



Stories from the field



Increased crop productivity is making life in rural Myanmar easier

Myanmar

If you want to grow quality crops, you need quality seeds. In western Myanmar near the border with Bangladesh, Rakhine farm communities boosted food production by as much as 15 percent after learning to use the natural resources around them in a sustainable way. They were able to accomplish this by planting high quality seeds using the latest farm implements and inputs, such as fertilizer, power tillers and irrigation water as part of a European Union-funded food security and livelihoods project* implemented by FAO. The project improved the lives of nearly a million people in Rakhine State.

Improved seeds: Some 5 000 farmers substantially increased crop yields using 319 000 metric tonnes of improved varieties of rice seeds distributed by the EU-funded *Special Rice Production Programme*. Over time, the farmers further multiplied these quality seeds and made them available for local distribution. With greater quantities of

quality seed available to more farmers, there were substantial increases in crop productivity. Guaranteed quality seed is one of the most economical and efficient means to improve crop productivity.

Increased water availability: Five new earthen dams provide more water for irrigation, while the use of water pumps, watering cans and water pots has helped farmers increase production of dry-season crops.

Mechanization: Two mobile seed processing plants, 13 oil mills and three rice mills have also greatly improved food production and food availability. Nine new power tillers made planting more efficient for 165 farmers who were already starting to adopt mechanized farming because they had no livestock for tillage.

Livestock for the landless: Women heading some 6 000 landless households are now managing livestock, producing

food and earning money by tending some 20 000 chickens, 10 000 ducklings, 225 bucks, 140 female goats and 120 sows.

Biogas and solar energy: The building of 75 biogas plants and two solar-powered refrigerator systems reduced stress on the environment as well as people, particularly women, who now earn more money because they spend fewer hours gathering fuel for cooking and other chores. "Now we hardly need to spend time and energy gathering firewood," said farmer U Kyaw Sein Aung. "Most importantly, my children can study in the evening using biogas light."

The success of the biogas plants led local authorities to install 40 more plants in Rakhine State, says Bir Mandal, FAO's chief technical advisor.

Education: Training and workshops covering how to grow more vegetables and pulse crops, an oil-seed manual, and leaflets on biogas that were distributed throughout the farm communities, enabled Rakhine farmers to grow greater amounts of food than ever before.

Future sustainability: Small and medium farmers, as well as landless and vulnerable families, were the main beneficiaries of the food security and livelihoods initiative. The results were impressive in terms of the increased foodcrop yields and animal production. Broad community satisfaction and support for the 3-year initiative offer considerable hope for long-lasting positive and sustainable changes for the farming communities of Rakhine State.

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