



*After the earth moved, Nepalese planted seeds*



NEPAL

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**Kathmandu, Nepal** – After two major earthquakes and hundreds of aftershocks rocked Nepal in 2015, many remote farming communities were left completely devastated. In a country where four out of five people depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, the disasters dramatically increased the threat of food insecurity, particularly for subsistence farmers and their vulnerable families.

Subsistence farmers Jetha Tamang, 53, and his wife Kaili, 50, live in a village west of Kathmandu, where the first earthquake destroyed all but 15 of the 500 houses including theirs. The couple salvaged some corrugated metal and managed to build a single-room shelter that could house them and their three youngest children. They cooked lentils and rice, or millet and roti bread over an open fire on the dirt floor.

The Tamang family can't afford to buy their own land and instead are growing crops on other people's land in return for some of the food it produces. But because they lost one of their oxen in the disaster, and couldn't afford to buy another, the Tamangs must work even harder, ploughing some of the fields by hand.

But the family's fortunes have improved as they were among 65 000 households to receive a mixed packet of nine varieties of vegetable seeds, including some fast-growing varieties that can be ready to eat in as little as a month. The seeds were supplied by FAO in cooperation and coordination with the Government of Nepal. Timing was critical as the seeds needed to be planted before the monsoon rains arrived. The FAO package also included feed supplements to improve

the health and productivity of surviving livestock and grain storage bags to protect remaining seeds and grain.

**Why earthquakes threaten food security**

Landslides also added to the disaster killing animals in the fields and destroying animal shelters. One in six cows and more than one in three chickens were killed wiping out a lifetime of savings for some families.



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Nepali farmers traditionally store their seeds and grains in their houses and about half of all households in the six worst affected districts lost virtually all of their stored rice, maize, wheat and millet. Sixty percent of households lost nearly all of their stored seeds.

Rice seeds were particularly important for remote communities struggling to replace the seeds they lost, because there was little or no market access following the earthquake, coupled with a rush on remaining



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local seed supplies. The looming monsoon also posed a crucial deadline. If the staple rice crop was not planted before the rain, farmers would be forced to wait a full year for the next harvest – and be ever more reliant on food aid.

### If recovery starts immediately after a disaster there are tangible results

Working with the Government of Nepal, FAO successfully reached 40 000 households with larger five kilogramme bags of rice seeds in time for planting. Each bag produces several months of food.

In total, in the critical first few months, FAO and partners had reached more than 130 000 farm households with assistance that helped them resume food production, care for surviving livestock, improve family nutrition and avoid the threat of food insecurity.

Farmers who received the feed supplements for livestock reported a significant increase in milk

production – sometimes up to double the regular milk supply. Within months, farmers were harvesting vegetables produced with the FAO seeds, to feed their families or sell in the markets.

Some crops such as off-season cauliflower, allowed farmers to earn up to four times the normal price. With the provision of new airtight grain storage bags, families are keeping their remaining food and seed stores safe from insects and other pests.

FAO also worked with its partners to help organize the repair of community seed storage facilities, provided more grain storage bags and helped with the repair of small-scale irrigation infrastructure, using a community-based cash-for-work programme.

To create income-generating activities in the six key districts a number of initiatives were launched to provide material and training to women's groups so they could build plastic tunnels for year-round vegetable production. This will enable the families to improve their nutrition and generate some additional income well into the future.

When disasters strike saving lives is the immediate priority but getting communities back on their feet and food-secure without delay is also critical.

*"In the weeks after the earthquake, we had difficulty looking after our family," Jetha says. "I could only produce enough food for the family to eat, and sometimes not even enough for that, so I had to find extra work."*

## ACHIEVING FAO'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Increasing the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises is one of FAO's strategic objectives.

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