

Mushroom Case

Mitra Bandhu Poudel

This practitioner case example was developed out of the *Use of Digital Technology as an Enabling Strategy for Empowering Women Micro-entrepreneurs for Marginalized Communities in the Context of COVID-19 in Nepal* project. Their intended purpose is to serve as illustrative and educational materials for others working in the promotion of gender equality, digital technology, and micro-entrepreneurship within agriculture support as part of their development practice.

Inception of Business

Prithvi Bahadur Tamang lives in Padampur of Kalita Municipality in Chitwan. It has been 20 years since the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), now known as NTNC, inspired farmers to take a strong interest in mushroom cultivation and gave them access to their first official training. The training was conducted during a time when unemployment was a persistent problem. There were nine participants in the training campaign when it began, but that number quickly rose to nearly forty. Unfortunately, only two of those forty participants have kept up their mushroom cultivation after twenty years.

Prithvi began by producing gobre mushrooms at first. However, he quickly switched to bunne and patee mushrooms once the gobre mushrooms he was growing started having issues. He has stuck with those varieties for the past eight to ten years.

In the beginning, it was very difficult. He used to produce over 30 kg of mushrooms every day and transported them from Butwal to Hetauda for sale. People cooked mushrooms less frequently back then. The common misconception was that all mushrooms were poisonous and unfit for human consumption. But things are different now. He is no longer in need of promoting his business or educating others about the health advantages of mushrooms.

Prithvi stated, “there is a good demand for mushroom in the local market of Chitwan”. Nearly 50 quintals¹ of mushrooms are used every day by people in Chitwan, of which nearly 1 quintal is exclusively produced by Prithvi. Therefore, there aren't many issues with the mushroom market's potential. However, because of fluctuations in mushroom demand, the price is always changing.

Market Demand and Price

He used to go to the nearby stores one by one with packets containing 250 grammes of mushrooms in the past. Since local marketplaces have been established, he doesn't actually need to visit store after store. All he does is supply his mushrooms to eight or ten local merchants.

¹ 1 quintal = 100 kg = 220 lbs.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



PURDUE
UNIVERSITY



LITTLE ANGELS'
COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT
AFFILIATED TO KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY



HEIFER
INTERNATIONAL
NEPAL



Regarding the cost of the mushrooms, Prithvi stated that “at this time, the cost per kilogram of these mushrooms is 170 rupees/kg. Yet, depending on demand, their prices are prone to significant changes. The cost may be as low as 50 rupees/kg or as high as 500 rupees/kg. With the exception of one particular day on the calendar, you might claim that the price is roughly 250 rupees/kg on average throughout the year”.

Additionally, there is a clause about selling dried mushrooms. In actuality, the cost is rather higher. Dried mushrooms typically fetch a price of 2000 rupees per kilo according to Prithvi.

According to Prithvi, his mushrooms don't sell at all on the day immediately following Dashain. The custom of eating meat during Dashain must be the primary cause, which explains why his mushrooms don't sell as well immediately following the celebration. He also reminded me of the 22 bags of mushrooms from last year's Dashain that he still hasn't received money for.

Use of Digital Technology

Prithvi recalled using YouTube to obtain knowledge, particularly in the early stages of his business. He also made use of the Geo-Krish app. He uses a Facebook group as his third digital platform of choice to stay up to date on market news, price fluctuations, and demand. Occasionally, these social media sites also assist him in learning about the historic Nepal strike.

Challenges

According to Prithvi, planting the root is the primary issue. The moment the root system is removed from the air conditioner, it must be planted through a tunnel. It goes bad very quickly if we are unable to sow the root in time. Inflation is an additional issue. All goods available now have a significantly higher price, and this also applies to the supplies needed to cultivate mushrooms.

Prithvi claims that mushroom growing doesn't even need a lot of land. The 200,000 rupees (Equivalent to about 2400.00 USD) that the municipality gave Prithvi in financial support functions as both a grant and a support. In addition, the costs associated with other machinery like barrels, pipelines, and other items add up to a fairly manageable total that farmers who want to enter this market can readily afford.

Initial Investment

“You see, there's a good probability that adopting a systematic system with integrated A/C systems will prove to be somewhat costly”, stated Prithvi. However, an initial expenditure of about 400,000 to 500,000 rupees should be more than sufficient if you wish to start the business on a small scale to begin with, like he did for himself, and then build the firm, and scale up.

Therefore, it doesn't appear that starting a mushroom farming business will be too difficult for any would-be growers. But after speaking with Prithvi, one thing was very apparent. It appears that



scientific farming methods are not practiced as much in Nepal. Furthermore, it appears that understanding how to treat illnesses associated with mushroom cultivation is also lacking. Thus, it will be crucial in the future to provide sufficient support for scientific farming methods and raise awareness of the use of healthy, organic fertilizers in order to prevent the spread of any diseases among mushrooms.

Such data and assistance necessitate a specific set of expertise. But now that there aren't any such bodies, it's imperative that we begin addressing these issues. Can we bring in these professionals to raise awareness of these issues? Is it possible for universities and agricultural committees to collaborate to fund an R&D center focused on these issues? The responses to these queries will motivate mushroom growers like Prithvi Tamang to expand their operations and will also inspire aspiring and new farmers to pursue this line of work.

Conclusion

“I have worked for years and years now, and I must say I am satisfied”, Prithvi said in closing further adding, “if not, it's likely that I wouldn't have carried on with this for as long. Additionally, the returns appear to be quite profitable. If all goes according to plan, I can make enough money in a month to cover my yearly investment.” But if contemporary technologies can be used in this field, the possibilities will be huge. At that point, new farmers will also be encouraged to enter this industry, according to him.

The conversation with Prithvi concluded with such a great message. It was a fantastic educational opportunity that provided valuable insights into the mushroom farming sector which has been a complete delight.

