



# IMPACT STORY

## CUSTOM HIRING CENTRES A TOP PRIORITY FOR NEPALI PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT



Photo: Conor Ashleigh

With increasing human agri-labor scarcity, agriculture in Nepal is rapidly moving towards the use of machines. But the majority of farmers in Nepal are also smallholder marginal farmers who lack financial capacity to own expensive farm machinery. Realizing a strong need to enhance farm mechanization and provide access to smallholder farmers, the government of Province 2 has set aside funds for the establishment and operation of a Custom Hiring Center (CHC) for the first time.

As the initial step of developing protocols for establishing the CHC is taking place, the ACIAR funded Roadmaps Project assisted in connecting the Agriculture Development Directorate (ADD) of Province 2 with Satmile Satish Club of Pathagar (SSCOP) from Coochbehar, West Bengal, India.



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Since 2014, SSCOP has partnered with the ACIAR funded SRFSI project in scaling Conservation Agriculture based Sustainable Intensification (CASI) beyond the lifespan of the project by reaching out to more than 70,000 farmers directly and indirectly in Coochbehar.

Starting humbly as a small custom hiring Centre, SSCOP is now a center of excellence for rural entrepreneurship as well as Conservation Agriculture in North Bengal. They are a one stop shop for technical support and also a training hub for CA and various associated sectors. SSCOP is now focused on moving CA to wider areas and connecting it with new economic opportunities in agriculture and other allied sectors, like fish farming and poultry production.

While the Roadmaps Project assisted government and cooperative members in Province 1 with a face-to-face immersion trip to SSCOP before COVID-19, the same has not been possible with Province 2. Despite this, a virtual meeting was arranged to start the information and experience sharing process.

The main purpose of this virtual meeting was to share learnings and firsthand experiences from SSCOP regarding the establishment of CHC. The Roadmaps Project created a platform for both parties to discuss and ask questions openly, to help guide the government of Province 2 guide through the process of establishing a CHC.

On February 3rd, participants from ADD - Dr Ratna Kumar Jha (Chief), Bikash Kumar Sah (Agriculture Economic Expert) and Arbind Jha (Agriculture Engineer) along with Er. Ramnath Jha (Chief of Agriculture Machinery Testing and Research Center) came together with Tapan Chowdhury (Senior Advisor, SSCOP) and Amal Roy (Secretary, SSCOP) on a virtual platform for an hour-long discussion.



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Amal Roy initiated the discussion from a brief history of SSCOP followed by Tapan Chowdhury, who elaborated on how SSCOP started the first CHC in 2014.

Chowdhury also clarified the main purpose of the establishment of a CHC and where should it be located. He emphasized that the preliminary step in establishing CHC should begin with few farm machines and gradually move on to adding more machinery and equipment. Chowdhury also stressed the need to focus on a business model. He also highlighted how the government of West Bengal have promoted CASI at the policy level, by making CASI machinery a mandatory part of all Custom Hiring Centers.

Clarifying all the queries, Chowdhury also shared some official documents to help Province 2 in developing and delivering their ambition for Custom Hiring Centers across the province.

Content with the information and experiences shared from SSCOP, ADD participants from Province 2 thanked Roadmaps project and remarked the interaction to be very fruitful. They strongly expressed the need to have an exposure visit to West Bengal to observe CHC activities being implemented by SSCOP and to explore new learnings related to agricultural mechanization which can be successfully adopted in Province 2.

The ACIAR funded Roadmaps Project aims to develop capacity for sustainable agricultural mechanization in Nepal. Led by CIMMYT, this project targets Provinces 1 and 2 of Nepal, where the SRFSI project has been working since 2012.