

SUCCESS STORY

Title: Processing and Preservation of Seasonal Fruits for Sustainable Livelihood: The Journey of Mrs. Tabitha Chothe



Farmer Profile

Name: Mrs. Tabitha Chothe

Age: 56 years

Village: Ziontlang

District: Chandel, Manipur

Education Level: Class X

Landholding: 0.05 acre

Background and Challenges

Chandel district, located in the hilly terrain of Manipur, is endowed with a rich diversity of seasonal fruits such as plums and mangoes. These fruits are abundantly available during the summer season, particularly from May to July. Despite their high nutritional value such as being rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants—these fruits are highly perishable and often go to waste due to a lack of awareness and access to proper processing technologies.

The community in Ziontlang and surrounding villages has traditionally relied on agriculture and forest produce, but many households remain economically vulnerable due to low farm productivity and limited market access. Women in these areas, although engaged in various subsistence activities, have not been fully empowered to take up value-added enterprises that could supplement their household incomes.

However, increased awareness and outreach by extension agencies in recent years have led many villagers to explore new opportunities for sustainable livelihoods using locally available resources.

KVK Intervention: Knowledge Building and Skill Development

In April 2019, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Chandel, under the ICAR Manipur Centre, launched a series of training programmes under the VATICA initiative. These trainings aimed to raise awareness among farm women on the potential of processing and preservation of seasonal fruits and vegetables as a viable enterprise.

The trainings were designed to suit local needs and conditions and included hands-on demonstrations on juice extraction, preservation, squash and RTS (Ready-To-Serve) beverage preparation, and candy making. During these sessions, farmers were provided with essential materials like potassium metabisulphite, citric acid, sodium benzoate, acetic acid, food-grade color, flavoring essence, and packaging materials. Training manuals and leaflets were also distributed to serve as reference guides.

Mrs. Tabitha Chothe was one of the active participants in these training sessions. With a keen interest and willingness to adopt new practices, she took up the challenge of starting a home-based processing unit using easily accessible seasonal fruits like mangoes and plums.

Enterprise Development and Implementation

Motivated by the skills and confidence gained during the training, Mrs. Tabitha began a small-scale fruit processing enterprise from her home. She chose plum and mango as her primary raw materials due to their abundance and affordability during peak season.

From May to July, she collected fresh fruits from nearby sources and began producing various value-added products. She processed 30 litres of plum juice, which she stored and later used to prepare plum squash and RTS beverages during the off-season. Additionally, she produced 20 litres of mango squash, 20 litres of mango RTS, and mango candy using simple preservation methods taught by KVK experts.

Her mango candies were creatively packaged in small sachets priced at ₹5 and ₹20, making them affordable and appealing to local consumers. She sold her products at local markets, village festivals, Christmas functions, community events, and nearby shops. Plum and mango squash were sold at ₹50 per bottle, while RTS drinks (250 ml) were priced at ₹10.

Impact on Income and Social Status

Within a short period, Mrs. Tabitha established a sustainable and profitable enterprise. During the fruit season alone, she earned over ₹50,000 from the sale of her plum and mango products. Her products gained popularity for their taste, affordability, and hygienic packaging, creating a steady customer base within her community.

Her consistent efforts and entrepreneurial spirit inspired other women in the village and nearby areas to consider similar ventures. Her story has become a source of motivation and empowerment, particularly among economically disadvantaged farm women seeking livelihood alternatives.

Mrs. Tabitha's journey from a traditional farm woman to a confident entrepreneur also improved her family's financial condition and social standing. The additional income helped her support household needs and strengthened her role as a decision-maker in the family and community.

Lessons Learned and Replicability

Mrs. Tabitha's success highlights the importance of skill development, local resource utilization, and small-scale processing as a means to reduce post-harvest losses and improve rural livelihoods. Through her experience, she learned that even with minimal land and resources, it is possible to generate income by turning perishable fruits into shelf-stable, value-added products.

The key takeaways from her success include:

- Seasonal fruits, if properly processed, can provide year-round income.
- Community-based training and resource support from institutions like KVK can create lasting change.
- Empowering women through livelihood interventions contributes to overall household resilience.
- Her initiative serves as a replicable model for other rural women in Chandel and across the northeastern region who wish to start similar fruit processing ventures.

Conclusion

The story of Mrs. Tabitha Chothe is a remarkable example of how rural women can turn local challenges into entrepreneurial opportunities with the right knowledge, skills, and institutional support. Her commitment to adopting scientific food preservation techniques and her ability to convert low-cost seasonal fruits into income-generating products underscore the power of grassroots innovation.

Through her journey, Mrs. Tabitha has demonstrated that sustainable livelihood solutions lie not in distant markets, but within the rich biodiversity and simple resources of one's own village. Her success stands as a beacon of hope and inspiration for many aspiring rural entrepreneurs in the region.



Fig. MANGO AND PLUM RTS



Fig. MANGO AND PLUM PRODUCTS