Project Report

1. General Information

Project Title: *Integration of Local Farm Production with School Fed Program*

Project Number: *67/23*

Project Country, Region, Location: Nepal, Bagmati province, Baiteshwor Rural Municipality

Project Duration: 12 Months

Name of Your Organization: Peoples Access to Adequate Natural Infrastructures (PAANI)

Contact Person for the Project: Bhav Narayan Jha

Phone Number: 0977-9854041505

Email: jhabhav4@gmail.com

Address: Godawari Municipality, ward 13, Lalitpur, Nepal

2. Project Information

The project has been implemented successfully with most of the targeted objectives achieved. Efforts were made to engage the school management committee and local governments to ensure the sustainability of the initiative. However, additional support in terms of budgeting from these stakeholders is still needed to maintain long-term results.

The project effectively sensitized farmers and school students about organic meals prepared using locally sourced farm produce. Despite being a short-term project, the impacts of behavior change, particularly in food consumption patterns, are expected to yield sustainable results over the next few years. The school has expressed its commitment to continue using locally available farm products as long as the supply is consistent.

What measures have you taken to solve or mitigate the core problem? If the course of the project deviated from the original plan, please briefly explain.

1. Specific measures taken to solve or mitigate core problems

The project successfully tackled two major core issues: the lack of organic meals for students and insufficient market linkages for locally produced farm produce. This was achieved through three main approaches:

I. Developing schools as learning hubs:

One of the primary objectives of the project was to transform schools into learning hubs for organic farming and healthy eating practices. This approach aimed to enhance farm practices at the school level and extend this knowledge to both students and local farmers. By using the school as a platform for promoting organic meal options, the project sought to not only improve the students' diets but also influence their behavior in adopting healthier food choices.

A key initiative in this approach was the installation of a Food Pyramid within the school premises. The food pyramid visually reinforced the importance of healthy, organic meals and served as a constant reminder for both students and school management about the benefits of locally produced organic food. The pyramid became a motivational tool that helped to encourage the adoption of organic meals over junk food, which, as per the project's observations, had a strong foothold among students due to familiarity and convenience.

This demonstration of organic meal options was critical in bringing about a behavior change among the students, as changing food preferences, particularly moving away from junk food, is a long-term process. Continuous sensitization through visual aids like the food pyramid, along with the active involvement of school management, helped sustain the message of eating healthily with local farm products.

II. Engagement with local farmers and students:

Another core focus of the project was to strengthen the knowledge and capacity of local farmers and school students on organic farming. The project organized a series of trainings and cross-learning activities that aimed to improve farmers' agricultural techniques, particularly in organic farming practices. To address winter farming challenges caused by prolonged fog and rain during monsoon, the project supported farmers with short duration high yielding improved vegetable seeds (cauliflower, cabbage, and tomato) and introduced plastic tunnel farming. Last winter, these tunnels protected crops from adverse winter conditions and farmers reported a 30% increase in production using tunnels and improved seeds. Similarly, the current vegetables growing under these tunnels are expected to protect from coming monsoon rain which is believed to increase the production as well similar to the winter production.

Additionally, a plastic tunnel was installed in the local school to grow green leafy vegetables, cauliflower, and cabbage, serving primarily as a community learning site. However, during winter, the school was able to use the produce to supply vegetables for approximately 10 school days.

One important topic of our trainings was pest management. We utilized locally available invasive plants such as *Lantana camara*, *Calotropis gigantea*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Acorus calamus*, along with livestock urine and dung to prepare biological pesticides. We conducted training on this approach, which focused on deterring pests rather than killing them—promoting organic farming through local herbs.

However, farmers now seek a more advanced plant clinic model that can identify crop-specific pests and diseases and recommend appropriate biological remedies. This requires technical experts to diagnose issues across various vegetable crops. The model also includes

soil testing and aligns with the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach, where farmers identify problems and co-develop solutions with expert guidance.

The project successfully linked local farmers with the school's feeding program, establishing a sustainable model for organic food production. This not only ensured a continuous supply of locally grown organic produce for the school but also provided a reliable market for farmers, improving their income and food security. The engagement between students and farmers further strengthened the knowledge-sharing process, with students actively participating in farm activities, learning about sustainable agriculture, and helping to communicate these practices to the community.

III. School management and government support:

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the project, continuous communication was maintained with the school management committee and local authorities. This approach aimed to secure future funding, logistical support, and overall commitment to the continuation of the school feeding program with local organic produce. The involvement of local government was also essential in ensuring the project's integration into community development plans, especially as a model for replication in other schools and communities.

However, some unforeseen challenges caused slight deviations from the original project plan. The project began full-scale activities after September 2024, which was later than initially anticipated. Delays in obtaining government approvals and logistical challenges due to mountain landslides impacted the project's timeline. Despite these setbacks, the project managed to implement its activities within the revised time frame by focusing on frequent field visits and constant monitoring of the project's progress.

2. Deviations from original plan:

While the project made significant progress, certain activities were adjusted due to unforeseen challenges:

I. Plant clinic for students and farmers:

- The advanced plant clinic activity, which was intended to help students and farmers identify and address local pest and disease problems, required technical expertise. The plan was to conduct rigorous field observations such as crop cycle assessments and soil testing. However, there were challenges in securing a technical expert with the required expertise, as no local experts were available, and the costs of hiring external experts amounted to nearly half of the project budget. Therefore only basic workshops on the production of herbal pesticides were given.
- Given the budgetary constraints and the high costs of external expertise, this activity was not implemented. However, this issue was flagged as a critical need by the local farmers, who are facing increasing pest and disease problems. The local government has been encouraged to consider this

activity in future development plans, as it remains a high priority for the community.

II. **Electric Cooking Initiatives:**

- Initially, the project had planned to implement electric cooking systems in the school canteen to replace the use of harmful and unsustainable cooking fuels such as firewood and LPG. The funding for this initiative was expected from the EWS funding application. However, due to the limited funding options available in this year's EWS budget, the project was unable to secure the necessary funds for the electric cooking initiative.
- As a result, this activity could not be implemented under the current project. Despite this setback, the local government has expressed its commitment to promoting electric cooking technologies through its upcoming development plans, which could provide an alternative route for introducing clean cooking methods to the community in the near future.

3. Financial Information

Funding Amount from RAPUNZEL One World Organic Foundation:

The Used funds are provided in a separate attached sheet.

4. Project Evaluation

Main target group: The project primarily targeted 83 students (Class 1-6) receiving mid-day meals, and 90 higher-level students (Class 8-10) who were directly involved in capacity-building activities and are replicating the practices in their homes. Additionally, 60 higher-level students were partially involved as learners/observers, with the potential to apply their skills in the future.

Beneficiaries: A total of 261 individuals directly benefited from the project, including students, teachers, parents, and 28 farmers from the Golma Devi farmer group as originally planned. The number of indirect beneficiaries is approximately 300. However, the number of indirect beneficiaries may increase in the future through cross-learning and knowledge sharing with community farmers. The total number of beneficiaries thus stands at 561 people.

Achieved Objectives:

The project successfully achieved the following objectives as defined in the grant application:

I. **Linking local farmers with the school**: Local farmers were successfully linked to the school to supply organic food items for the students' mid-day meals, ensuring a steady market for their produce.

II. **Promotion of organic farming**: The project raised awareness and provided training on organic farming to students, teachers, and parents, helping to establish organic farming yards and an improved school-based learning environment.

III. **Hygienic mid-day meals**: The project facilitated the provision of hygienic mid-day meals by sourcing locally grown organic food, promoting healthy eating, and reducing costs compared to imported items.

IV. **Capacity building and support for farmers**: Farmers received capacity-building and materials support to enhance organic farm production, resulting in a stable income from regular supplies to the school canteen.

V. **Knowledge exchange**: The farmer groups served as a platform for students and teachers to exchange practical farm-based knowledge.

The objective of promoting and integrating electric cooking technologies at the school canteen was not achieved due to a lack of funding, which was initially planned to be secured through the EWS funding application, however the project will maintain regular follow-up with the local government officials to allocate the budget and integrate the clean cooking in the school canteen.

Obstacles and Difficulties:

The project faced several challenges, starting with a two-month delay in approval from government bodies, which postponed the fund transfer to PAANI's account. Once funding was received, heavy rainfall caused devastating landslides in the region, further limiting the team's field movement and delaying project implementation. Additionally, securing technical expertise for the plant clinic proved difficult, as local experts were unavailable and hiring external experts was cost-prohibitive, consuming nearly half of the project budget. As a result, the plant clinic could not be implemented, although local farmers identified it as a critical need, prompting the local government to consider it for future development plans.

The project also faced financial constraints in securing funding for electric cooking systems intended to replace harmful cooking fuels like firewood and LPG. Despite plans to apply for EWS funding, the limited budget for this year prevented the implementation of the electric cooking initiative. However, the local government expressed interest in supporting clean cooking technologies through future development plans, offering a potential pathway for introducing electric cooking systems to the school canteen.

Future Involvement Conclusions:

The success of linking local farmers to the school for produce supply, coupled with providing hygienic meals for students, has established a circular economy within the rural community. This initiative not only supports local farmers but also ensures a steady, healthy

food source for students, laying a strong foundation for continued involvement. With the positive outcomes seen in this project, there is a significant opportunity for expansion to other regions facing similar challenges. By incorporating additional stakeholders, such as local governments, NGOs, and educational institutions, the project can scale its impact, addressing broader food security and health issues across the country.

Looking to the future, the knowledge and experience gained from this project can be used to replicate similar practices in other parts of the country, particularly in rural areas facing issues like malnutrition, poverty, and limited access to sustainable farming methods. Furthermore, there are opportunities to integrate additional critical themes such as water and sanitation at the school level. Incorporating these aspects can ensure the sustainability of the food production system while promoting overall community well-being.

Building on the established rapport with relevant stakeholders, future projects can advocate for policy changes and secure long-term funding, ensuring that these practices are not only maintained but also expanded to benefit a larger population. The integration of water and sanitation solutions, for example, would further support the health and hygiene of students, creating a holistic approach to rural development that addresses the interconnected challenges of food, health, and the environment. This expansion offers an opportunity for broader national implementation, creating lasting, scalable solutions for rural communities across the country.

Long-Term Project Goal.

How have you ensured that the measures will be continued or have a lasting impact?

The project has ensured long-term sustainability by integrating local farmers into the school's food supply system, which provides a steady income stream for the farmers and a reliable source of nutritious meals for students. The foundation laid by the project has been recognized by local government officials, who have committed to allocating the necessary budget in the next planning process. This commitment signifies the local ownership of the intervention, which is crucial for its continued success and lasting impact. The active involvement and financial backing from local authorities would ensure that the measures implemented will be maintained and potentially expanded in the future.

Of course it means a risk to rely on the promises of the government officials. We can consider it a tremendous success that the government has witnessed the project's necessity and thus has promised its active involvement in the future, but instead of relying on this promise we should further reduce the production costs within our circular economy model as we had it originally foreseen. If we manage to substitute the LPG and firewood/coal fueled cooking facilities in the school kitchen with electric cookers we can further reduce the school's energy costs for preparing the lunch by about 50%

5. Photo Documentation

Explanations of the images:

Image 1: This image shows the interaction workshop between school management committee, teachers, parents and local government officials.

Image 2: This image shows the Golmadevi farmer's group members at the organic pesticides preparation trainings

Image3: This image shows that the Ward chair person Mr. Kamal Parsad Adhikari is observing the organic farm produce demonstration and acknowledges the initiatives.

Image 4: Cross learning of farmer's group to the other farmer's field to learn the best practices

Images 5: Farmers and students engage in learning exchanges at the school model farm. The event is held in small groups per session to minimize crop damage risks due to limited space.

Image 6: Plastic tunnel preparation and drip-irrigation set-up at farmer's field to increase the farm produce

Image 7: Locally produced hygienic farm produce is displayed in front of the canteen to encourage students and teachers to consume healthy, locally grown meals through regular observations.

Image 8: Student having the healthy meal

Name/Position : Bhav Narayan Jha

Project manager (PAANI)

Nepal

2025/06/ 17