



Farmers grading Chilli pepper crop for processing © FAO

Strengthening irrigation schemes through value addition: Chilli pepper processing

Key figures



34 farmers were contracted to grow **0.1ha** each, planting **3.4 hectares** of chilli pepper.

34 households now have a regular monthly income of **USD90.00** from 0.1ha of Chilli.



1,700 kgs of chilli was picked and processed at the irrigation scheme, as of May 2021.

Outcomes

FAO saw an improved household income realized from chilli pepper sales with anticipated increased nutrition in the future. Farmers are now well versed with the crop and timing of operations, as well as business capacities. Local employment

Background

Situated in ward 20 of Chipinge District in Manicaland Province, the Gudyanga irrigation scheme was at the centre of Cyclone Idai, which left a trail of destruction. Established in 1997, the 48-hectare farmer-managed irrigation scheme was a source of income and livelihood for 63 (4 females; 59 males) farmers. The cyclone destroyed their key source of food, nutrition and economic security. It washed away most crops, while some were submerged in water, destroyed canal dams and collapsed boreholes, negatively affecting the irrigation operations of the scheme. The few crops that remained were at the mercy of livestock as the perimeter fence was also destroyed.

The impact of the loss of income was severe. Access to financial, input and output markets were also disrupted as farmers turned to informal buyers to market and sell their produce. This exposed the farmers to unscrupulous buyers, marred relationships and stiff competition. Lack of income and financial resources resulted in poor irrigation maintenance.

Searching for solutions

Farmers at the Gudyanga irrigation scheme did not just sit on their laurels. The farmers were actively involved in maintenance work involving canal banking and cutting tree branches to act as a boundary fence to deter cattle and domestic animals from entering the irrigation scheme.

While the farmers managed to plant some crops for the 2019 winter farming season, it was a torrid task for most farmers. "We planted retained



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has been created for the local community as casual workers.

The Chilli Pepper Company invested and the storage shed was upgraded to an onside micro-processing plant. It reduced the transaction costs for the farmers by reducing the cost of transport and maintaining the freshness (quality) of the produce. In addition an extension worker from Chilli Pepper Company is in situ to provide needed agronomy training.

“We were assisted a lot by FAO in linking us to the contractor and technical agronomic advice given on chilli pepper production since it is our first time growing the crop”

- Mr Maibvise, Gudyanga’s marketing committee chairperson



Chilli pepper crop ready for processing
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sugar beans seed using few or no fertilisers as we had no capital to purchase certified seed and fertilisers. Our maize harvest was affected by Cyclone Idai; hence we did not get any meaningful income from maize sales as the few grains that we got were meant for home consumption, although it was not enough. We tried to engage several companies for contract farming, but they regarded our area as high risk due to flooding which had taken place,” narrated the irrigation scheme chairperson Mr Tongai Chipiro.

Supporting the most vulnerable

FAO, a ZIRP implementing partner, is restoring the Gudyanga irrigation scheme and six other irrigation schemes in Manicaland Province by supporting their physical rehabilitation. It also facilitates the organisation/aggregation of farmers, equipping them with “Farming as a Business” skills through training and coaching. Co-facilitated with the government extension department, AGRITEX, the enhanced local community technical, business and management capacities were considered a key driver for success and sustainability. Local communities were challenged in practical ways leading to a shift from merely subsistence mindset to commercially oriented practices.

Rebuilding lives and livelihoods

To foster the project’s sustainability, ZIRP sought to widen available market opportunities for farmers and to create a strong connection between the producers and financial, input and output market actors mainly through contract farming arrangements on high-value crops. Gudyanga irrigation scheme farmers were linked to *Chilli Pepper Company* for chilli pepper production and processing at the irrigation scheme. Thirty-four (34) farmers were provided with free seedlings, chemicals for nematodes at a market-based cost and training on how to use them. Planting was done in November 2020, with harvesting and processing commencing in April 2021.

Fresh weight was recorded against each farmer, with payments being processed at the end of each month. The price for chilli was set at USD0.55 per kg. A processing plant was also set up at the irrigation scheme creating employment for four farmers from the irrigation scheme who are engaged as casual workers. Mr Shamai, the company representative for Chilli Pepper Company, indicated, “We are happy with the progress so far and the zeal shown by farmers. We contracted farmers late into the season, but their response has been impressive. We hope to continue with them for the next five years as we have invested a lot in renovating their shed to a processing warehouse”. It is envisaged that more farmers will be contracted in the 2021 – 2022 farming season.