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Drip Irrigation Provides a Lifeline for Thirsty Crops in Chittagong Hill Tracts



Sadhan Chandra Das, is a local service provider living in Bolipara union, Bandarban Hill District who grows a variety of crops, including eggplants, moringa and chilli. In recent years, the water scarcity problems plaguing the Chittagong Hill Tracts region have grown much worse, particularly in the dry months between October and March. Sadhan has had an increasingly difficult time bringing water the 200 feet from the nearby stream to his crops as he is unable to afford mechanical pumps for irrigation. As a result, he has had to cut down on the diversity of crops he grows to focus on those that will make him the most money in order to support his family.

The Leadership to Ensure Adequate Nutrition (LEAN) project, funded by the European Union, has sought to address this by promoting an innovative drip irrigation method through local service providers in communities like Sadhan's. Drip irrigation is a type of locally sourced, micro-irrigation system that has the potential to save water and nutrients by allowing water to drip slowly to the roots of plants, either from above the soil surface or buried below the surface. The goal is to place water directly into the root zone and minimize evaporation.

Sadhan was selected by LEAN as a local service

provider in June of 2019 and received training on a variety of techniques, including drip irrigation, vermicomposting, and seedling production with the support of the Department of Agriculture Extension. Sadhan quickly adopted the drip irrigation technology and assisted with disseminating this technology to his neighbours and friends. Prior to introducing this irrigation method, which he himself using locally sourced waste plastic, Sadhan used to allocate 43% of all his production expenses on irrigation alone. Now, Sadhan reports watering his crops only requires 13% of his total expenditure, allowing investment in new practices and crops as well as extra cash to support his family of six. Sadhan explains, 'I used to spend BDT 3,000 each winter to irrigate my crops. I was lucky I could afford even that, most farmers cannot.'

As part of educating his community about this, and with the support of LEAN, Sadhan has formed four producer groups comprised of five men and thirty-nine women. Here, Sadhan demonstrates the installation of drip irrigation systems—a popular approach which has now been adopted by numerous members of the groups and which promise an adaptive, community-driven adaptation to the increasing impacts of climate change in the region.

