

## Apples for Peace Project Report

### Project objective

Before their disappearance in the early 1990s due to structural factors, Helambu Apples were famous all over Nepal for their taste and red color. *Apples for Peace* aims to assist two communities of the Helambu region to re-engage in apple production, with the intention of economically and socially benefitting the entire community in the long term. Working towards this goal, we have given special concern to the situation of the most marginalized, such as young girls - who are especially prone to become victims of human trafficking.

### Project implementation

In order to provide the most adequate solution to the Helambu communities, we adopted a two-fold approach. While working closely together with the villagers and relying on their experience with past apple cultivation and related challenges, we consulted local representatives of government and private institutions, thus gaining access to multiple valuable sources of horticultural expertise. In addition to giving useful insights with regard to proper planting, maintenance, processing and marketing, experts suggested that beyond apples, apricots would also be a suitable crop for the Helambu region, given its climatic and soil specificities. After a number of meetings with the communities, it was decided that while putting an emphasis on apple cultivation, the potential of apricots should not be neglected. In consultation with villagers, it was concluded that one village would receive support for organic cultivation, and the other would be assisted in engaging directly with the governmental District Agricultural Development Office (DADO).

Our partnership with the NGO Aythos<sup>1</sup> provided us with some highly relevant cultural and institutional support. In particular, their knowledge of the political and social dynamics in the Helambu region as a whole, and in the target villages specifically, was very beneficial to project implementation. Additionally, the provision of key contacts within a highly hierarchical community enabled us to swiftly engage with relevant decision makers. Furthermore, we worked closely and were supported by an Aythos representative on the ground.

Due to apple cultivation previously being a core cultural identifier of the Helambu region, community members were very keen on re-engaging in fruit horticulture. As the communities had had previous exposure to apple cultivation in particular and to development work in general, the villagers were able to point out specific challenges and outline their expectations of our engagement in a coherent fashion. Furthermore, several villagers had begun the process of re-introducing fruit to the area, meaning that there is an already established indigenous pilot project, albeit in a smaller context.

As with every development program, project implementation was not free from challenge. First and foremost was the Monsoon season, making access to the villages via bus impossible, resulting in multiple-hour treks. This posed an additional challenge to meetings taking place between experts based in the capital and villagers from the Helambu region. Moreover, the climatic conditions impeded fruit plantation during our time on the ground.

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<sup>1</sup> The Helambu Project, named in our grant application, was renamed Aythos Inc. prior to project implementation but subsequent to grant decision being made.

There were also some social barriers to overcome. These took two parts – linguistic and cultural. In terms of the former, the strategy of relying on local translators proved widely successful, but with notable exceptions. With regard to the second issue, one village held several significant cultural and religious festivals during our stay in Nepal. This had the impact of slowing the communication process between us and the village community as a whole.

Our engagement with the Nepalese governmental agriculture infrastructure was a double edged sword. They are, on the one hand, a highly knowledgeable and effective body of professionals, with wide ranging experience and modern approaches. However, on the other, the removal or retirement of key personnel slowed down decision making.

The overall beneficiary pool envisaged in this project is that of two villages, which will include up to 100 families in the two Helambu communities. The committee oversight structure we have established has the requirement that a notable number of the members are both young and female, in order to empower marginalized members of the community.

As organised during our stay on the ground, 4400 saplings (3400 apples / 1000 apricots) will be planted during the planting season (December-February). In addition to this, training with regard to planting, maintenance and marketing will be given to the both communities by private and government fruit experts over the course of the next three planting seasons. Oversight will be undertaken by officially registered community committees as well as by the partner NGO and ourselves.

In the long term, Apples for Peace is designed to provide the community members with an added cash crop. The lifespan of these trees is anticipated at around 30 years, potentially offering long term benefits and sustainability to these communities, which have long suffered from extensive out migration. This is often connected to abuses and economic necessity.

### **Apples for Helambu – Apples for Peace**

In the context of our project, peace can be understood as the creation and maintenance of a sustainable socio-economic system, with particular attention of the sustenance of community demographics. By empowering the community to improve its own economic and alimentary standards, *Apples for Peace* provides the tools and information they require for sustainable community development. This acts as a form of education, which will allow not only the current but also the coming generations to envisage new industries and markets for themselves and their products.

In our discussions with villagers, there was often talk of the Helambu brand acting to bring more than just fruit money to the region. Many of the insights of Kathmandu which we brought to the region were quickly seen for what they were – new opportunities to strengthen community, village and regional identities.

“The Davis Foundation has given us the opportunity to get a unique insight into the structures and challenges of development work and the lived reality of aid. The implementation of Apples for Peace has demonstrated that the success of development programs is highly context-specific and hinges on constant feedback from all participants, as well as the willingness of external agents to engage with and understand local dynamics.” Anna Scherer, Graduate Institute, Geneva, 2012

