- At community and household level the majority of the climate smart agricultural practices are continuing to be used by people on their own accord. Members of NLRG and NFGF are also scaling-up these models in other communities on their own initiative.
- The project has created a foundation for climate adaptive farming technologies across the project communities, which will continue to be used given the advantages it brings to farmers’ production.

4. Limitations and challenges

The outcome harvesting took place during Nepal’s rainy season, which restricted access to certain locations for field visits. To address this the research team adapted their approach, switching locations where necessary, and undertaking interviews remotely instead. A further limitation was that the evaluation took place in May and June 2022, five months after the end of the SAMARTHYA project (which ended in December 2021) limiting recall among some respondents. However, this was compensated by a broad use of data collection sources, enabling triangulation of data to avoid any recall bias. Another limitation was the short amount of time to complete the outcome harvest, given the need for funds to be spent by the end of the fiscal year. This reduced the amount of time available for interviews and data collection. Despite this very short time period, the evaluation team collected extensive data and results, reflected above.

The success of the project has also become a challenge. There is now high demand for the models like FID, localized insurance, and climate resilient leasehold farming in other contexts across Nepal. Moreover, NLRG and NFGF face increasing demands to further expand their work and scale the models developed through SAMARTHYA, but have limited resources to meet this demand. There is also a need for ongoing local technical human resources to support the sustainability of climate resilient leasehold farming, nutrition garden and vegetable production. Meeting all these demands could be a challenge for CARE within its existing resources. The retention of the localized insurance, which itself was limited to urban cities and more accessible places, may also be a further challenge without a robust renewal mechanism for the scheme among participants.

5. Lessons learned

The evaluation provided several lessons both on systems-level change and impact, as well as on the outcome harvest evaluation methodology for this purpose. The most salient lessons include:

- **Grounded in the needs of target populations:** To be effective at changing systems, project interventions and approaches must be informed by and respond to target impact groups needs at the current time. In the case of SAMARTHYA, the FID, localized insurance, leasehold farming, IVR, climate resilient local seed system were

directly relevant to the needs of landless and marginalized farmers and were therefore more accepted by the target communities.

- **Effective CSO-government collaboration was central to success:** Effective partnership and network building between NLRP, NGFG, CSRC, NLC, and local governments was key to achieving policy change. The strong culture of co-creation and partnership between the CSOs and government was essential in the successful planning, development, implementation and scale-up of the climate resilient models.
- **Social movements can change lives:** It is possible to improve the lives of the landless, marginalized and socially left behind where their representatives and respective social movements are meaningfully integrated with the tangible products and benefits a project such as SAMARTHYA, particularly the FID, IVR, localized insurance, accessing to land, and climate smart agricultural practices.
- **Working with social movements requires not only supporting technical capacity but also internal systems:** Supporting social movements' financial, operational and management systems is key to building strong foundations. Enhanced credibility of these movements among their communities and the government not only improved their ability to influence change, and strengthened project outcomes, but led to these CSOs jointly sharing resources for the project intervention, thus supporting sustainability.
- **Social movements can play a key role in advocating for policy change:** Capacitating and mobilizing social movements to enable changes in policies, programs and budgets is an effective approach, and can lead to organic changes where new parts of the movement decide to seek such changes in their own communities.
- **Institutionalization is important for systems-level change:** The integration of the climate resilient models within the local level acts, policies and practices, and the support of local power holds to do so, is important for systems-level change. In the areas where the SAMARTHYA project models had not been endorsed and institutionalised within local acts, their ongoing use and sustainability was challenging.
- **Scaling is local and not only institutional:** Scaling and replication took place successfully not only through government, but through local CSOs. These CSOs have continued to expand use of the project models. At the same time, in some cases, the climate resilient activities were initiated just nine months before the project was phased out, which negatively impacted on potential for adoption and scaling.
- **Local models are key to addressing climate risks and can be easily scaled:** Climate resilient farmer friendly models and technologies at community level are highly effective and adoptive in the face of climate risks. These model were deliberately tailored to the local context and to directly address local challenges and beneficiaries' needs. The support and ownership from local government and CSO partners facilitated the institutionalization of these models within their own local government and CSOs system. Moreover, these CSOs and local government initiated the scaling up and out of these models to a national level.
- **Walking the talk on gender equality:** SAMARTHYA not only included a strong focus on gender equality and social inclusion within its work, but achieved visible results in communities. The gendered nature of the project interventions supported 'spill-over' effects in visible outcomes and impact in the community.
- **Projects should more deliberately employ systems-levels approaches:** SAMARTHYA was not originally a systems-level project, but used a number of strategies that speak to each of the pathways. Working to support CARE offices to deliberately integrate the pathways from the outset can lead to greater impacts.
- **Outcome harvesting should be conducted immediately after the project phase:** A significant gap between the project and an outcome harvest can limit the inputs harvested from stakeholders.
- **Outcome harvesting has proven to be an effective methodology to evaluate systems-level change and impact:** This method successfully generated findings and other qualitative data on SAMARTHYA changes and impact that had not previously been taken into account or appreciated. As such, outcome harvesting proved to be more effective for evaluating systems-level work than a traditional evaluation methodology.

6. Recommendations and future directions

The following recommendations are provided to inform systems-level programming, policy and research and CARE's work to take forward these:

1. For CARE Nepal

- **Greater local endorsement of agriculture and land act will enhance their sustained impact.** CARE Nepal should work with NLRF and NFGF to influence local politicians and government officials in areas that have not yet endorsed and adopted the Agricultural and Land-related acts and policies. Adoption will support access to services and land registration for the marginalized farmers in those communities.
- **Support ongoing institutionalization of climate resilient models within local government.** CARE Nepal should continue supporting the uptake of SAMARTHYA climate resilient models with local governments, where they have not incorporated these into annual workplans and programs. CARE Nepal should establish very clear roles and responsibilities for these local government stakeholders to continue this work.
- **Create a mechanism for the renewal of the localized insurance model:** CARE Nepal should support a renewal and continuation mechanism for the localized insurance provided by the project to the target group. This should be in place before the current insurance period ends.
- **Raise resources to continue providing technical assistance to partners and government:** CARE Nepal should raise funds to continue providing resources and technical assistance to maintain and expand the use of the project models and address the growing demand for model replication in other parts of Nepal.
- **Address the gap in technical skills to sustain the climate smart models.** CARE Nepal should create a three-four months tailor-made course to train several farmers as TVET graduates, who can then provide technical support to sustain climate smart models which have been locally adopted and institutionalized. This would address the acute shortage of local technical human resources to support climate resilient models in the long run, facilitate employment opportunities, as well as support sustainability of interventions.
- **Expand partnerships to support wider reach of SAMARTHYA models:** To support greater geographical scale-up of the SAMARTHYA climate resilient models across the country, CARE Nepal should enhance its collaboration with the national level federation of elected members/local levels (for example, the National Association of Rural Municipalities, NARMIN).
- **Use media to support sustainability of project approaches:** CARE Nepal could support local levels to air agro-met advisory services and successful cases of the project activities through local FMs/Radios establishing a mechanism on a regular basis to support sustainability of the interventions.
- **Continue to build on social norms change:** CARE Nepal should leverage the remarkable changes in social norms due to SAMARTHYA actions to strengthen economic and social transformation across its work.

2. For Nepal policy makers or stakeholders

- **Adopt Agriculture and Land related acts in all areas:** Government should continue to adopt this act in areas where it has yet to do so to strengthen their focus on the landless and marginalized farmers, learning from the lessons of other local municipalities
- **Incorporate SAMARTHYA climate resilient models in workplans and programs:** Local government should institutionalize and scale-up these models, including the FID, in areas where they have not done so. to improve services and land management practices among the target groups
- **Expand resources for the climate resilient models:** Government should continue to commit resources to support landless and small-holder farmers in the implementation of climate resilient agricultural practices

3. For CARE Global

- **Expand SAMARTHYA approach to other locations:** The SAMARTHYA project approach and model should be expanded to other locations, leveraging on the significant success of CARE Nepal's work

- **Support analysis of systems-level change and impact across other CO projects:** CARE should support further evaluations of systems-level change across its portfolio, deepening an understanding on the systems change that the organization has achieved.
- **Strengthen CARE's work on social movements:** Expand CARE's work engaging with social movements for policy change and as a sustainable approach to addressing the needs of the marginalized communities.
- **Embed strong CSO-government partnerships within projects:** Build robust institutional linkages with local level government during project design, building ownership and accountability from them and facilitating policy change or adoption of models. This will strengthen sustainability of systems-change and impact.
- **Develop knowledge products to facilitate government support for scale-up:** Projects need to generate evidence-based knowledge products/policy briefs to stimulate government to be active in co-creation and to support scale-up and institutionalization of models developed by CARE.
- **Embed institutionalization within CARE's work on adapting and scaling models:** Strengthen the focus on institutionalization through government within CARE's pathway on adapting and scaling models.
- **Projects should more deliberately employ systems-level approaches:** CARE should encourage projects across the confederation to deliberately employ systems-level approaches (not by chance), strengthening understanding on CARE's effective approaches and ways to deepen these systems-level tactics.
- **Create business plans when working with small-scale farmers:** Business plan development are critical elements when working with groups of small-scale farmers and producers through interventions, providing a clear road map for active involvement by all farmer groups and mitigating any internal conflict.

4. For research and evaluation practitioners

- **Ensure clarity on how the project included systems-level activities before undertaking the evaluation:** Some projects, such as SAMARTHYA, have their own theory of change (ToC) and goals which may not be specific to systems-level approaches. It is important to spend time exploring how these goals, and related project activities, relate to the systems-level pathways before the evaluation (where this was not originally its focus). An analytical framework created for an outcome harvest may also wish to evaluate the project against its original ToC and goals, as well as against the systems-pathways for change. A clear analytical framework will ensure data is collected in the right way to facilitate those analysis.
- **Support a greater focus and measurement on the impact of systems-level change in individuals.** SAMARTHYA had a significant impact on individuals as a result of systems-change, though these intentions were not made explicit in the outset. Support Country Offices to explore and understand what types of individual-level change may be possible due to systems approaches and to them measure those.
- **Consider the timing of the outcome harvest:** Depending on the questions you are trying to answer, and how the results will be used, Outcome harvesting may need to be conducted immediately after the project ends to gain as current an understanding and experience from the stakeholders as possible.

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The full Nepal Outcome Harvesting Evaluation report is available for further information [here](#).