

MULTI-FUNDER INITIATIVE

Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (CIFSrf)

New farm ventures improve food security and incomes for Cambodian women farmers

Women farmers in Cambodia are acquiring the skills and resources needed to improve their children's health and become entrepreneurs. And they're willing to share the risk by investing time and money to do it. Public and private sector partners are now expanding this Homestead Food Production (HFP) model across Cambodia through growing, eating, and selling nutrient-rich foods.

Empowering women to raise healthy children

Cambodia's economy is growing, child mortality and malnutrition rates have declined, and its strengthening agriculture sector has the potential to drive further economic growth. Despite this progress, poverty and food insecurity persist with nearly a third of the rural population living below the poverty line.

Identifying scalable solutions is a key plank of Cambodia's national strategy for food security and nutrition. Under the HFP model, Canadian and Cambodian researchers worked with small farmers to build sustainable food production and businesses based on aquaculture, and home gardening. The project also educated mothers about child feeding, nutrition, and sanitation and hygiene practices.

So far 300 fishponds and 600 gardens have been established, providing families with extra money for healthy food, education and health care. After two years, production increased, incomes rose, and diets diversified.

Farmers decide on most workable and profitable solutions

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to moving from subsistence farming to sustainable livelihoods. That's why researchers, farmers, universities, government, and the private sector are developing optimal models that work best in different agro-ecological zones, including upland, lowland, forested and peri-urban areas.

In this expanded project, 4,500 women farmers will select the model that works best for them: backyard vegetable gardens alone; gardens plus fish ponds (to grow nutrient-dense small fish for household consumption and large fish for sale); gardens plus poultry; or gardens plus poultry and fish. Success will

depend on addressing issues, including economic, gender and socio-cultural, that make it difficult for women to participate and invest in HFP ventures.

Previous research found that farmers who invested in these new ventures were more likely to use some of the profits to grow their business. Under the cost-sharing model, women paid 30% of costs, such as seeds and fish fingerlings.

This model is being expanded to include business training and stronger linkages between growers and buyers. Participants will also assume a larger portion of costs through different cost-sharing models, including microcredit.

Expected outcomes

- Improved food security, diet, and incomes for an estimated 22,500 households (135,000 individuals)
- Inform Cambodia's national strategies and policies for food security, nutrition, and agriculture
- Improve and validate HFP training packages
- Provide a range of scalable HFP options that can be rapidly implemented in Asia and Africa

LEAD RESEARCHERS

Aminuzzaman Talukder, Helen Keller International, Cambodia
Tim Green and Judy McLean, University of British Columbia, Canada

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International Development Research Centre

PO Box 8500 Ottawa ON Canada K1G 3H9
Phone +1 613 236 6163 • Fax +1 613 236 7293
cifsrf@idrc.ca • www.idrc.ca/cifsrf