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A market approach to drip irrigation

Water is scarce, especially for the most vulnerable among the world's population. Most poor rural people live in marginal, dry areas and have very limited access to water. This essential resource, upon which their livelihoods heavily depend, is depleting rapidly and is also being threatened by the impact of climate change.

Drip micro-irrigation is a simple, effective technology that makes optimal use of each available drop of water. Adaptable to different terrains, functional on the smallest scale, simple and cheap to make, use and repair, it allows farmers to intensify production and introduce high-value crops. For a family farming at subsistence level, this can make all the difference; it means they can grow a supply of vegetables year-round for their own consumption and also generate some income by selling surpluses. Thus, with a simple drip irrigation kit, a rural family can make a small but significant step out of extreme poverty.

Between 2009 and 2012, the IFAD-supported Scaling up Micro-irrigation Systems (SCAMPIS) project developed a market approach for the dissemination of locally adapted drip irrigation kits. The approach identifies the technology that is best suited to the local context and appropriate for the most vulnerable rural inhabitants. It then builds a sustainable local supply chain for the irrigation equipment that makes the technology affordable and available, not just for the duration of the project but in the long term.

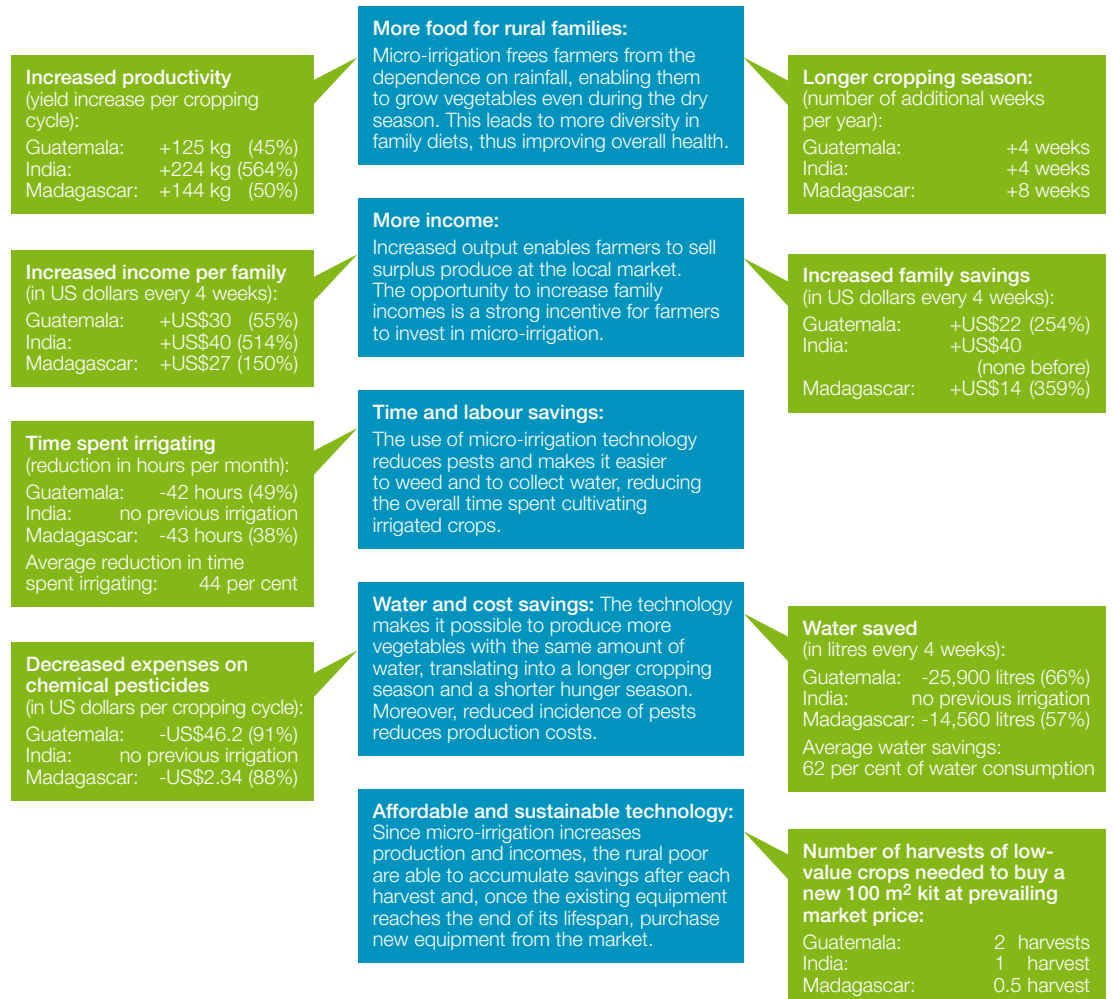
In just three years, the pilot project was able to dramatically change the lives of 30,000 farmers and their families (in total, around 150,000 poor rural people) on three continents. Family health, income and living conditions of the beneficiaries have significantly improved. The growing demand for the kits is nearing a critical mass that validates the supply side and the opening of markets for the equipment.

SCAMPIS project results

- More efficient water use
- Increased water productivity
- Longer cropping seasons
- Greater variety of crops
- Better quality crops
- Higher yields
- Higher incomes
- Reduced labour requirements

Results from Guatemala, India and Madagascar

The following results were obtained in each pilot country for a plot of tomatoes with an area of 100 square metres:



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The market approach to drip irrigation overcomes the most common and persistent challenges standing in the way of this technology and preventing it from becoming a valuable and sustainable tool for smallholders living in arid areas across the globe. It does so by ensuring that the technology is adapted to local farmers' needs, capacities and environments.

The innovative aspect of this approach also lies in the fact that it builds local supply chains for the kits, in addition to disseminating the kits and training farmers to use them. As the interest in the technology spreads, supply and demand become a self-sustaining mechanism, ultimately eliminating the need for project support. Since the closure of the SCAMPIS project in 2012, the markets it has established for the micro-irrigation kit in the three pilot countries have found new sponsors and continue to grow and evolve towards maturity.

The Market Approach to Drip Irrigation is set out in a series of documents that provide information and guidance to practitioners who wish to replicate and adapt the SCAMPIS project experience.