Photo: Mong U Marma

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND PRODUCTION LINKED TO IMPROVED NUTRITION STATUS, RESILIENCE, AND GENDER EQUITY

SAPLING PROGRAM LEARNINGS AND RESULTS: WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

THUI CHAMANG, THE WASH ENTREPRENEUR

Thui Chamang appreciates the true potential of entrepreneurship and has experienced firsthand the benefits of training for building business capacity. A Marma father of two from Ruposhi Para Union of Lama Upazila, Thui Chamang and his wife had struggled to support their family as day laborers with inconsistent and low wage incomes. Earning a meager household income of only BDT 4,500 (US $53) per month, they did not own land, and their home was their only fixed asset.

In 2017, Thui Chamang learned that a friend had participated in technical training sessions on making sanitation products. The training was provided by the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience, and Gender Equity (SAPLING) Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSA).

Thui Chamang wanted to learn more, in an attempt to become an entrepreneur. He was intrigued by how his friend's business worked, and encouraged by his business's financial success.

He began visiting his friend regularly, to study how the business was run. Thui Chamang began completing tasks for his friend's business, and demonstrated high proficiency and enthusiasm. Towards the end of 2017, he began his own business, making temporary sanitary slabs and ring wells, using loans from the government, private loaners, and relatives.

Thui Chamang's initial optimism was curbed, however, as there was little demand for his product. There were no traders of sanitation wares, and awareness about water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) markets was low. Without proper training, his first products were of low quality as he lacked technical knowledge and skills. Still, he did not give up and continued to produce slabs and ring wells. A critical turning point came in March of 2018 when he joined SAPLING as a WASH entrepreneur.

PHOTO ON TOP: THUI CHAMANG, SAPLING WASH ENTREPRENEUR, TAKES NOTES FOR HIS BUSINESS. LEARNING AND NETWORKING WERE CRITICAL FOR HIS SUCCESS.

Photo: Mong U Marma

TRAINING WITH SAPLING

Through participation in training provided by SAPLING, Thui Chamang gained the necessary skills to improve his products and business model. In 2018, he finally saw the progress he had been waiting for. The demand had grown through SAPLING's efforts to strengthen the WASH system. Buyers from other villages now required WASH materials, enabling him to sell to a wider client base. He also expanded his scope by producing border pillars, another WASH product.

This expansion of clients and products paid off, with Thui Chamang calculating that by the end of 2018, he had earned approximately BDT 67,000 (US $789). This included a net profit of BDT 32,000 (US $377), enabling him to buy raw materials and pay off the loans that had helped him launch his business. Through the addition of his business activities on top of his work as a day laborer, in 2018, Thui Chamang's diversified income totaled BDT 92,000 (US $1,083).

Thui Chamang's success continued, even through the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, four years after a challenging beginning, he is proud that he can contribute more for his family. He receives regular orders from buyers from different paras (areas), generating an average monthly income of BDT 6,500 (US $76.5). His total monthly earnings amount to approximately BDT 7,500 (US $88). With his business income, he has also bought 15 decimals of land, and uses it for WASH material production for his business.

Thui Chamang credits his friend for his involvement in a WASH business. He thanks SAPLING for the training that supported him with critical technical skills. His wife has expressed her gratitude as well, stating, "now we can live like ten other people, and pay for the education of our sons and daughters."

THE QUALITY OF THUI CHAMANG'S PRODUCTS, SUCH AS RING WELLS, IMPROVED AFTER JOINING SAPLING. THIS TECHNICAL TRAINING HELPED CREATE BETTER PRODUCTS AND STRENGTHEN HIS BUSINESS.

Photo: Mong U Marma

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