



HERBAL PRODUCTS IN NEPAL

CHEPANGS BENEFIT FROM TECHNICAL ENQUIRY SERVICES

Background

At the time when community-based enterprise Agro Herbal Products approached Practical Action Nepal, it was basically processing and marketing non-timber forest products and agro based products in Chitwan district. Simple, basic ways were employed to dry and steam herbs and other agro products. As the demand grew the enterprise required greater supply of herbs and agro products and more efficient technologies to increase its product output. It was then that the enterprise approached Practical Action Nepal to obtain information regarding efficient drying and steaming technologies.

Technical information provided

Considering the nature of the enterprise's requirement, Practical Action Nepal suggested that it install glass house dryer. It further provided information regarding the dimension, construction materials and ways to control temperature considering the materials being dried – medicinal or aromatic herbs. The enterprise then constructed a 14'x 26' glass house dryer with a fiber roof and glass side walls. Similarly, Practical Action Nepal also provided information on installing the steaming unit, basically for the purpose of killing micro organisms at 80°C, which the enterprise later installed. Following the installations of efficient technologies, significant improvements were observed in the enterprise as well as in the community which supplied it with herbs.

Increased involvement of the community

As the efficiency of the enterprise grew following installation of glass house dryer and steaming unit it required increased herb supply, and instead of collecting herbs from individual herb collectors an institutional mechanism was initiated – a community based cooperative was established. The cooperative managed herb collection, determined the wages for the collectors and processed the herbs to some degree before supplying to the enterprise. As a corollary of this mechanism members of all 250 HH of four Village Development Committees (VDCs) got involved in herb collection and supplied it to the cooperative. These herb collecting community members of Chitwan district were the Chepangs, one of the indigenous and most disadvantaged communities of Nepal. However, direct herb collectors from these 250 HH were 150 – of which 60% were women and 40% male. The cooperative had also installed a small scale plastic tunnel solar dryer and steam unit at the local level for initial processing before herbs were supplied to the enterprise.

Since herb collection was their seasonal occupation – collecting about 15 different varieties and the peak season ranging from February to October, the herb collectors' primary occupations were farming and labour. The wages they received from the cooperative ranged from Rs.20 – Rs.300 per kg.

Impact

Efficient and hygienic processing of NTFP and agro products increased their value by approximately 20% – 10% of which was given to the cooperative. The community was able to supply more herbs to the self-functioning cooperative as the demand from the enterprise increased, and consequently their income increased as well. Registering as members of the cooperative the community had the ownership and decision making power – providing impetus to the survival of the cooperative over the long run.

There are examples of change in life styles of the community members as well– many own radio which increased their access to information and entertainment. Likewise, some members have managed to buy bulls needed for ploughing the fields. Some saved money earned by selling herbs to pay the school fees of their children and expend during festivals.

Technology transfer

The same technical information has been transferred by the enterprise to Surkhet district where another cooperative adopted the technologies. As a corollary of which, ginger that had been dumped for two years because it could not be processed well enough to kill the micro organisms, was processed using the steam unit. The steaming and cleaning added approximately 50% value and which was later appropriately sold.

Summary

Community Level

Direct Beneficiaries: 150

Indirect Beneficiaries: 250

Enterprise level

Permanent staff: 6

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stories of change