

When nutritious food and safe domestic water are available as locally needed

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This is the story about Daw Shwe Hmon, a 60 years old grandmother of two children, living in Kyauk Kyi village, Seik Phyu Township, Myanmar. Her participation in a home garden project helps the family to have more diverse food and improved livelihoods.

Life of small scale farmer households in central Myanmar

Life in central Myanmar is precarious; many families struggle to have enough food to eat and are living on the edge of financial disaster. Livelihoods and food security are major issues affecting families throughout the country, but for those living in central Myanmar they are especially pertinent as extreme weather conditions leave them volatile and prone to uncertainty. The amount of rainfall can vary greatly from year to year in the area, also known as the dry zone, posing severe difficulties for agricultural production often resulting in crop failures due to drought and uneven rainfall patterns. In addition, the area is repeatedly afflicted by natural disasters, weak infrastructure, harsh climate, inadequate farming inputs and lack of access to land creating chronic food deficits and general financial insecurity.

Daw Shwe Hmon lives with her 5 family members in the village Kyaik Kyi of Siek Phyu. Her daughter and son-in law are working as casual labour in farm and non-farm activities earning irregular household income for two children (2 and 5 years old). Daw Shwe Hmon says: *'I am too old to earn from casual labour as the labour wages are based on the yielded workload. I have also no land for commercial agriculture as 40% of farmers in the village are landless. We are facing low daily earning for the basic needs especially in household food. Due to poor transportation, we cannot go to the township level market place. So we eat any kind of food available around us or sometimes we skip one meal in a day.'*



Daw Shwe Hmon is working in her home garden for watering, weeding and harvesting the vegetables.

Support for household food and livelihoods security

In 2012 the project “Shae Thot” started assistance to the local communities in the central dry zone. Daw Shwe Hmon realized that this is a good opportunity to help her family and taking care of her two grandchildren with fresh and nutritious food from home gardening to be established in her home yard with surplus water from a domestic water supply scheme. The integrated

livelihoods and food security project aimed at supporting the food and income security of smallholder farmers and landless households through training in improved and locally adapted farm based practice. Moreover, the project improved the nutritional knowledge and practices for mothers and caretakers, as well as the promotion of better access to sufficient quantities of safe water, potable water and improved hygiene and strengthened social and community institutions for development. In 2013, the project provided training and input provision to 10'000 farmers for crop cultivation, including home gardening, and training on nutrition and hygiene practice to 1'000 mother groups. Moreover, 100 water supply systems were provided.

Daw Shwe Hmon as a home gardener and family caretaker

Daw Shwe Hmon participated in the home gardening establishment program through a series of training sessions and nutrition knowledge improvement for care-takers. She committed to establish a home garden in her house compound using the surplus water from community WASH groups supported from UN-HABITAT. She learned on nutritional knowledge from mother groups' learning and sharing sessions for the families with children under 5 years in her village facilitated by PACT. She selected the vegetables seeds that are appropriate for her home garden and nutritious for her family with the technical knowledge of locally adapted agricultural training and nutrition knowledge from health training. She grew short live vegetables such as okra, roselle and eggplants. Moreover, she could prepare daily fresh and nutritious meals for her family. She also got extra income from selling the vegetables to her neighbours. Last year, she earned about 30,000/MMK (24\$) while her family saved for the household food expenditure approximately 100,000/MMK (80\$) from home gardening. She said *'My family is now able to eat fresh and nutritious vegetables. And we could spend some money even for health care. I am now able to better support my family's needs and health care of my grandchildren'*. Daw Shwe Hmon has gained improved livelihoods and food security for better resilience to livelihood shocks.

About the project

Shae Thot is a five-year integrated program funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), begun in September 2011 and running through September 2016. Shae Thot is implemented by a consortium of international organizations, including Pact, Cesvi, Marie Stopes International, and UN-HABITAT. The main goal of the project is to reduce suffering and death among the people of Central Myanmar through the use of an integrated, multi-sectoral approach that addresses the root causes. The specific objectives of the project are to: 1. Decrease maternal, newborn and child mortality; 2. Improve household food security; 3. Increase access to sufficient quantities of safe water, potable water, and improved hygiene and 4. Strengthen social and community institutions for development.

The author of this article worked in the Shae Thot project as Livelihoods Technical leader for two and a half years. Her tasks were to provide technical leadership in designing, implementation and operational management through consortium partners in the livelihoods and food security development component in line with technical standards of the program models/approach to maximize program efficiency and effectiveness.

Links to project information

http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00K9S7.pdf

http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00JFKF.pdf

<https://www.facebook.com/PactinMyanmar/posts/700449703358420>

About the author

Maw Maw Soe is a SDC National Program Officer, taking responsibilities in program development and portfolio project cycle management of the agriculture and food security domain in the Integrated Embassy of Switzerland in Myanmar. She studied agricultural science in Yezin Agricultural University Myanmar through undergrad and post-graduation. Related to the area of food security, she learned food science and food technology from the Master degree program at the University of Philippines Losbanos (UPLB) and academic research in University Putra Malaysia. She has been contributing her technical knowledge and professional experience of livelihoods and food security to Myanmar development landscape for more than 20 years. Around the thematic area of food and livelihoods security, she provides support to the farmers and development practitioners for capacity building and contributes to program management services in collaboration with stakeholders involved. She believes that learning exposure through different means is necessary for career and professional development.



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She says 'Different farmers need different options to solve their problems within their limitation. Framer empowerment promoting their decision making power is essential for their better future.'