

Apples for Peace

Mission Statement

The 'Apples for Peace' program will revive and bolster the Helambu region of Nepal's once-famous apple crop in order to diversify opportunities for Himalayan communities to generate and sustain local food sources. We will work with the Helambu Project, a Nepalese NGO with significant experience of project development with local community groups, to enact the 'Apples for Peace' program to address one of the region's greatest afflictions - sex trafficking of its young girls.

NGOs and community-based organizations in Nepal have had some success in thwarting human traffickers through campaigns combining education and economic development. The 'Apples for Peace' project will work with local communities to increase economic opportunities for families to remain both healthy and intact. Helambu's communities once had a reputation for their sweet apples rather than their trafficked girls. The same can be true again.

Background

In recent years, the Himalayan region of Helambu has undergone a rapid transformation. Despite a wealth of natural resources, Helambu - and its district of Sindhupalchok in particular - remains one of the poorest regions of Nepal. Desperate for jobs, and with minimal opportunity for employment even in the local tourist industry, its village social structures have been racked by communal out-migration as its young people move to Kathmandu and abroad in search of work. The girls of the area are frequently targeted for sex trafficking by middle men promising opportunities for work. If they return, these girls face public shaming and victimisation from the village.

It does not need to be like this. The Helambu region was famous for its apples - however, there has been a notable lack of market presence in recent years. This has been due to three interconnected issues. The first of these was a lack of infrastructure to transport the apple produce to Kathmandu and other markets. The second was an outbreak of apple blight in the late 1980s. The third issue, concurrent to the apple blight, was counter-intuitively a booming tourist industry which absorbed the required labor force. These issues led to the lack of the necessary economic incentives to recreate the previous apple production system after the disease had passed.

The first of these issues has been remedied - Helambu is now well served by a network of roads. The second, with reference to diseases which effect produce, can be more easily dealt with through contact with international experts and connections to agricultural products and pesticides. The third issue is one which was confronted by a drop in tourist related employment in recent years, especially during the civil war taking place between 1996 and 2006, and also an increase in the educational infrastructure of the region.

The now finished civil war, formally ceased in 2006, had a significant effect on ongoing aid projects in the country, re-aligning the focus of many organisations towards human rights issues rather than long term development. This led to a local economic structure which is dependent on income streams which have a tendency to fluctuate in line with factors the

local people cannot control. Thus, Helambu, through no fault of its own, has had the need to utilize local knowledge for the development of its own economic system taken away.

The time is now ripe for a re-introduction of widespread cultivation of the Helambu apple. Within both Sindhupalchok and Kathmandu, there is a developing market for locally produced foodstuffs. This would offer significant employment opportunities, local ownership of production and a source of revenue for the community. All of these components would notably improve the lived experience of the local community - and in particular, would offer significant resources to families.

NGO Background

Helambu Project is a multi-national NGO with branches in the US and UK which supports Nepali NGOs and community-based organizations. It has a focus on the application of traditional and indigenous knowledge to the problems of modernity - in particular with funding 'partnership' operations, which utilise local manpower and interest in combination with externally raised funds. The projects are focused on long term sustainability of village fabric in the Helambu region.

Goals and Objectives

Our core measurable goal is to plant 500 apple trees distributed in 3 orchards in discrete communities. This dispersion will ensure that any diseases will not pass between them as has happened in the past. We will ensure that these orchards contain enough stock to maintain stability of supply for the foreseeable future. We also aim to re-establish farming techniques which are suited to the local conditions. Through an integration of local production techniques, there will be an increased sense of ownership throughout the project - encouraging long term interest in the development of local agriculture.

Project operation

The project will supply four components: a consultant agronomist, fencing, fertilizer, and saplings.

The apple orchards will be fenced and planted by families from the local community using the tools and stock we provide, under the initial guidance of an agronomist we will contract from Kathmandu University. This is a partnership model which has enjoyed significant success in the region in the recent past.

We will entrust a capital stock of US\$500 to the Helambu project in order for there to be a backstop option for re-investment, in particular designed for treatment of any future outbreaks of disease. We will also establish a management committee of local stakeholders. This body will be entrusted to negotiate supply contracts with local markets, as well as to centrally purchase fertilizer and other supplies going into the future.

Whilst apple trees take some years to come to fruit, we envisage the planting phase to last one month, over the beginning of the planting season (July/August) 2012.