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Story

Sowing The Seeds Of Nutrition As WFP's Soya Beans Project Takes Root In Afghanistan

By OMOLO Dominic Otieno – 16 June 2016



Mr Rahman during the interview. Photo: WFP/Dominic Omolo

WFP works with farmers in Afghanistan to cultivate soy beans - both to fight malnutrition and as an economic investment.

Afghanistan's approximately 30 million inhabitants are a population under siege. Apart from decades-long civil strife in the vast country, many Afghans suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition. A third of Afghan children and one-fifth of women are anemic. Their daily household diet – *naan* (bread) and *choy* (tea) is devoid of nutrients. Vegetables and protein consumption remain startlingly low in many Afghan households.

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In 2012, WFP's Purchase for Progress (P4P) programme in the country initiated a soy value chain project in partnership with an NGO Nutrition and Education International (NEI) to complement WFP's on-going project of wheat flour fortification. This initiative received a major boost in 2013 when the Government of Republic of Korea (RoK) expressed an interest to fund the project. Since then, RoK has provided a total of US\$ 25 million, enabling the development of the soy industry in 22 provinces of Afghanistan.

The project aims to reach 30,000 Afghan farmers with training in soybean production techniques, as well as to establish six soy processing factories for soy flour, and to produce micronutrient-fortified soy/wheat flour and animal feed. In addition, it is providing 22 provincial soybean producer associations with post-harvest equipment and technology support.

WFP has built partnership with other actors such as UNICEF, GAIN and Ministry of Public Health to tackle malnutrition in Afghanistan. "The National 2013 Nutrition Survey revealed that a lot more needs to be done to tackle malnutrition in Afghanistan. Our global mandate to reduce malnutrition informs our promotion of the soya value chain as a critical programme intervention in the country," states Angeline Rudakubana, the Deputy Country Director in charge of Programme.

Fazel Rahman represents around 400 farmers living in the countryside around Kabul. He has been planting soya beans on one jerib (an equivalent of 2,000 square metres) of his land annually for the last 5 years. Planting 10-12kgs of soya seeds on this land yields about 560kgs in beans, valued at about US\$300. He also plants potatoes, onions, tomatoes and beans on other portions of his land.

Soya beans have brought a remarkable change to Rahman's life. He no longer buys soya flour from the local market as his family now has enough soya to add to wheat flour they eat at home. Soya has replaced animal protein in his family's diet. Soya beans are also benefitting his farming activity, as adding the soya to his animal feeds has resulted in fatter and healthier cows and poultry.

However, it is not all a bed of roses for Fazel Rahman. Lacking of soya thresher, he has to manually process the soya beans; a feat which is labour intensive. Transport is another handicap. The produce has to be moved from the farm to the homestead and eventually to the collection points where NEI buys from him.

Nevertheless, Rahman sees the benefits of expanding his soya production. "In the beginning we were only five farmers in my village who were willing to venture into soya production," he recalls. "Now we are 60. Personally, if the water is available from the downstream snow melt, I will increase the acreage under production."

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