

Village Mera celebrates increased maize production

Village Mera is located on a mountain top at a distance of around 6 km from Union Council Boi of district Abbottabad. Mera is a small village with total number 75 hh with 15 women (widows) headed households. Agriculture is the main source of income however, being a mountainous area, agriculture fields are stony and distributed into small terraces with average landholding of around 8-10 Kanals. The village received severe damages from earthquake as around 30 houses were totally damaged while 45 were partially damaged. Two children and one woman died, 16 people received injuries and unable to cope with the damages, five families migrated out of the village after the earthquake. In addition, at least one livestock died in almost every household. However, the village did not receive any relief support from government or non government organizations.

FAO was the first one to reach the village with its relief package for Kharif crop that approached the village. The results of the inputs distributed for the Kharif crop are very encouraging in the rainfed village Mera where on average the production has increased by 40 percent, as per feed back provided by men and according to women it has increased by 100 percent. Following are experiences of some of the village members.

Parveen Akhter is a widow, heading a family of six members. She owns 0.2 hectares of cultivable land which forms main source of her income. She said that her maize production increased from 40 kg to 120 kg from the seed and fertilizers given to her by FAO. She was very pleased with the increased production of maize but also with the fact that the quality of maize tastes much sweeter than the local variety. In addition to quality of seed, she identified fertilizers as the main reason for increased production, which she argued was never used on lands in the village before by anyone.



An elderly female beneficiary heading her family

Nazma Ahmed, one of the 8 family members, shared that their maize production increased from 40 kg to 80 kg from their 0.25 hectares of land, which is partially under cultivation. She further confirmed that in addition to the quality of seeds, it was the fertilizer which has made all the difference to the crop production this year.

Zarina Jamil's family is poor comprising 8 members who own only 0.05 hectares of stony land. They did not have access to seed and therefore could not cultivate their land. This year, with FAO's assistance, Zarina's family had access to seed and fertilizers and therefore, were able to cultivate their land for the first time. She was very happy as their 0.05 hectares of land had production of 80 kg of maize. This has encouraged the family to cultivate their land next year again and plans to arrange for the seed in time.

Sosan Jan bibi, a widow and an elderly lady is another beneficiary for kharif crop input who added that their land production increased from 80 kg to 120 kg. **Haji Nazir** a male beneficiary of the village added that his maize production increased from 100 kg to 160 kg from 0.2 hectares of land, while **Faizul Rehman's** production increased from 90 to 140 Kgs from 0.15 hectares of land.

Mera is a resource poor village where average land production was very low. The inputs for kharif crop provided by FAO was not only the first relief intervention undertaken in the village, but it was also the first time when the local farmers experienced increased production with the use of fertilizers. FAO assistance ensured farmers access to fertilizers and after experiencing better results, farmers want to use the same quality of maize seed and arrange for the fertilizers in time for the next year

“Starting Over - Working Towards A Sustainable Future”

Mohammad Akram, aged 30 is trying hard to make ends meet and assure that his wife and three children have all the basic necessities. His home and farm is located in Charkapura Union Council Muzaffarabad District. Mohammad Akram, like many, lost more than half of his production during the 2005 *kharif* maize season. With his land damaged and his crop destroyed and not having enough money to buy food and agricultural inputs, a year later Mohammad describes how difficult it was to get through the 2005/2006 winter and spring, wondering if he would be farming again come spring. Smiling at the healthy maize crop towering over him in the background, Mohammad explained how FAO through its implementing partners helped to rehabilitate his maize field. Mohammad Akram, along with 4,063 vulnerable farmers in Charakpura Union Council received 12.5 kilogrammes of maize seed along with 50 kilogrammes of DAP and Urea fertilizers.

The maize, not only provides a source of income, but is also a vital part of the families' daily meal making it an important crop in these areas. As Mohammad explains, *“the seed given by FAO along with the proper fertilizers resulted in the crop growing much better than I had expected. With such a good crop I will be able to replant the seeds and hopefully expect the same results next year. It is good.”* With the help of FAO interventions and technical assistance, many like Mohammad Akram are able to return to farming and support their families. Twelve months ago few would have thought they would have a crop to harvest and food on the table. With the help of FAO seed and fertilizer many are “growing back better” and trying to establish a sustainable future for themselves and their children.



Akram showing off corn ready to harvest. FAO provided 12.5 kilogrammes of maize seed and 50 kilogrammes of DAP and Urea fertilizers to beneficiaries in Charkapura