

# Poverty Reduction through High-Value Agriculture: the Experience of CEAPRED

Pius Raj Mishra, [info@ceapred.org.np](mailto:info@ceapred.org.np)

The vast ecological diversity of the Himalayan region provides farmers with unique opportunities to produce a wide range of high-value agricultural commodities and to generate income from their limited farmlands. In order to exploit such opportunities, farmers must be organised in a manner that enables them to achieve economies of scale in production and marketing, access distant markets, and receive development services and inputs more effectively and efficiently.

This typically involves a development strategy that draws on people's initiatives and local development potentials and priorities for rural development and poverty reduction. It is against this backdrop that a case of cooperative production and marketing of off-season vegetables in Nepal is discussed here. The Center for Environmental and Agricultural Policy Research, Extension and Development (CEAPRED) has been actively promoting and popularising various types of farm and off-farm income generating opportunities as mechanisms for reducing poverty in the rural areas of Nepal. CEAPRED promotes commercial production of off-season vegetables in relatively accessible rural areas as a major income generating activity within the farm sector.

The table on the next page summarises the quantities of vegetables produced, consumed, and sold, and the amount of cash income generated from the sale of some off-season vegetables under the programmes launched by CEAPRED in different parts of Nepal.

Off-season vegetable production has become one of the most popular activities among farmers, particularly

along the road corridors in recent years. The popularity of this enterprise has been triggered by the success and sustainability of an off-season vegetable production project first launched by CEAPRED in Dhankuta district of eastern Nepal during 1992-94. The 'Dankuta model' is being replicated by CEAPRED and other NGOs in different parts of the country.

The following section highlights some of the efforts of the 'Income Generating Project for Women Farmers along Arniko Highway' of CEAPRED. The overall objective of the project was to increase income and improve the quality of life of the participating households through the production and marketing of off-season vegetables along the road corridors of Kavre and Sindhupalchowk districts. The Project was implemented in two districts from 1996 to 2000 with financial support from DANIDA, and covered 20 village development committees (VDCs) and two municipalities of Kavre and eight VDCs of Sindhupalchowk districts.

After sensitisation and participatory planning meetings, 2,550 small and marginal farm families living within two to three hours walk of the Arniko Highway

road corridor were mobilised. The participating farmers, mostly women and members of deprived communities were motivated and organised into 153 production groups and provided with a series of different types of production and marketing training and exposure visits. Alongside production activities, the groups were encouraged to mobilise their regular savings, which served as a binding force among the group members. During the four-year project, the farmers have been able to market over 15,000 tonnes (t) of different vegetables worth NRs.185,940,000.

The annual average household income earned from vegetables increased to NRs. 14,500 by the end of the project's first phase, and NRs. 25,700 per year by the end of the second phase. The overall impact on food security, measured by ability of the households to save after meeting domestic consumption requirements, increased significantly during this phase.

A mid-term external evaluation of the project assessed that "Income realised from vegetable cultivation has contributed to improving the living standards of the vil-

**Table : Vegetable production, consumption, sale and cash income earned by households, 1992-2000**

District	Project period	Project cost (NRs* million)	No. of farm households	No. of groups	Production (t)	Consumption (t)	Sale (t)	Cash income earned (NRs*)
Dhankuta Kavre and Sindhupalchowk	1992-1994	8.7	1410	85	5157	849	4308	25,760,000
Kaski	1996-2000	29.84	2550	153	15101	931	14230	185,940,000
Lalitpur	1996-2000	7.3	822	42	2963	1087	1876	23,150,000
	1997-1999	4.5	624	43	492	90	234	13,840,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>50.34</b>	<b>5406</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>23713</b>	<b>2957</b>	<b>20648</b>	<b>248,690,000</b>

\*NRs 68 = \$US 1 (approx.) in 1999, t = tonnes

lagers. Some indicators of the growing relative prosperity, noticeable in the project area were: replacement of thatch roofing houses with more permanent materials such as galvanized iron sheets and caste cement tiles; additional household gadgets such as radio and even TV; better clothing and materials; and enrolment of children in private boarding schools. All these improvements were possible with additional income generated from vegetable growing."

In order to institutionalise project activities and sustain the income levels gained, the production groups were organised into 12 farmers' cooperatives. A separate package of support measures, including training on various aspects of cooperative management and marketing, exposure trips, and a revolving fund were provided to the cooperatives.

The project meets the sustainability criteria on at least two grounds: (a) continuity and expansion in coverage of the project activities by the farmers themselves, and (b) widespread replication of the model in other parts of Nepal.

Encouraged by the initial success in reducing poverty in the project areas, CEAPRED has since been working with more than 70,000 households through the formation of 2,353 groups. Geographically, the CEAPRED has provided its services in 332 VDCs and 10 municipalities and has acquired significant experience in working in 33 districts of the country.

Ana Agustina Barros

Whether in Tibet, China, or Dhankuta, Nepal, vegetable growing has always been a lucrative enterprise.

