

A story of a Progressive Commercial Farmer at Autsho, Lhuentse Dzongkhag.

Background:

Bhutan as an agrarian society whose 70% of the total population depends on agricultural farming, the majority of the farmers are small and marginal producers and are largely focused on meeting the subsistence needs especially in the eastern region.

However, with the various agricultural development interventions put forward by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forest (MoAF) and the past IFAD¹ projects which are targeted in uplifting the rural poverty in the east by promoting the large-scale production of both agriculture and livestock products, commercialization is gradually picking up by farmers.

This pace of commercialization process is been further facilitated and intensified under the support of 8th IFAD Project to Bhutan called CARLEP².

CARLEP promotes the intensification of commercial level farming and diversification of the climate resilient crops and vegetables under its 'Agriculture Component' in six eastern regions (Lhuentse, Mongar, Pemagatshel, Samdrupjongkhar, Trashigang and Trashiyangtse.)

Of the total beneficiaries under commercial vegetable production activity, Mr. Sherab of Autsho in Tsenkhar gewog under Lhuentse Dzongkhag is one of the progressive commercial farmers in the region.

Mr. Sherab and his commercialization story:

Mr. Sherab, 49, is an Army in Autsho; a small village in Tshenkhar gewog of Lhuentse Dzongkhag, located at the Lhuentse-Mongar National Highway. Driven by the conventional practice of agriculture farming, Mr. Sherab has been growing various crops and vegetables for the last decades on a small scale to meet the subsistence need.

However, in 2013, Mr. Sherab picked up the idea to expand his production area. He started with growing chili and tomatoes in the two acres of his family



Figure 1: Mr. Sherab

¹ International Fund for Agricultural Development

² Commercial Agriculture and Resilient Livelihoods Enhancement Programme

owned land. In the first year of the large-scale production, the chili alone fetched him a total income of Nu. 30,000/-.

In 2016, Autsho was selected as a 'Vegetable Commercial site of Lhuentse Dzongkhag by the Dzongkhag Agriculture sector and the Agriculture Research and Development Center (ARDC, Wengkhari). As a commercial vegetable site of the Dzongkhag, Autsho was subjected to the supports of CARLEP for the vegetable commercialization.

Mr. Sherab and 16 other farmers from Autsho who were consensually willing to take up large-scale production of vegetable started the commercialization activities in a total land of eight acres, which was initially left fallow.

With the fund support of CARLEP routing through ARDC and Dzongkhag Agriculture sector, these 17 commercial farmers were supported with vegetable seeds and seedlings and efficient irrigation materials like watering pipes and sprinklers. A plastic house to raise the seedlings, a syntax and a water reservoir tank were also provided.

In 2016, Mr. Sherab planted beans, maize, tomato, bulb onion and asparagus in 1.5 acres, while another whole stretch of 0.5 acres was allocated for planting watermelon. By the end of the season, Mr. Sherab was contended with the total income of Nu.70, 000/-.

The rise in Mr. Shreab's income from 30,000/- in 2103 to 70,000/- in 2016 after the commercialization interventions from CARLEP is a positive indication that there is substantial increase the economic returns to the farmers.

"Cultivating vegetables is always an added source of income for the household", Said Mr. Sherab. *"Farming in fact is a lucrative business that anybody including the illiterate ones can prosper."* He added with a proud grin.

Future plan of Mr. Sherab:

From the general observation on the current practice of vegetable farming, farmers are seen abundantly growing the vegetables that don't require much of post-sowing activities like intensive weeding, transplanting and those vegetables that can be harvested in short span of time. Such cultivation trends are often leading to excessive production of one type of vegetable which offers less demand in the market.

Knowing this repercussion, Mr. Sherab is selective in what he wants to cultivate and in which season. He is planning to focus on the cultivation of the import banned vegetables like beans and chili apart from high-value vegetables like asparagus. *"A bundle of asparagus in the market these days is worth 10 bundles of spinach these days."* Said Mr. Sherab.

Today, Mr. Sherab is acting as an informal spokesperson in the community who manages the overall welfare of the eight acres of the commercial land in Autsho by ensuring equal distribution of water. He also is a potential influencer in the community who briefs and persuades the fellow neighbors to start the vegetable farming.

“I will never give up growing vegetables and will also not stop influencing my fellow friends and other people towards vegetable farming.” Said Mr. Sherab.

A commentary session with Mr. Sherab

“Vegetable Farming always has been my prioritized passion. It is not only a profitable business but it increases my emotional attachment with the nature and keeps me mentally sound and happy.”

Said Mr. Sherab.

Every morning, before the sun rises, Mr. Sherab is seen in his 2 acres of land either simply walking around or removing the weeds and grasses from his crops.

“Every day, I wake up at 5:00 am or even before. The excitement of seeing my growing plants and vegetables instantly gets me out to the field.” He said.

Mr. Sherab lives in Autsho with his wife who is his companion to brush and soften her husband's passion. The couple has a son who works as an Agriculture Officer in the same Dzongkhag.

“My son helps me with my work during weekends and holidays. I always advice and teach my son to take up kitchen gardening as a part of recreation.” Said Mr. Sherab.

Now, this is the most needed lessons and the knowledge to be imparted in the youth of this generation who has a very limited knowledge on farming skills and considers farming as a secondary option.

“If each one of us maintains a garden and grows what we eat of our own, the dependency on the import items can be substantially reduced.” Said the wise farmer Sherab. *“I am an Army man by profession but I am also a farmer.”* He added. Therefore, he said, *“Because all of us eat food, all of us should be responsible food growers*

Conclusion:

Commercialization of vegetables in CARLEP is targeted not only to increase the economic returns of the individual farmers but also to promote the conversion of fallow land into an arable land which is achieved with the case of Autsho's vegetable commercial intervention.

Mr. Sherab who is a progressive and also an influential farmer said, "*Commercialization of vegetables is the definite way towards improving the rural livelihoods.*"



Figure 2: Watermelon of Mr. Sherab

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