

Women empowerment for improved food legumes value chains in rural India

In India, close to 40% of the population is vegetarian and food legumes represent an important source of protein for food and nutrition security. While India was a net exporter of food legumes in the 1970s, it imports today food legumes to meet the increasing national demand. In a context of climate change with deteriorating climate conditions, decreasing soil health, coupled with a rapidly increasing population, food legumes appeared to be a strategic crop to cultivate for their ability to restore soil health and provide a quality nutrition for the vulnerable populations, particularly women and children. Hence, OCP Foundation launched a major initiative with a consortium of international and national research centers, NGOs and Indian universities across 9 Indian states with the objective to improve the food legumes value chain by smallholder farmers in rural India. In an inclusive and integrated approach, OCP Foundation worked on improving the production and the quality of food legumes by smallholder farmers, and women played a major role in adapting the food legumes to local consumption habits for enhanced food and nutrition security of their households.

While the major focus of the project was to alleviate poverty and improve food and nutrition security through the adoption of good agricultural practices, a great importance was given to the active involvement of women in the management of the farm, the value addition of the crops and the commercialization of the final products. This was possible thanks to a dedicated capacity building program on production and value addition as well as on sensitizing sessions on food hygiene, health and nutrition security. OCP Foundation established 13 Women skill development centers to train and empower women for a greater socio-economic impact.

By building the self-confidence and the empowerment of women, it was observed that they managed to have a more active role in the management of the farm. The revenues of the cropping season were managed in a more efficient way: they were invested on food, education and health, and the remaining cash was reinvested for the purchase of agricultural inputs for the following cropping season. Hence, by balancing the roles between men and empowered women farmers, a virtuous cycle was created which allowed for more sustainable revenues for their household.

In order to facilitate market linkages between the farm gate and the local consumers, OCP Foundation further reinforced women through entrepreneurship, and established local food processing units led by women. Alternative income generating activities were initiated thanks to the processing of food legumes under different forms (vermicelli, local breads, biscuits...). This was an important innovation led by women as they enabled the introduction of protein rich crops in foods, such as biscuits and other nutritious bars particularly adapted for women and children. While preserving their local consumption habits, women introduced new recipes based on food legumes to enhance for food and nutrition security.

This initiative was successful because it relied on a strong collaboration between international research centers, local implementing NGOs, local universities, as well as the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) that facilitated the access to finance. This collaboration that linked the Indian agricultural sector, Indian universities and research centers with International research centers contributed to triple the revenues and enhance the livelihoods of 10 000 women in rural India.



Farmers' community training on health, hygiene, girls' education and women empowerment



Local (Desi) hand grinder



Dal from Khasari grain



Basan (Powder from grasspea grain)



Making of value added product out of lentil by women group.

Making of value added product from lentil by women group



Making 'Gayna Bori' on poppy seed.

Making 'Gayna Bori' on poppy seed



