

FROM CRISIS TO OPPORTUNITY IN SMALL FARM PRODUCTION

HiMaT Stories

No. 3

Dawar Khan is a young farmer who lives in the tiny village of Sher-e-Sabz in the Chipursan Valley, at the remote point where Pakistan meets Afghanistan, Tajikistan and China on its far northern border.

In this high mountain community, people have been farming potatoes and wheat for decades at 10-11 thousand feet. Dawar Khan owns a jeep, but his income as a driver is not sufficient to meet his expenses, because he is supporting many family members to get more education and to cover their health costs.

The January 2010, Attabad landslide disaster permanently flooded out a 35 kilometer stretch of the Karakorum Highway (KKH), completely cutting off the upper Gojal area (including Chipursan) from direct road access to markets. Now it costs three times more to produce potatoes than they can be sold for down country, because of the huge increase in the costs of transportation and a doubling of input costs (seeds, fertilizer, fuel, etc.).



And there is another problem. Much of the arable land in the Chipursan Valley has become increasingly unproductive over the years from continuous mono cropping of potatoes, and the use of increasing amounts of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. It's like an addiction. Every year farmers needed more chemicals to produce the same, or even fewer results.

When HiMaT introduced pulses (lentils, peas, beans) as an alternative crop with the potential both to replenish exhausted soil and to produce food crops that would help to fill the growing food gap, Dawar Khan decided to cultivate Dal Masoor (a kind of lentil). He chose Dal Masoor because it is known to grow well on lands that are relatively low in fertility and it doesn't require chemical fertilizers. After consultation with his family he bought 25 kg of Dal Masoor to cultivate seven canal of land (just under one acre), which is half of his families entire land holdings.

That same amount of land was capable of producing two 50 kg bags of wheat worth about 2,000 RS (about \$20) in the market.



This is what Dawar reported to HiMaT field staff at the end of the growing season. "I paid 149RS/kg for the Dal Masoor seeds (25kg@149RS/kg=3725RS or about \$40). We were able to produce 350 kg of Dal Masoor. We kept back 20kg for my family and 25 kg as seeds for next year's crop. That left 305 kg to sell in the market." He presented the following expense sheet.

Income

Pulses sold in Aliabad market for 125RS/kg
305kg@125RS/kg= **38,235RS**

Expenses

Transport in	1,000RS
Expense (seeds)	3,725RS
Labour	1,300RS
Total	6,025RS

Net Income **32,210RS** (about \$350)

This is a major amount of money for a small holding farm in northern Pakistan where they typically earn less than \$700/year in good times. In Gojal, in the middle of a dreadful disaster that is causing a great deal of misery in many households, Dawar's story is a bright point of light.

Dawar believes he can double his income next year, and says he is eager to motivate and involve his friends and relatives in this new line of agricultural production, so that more families can benefit.