

## Understanding Face-to-Face Household Gardens' Profitability and Local Economic Opportunity Pathways

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**Abstract :** In just a few years, the Face-to-Face Victory Gardens Project (F2F) in Cambodia has developed a high-impact project that has provided immediate and tangible benefits to local families. This has been accomplished with a relatively hands-off approach that relies on households' own motivation and personal investments of time and resources -which is both unique and impressive in the landscape of NGO and government initiatives in the area. Households have been growing food both for their own consumption and to sell or exchange. Not all targeted beneficiaries are equally motivated and maximizing their involvement, but there is a clear subset of households -particularly those who serve as facilitators- whose circumstances have been transformed as a result of F2F. A number of household factors and contextual economic factors affect families' income generation opportunities. All the households we spoke with became involved with F2F with the goal of selling some proportion of their produce (i.e., not exclusively for their own consumption). For some, this income is marginal and supplemental to their core household income; for others, it is substantial and transformative. Some engage directly with customers/buyers in their immediate community, while others sell in larger nearby markets, and others link up with intermediary vendors. All struggle, to a certain extent, to compete in a local economy flooded with cheap produce imported from large-scale growers in neighboring provinces, Thailand, and Vietnam, although households who grow and sell herbs and greens popular in Khmer cuisine have found a stronger local market. Some are content with the scale of their garden, the income they make, and the current level of effort required to maintain it; others would like to expand but are faced with land constraints and water management challenges. Households making a substantial income from selling their products have achieved success in different ways, making it difficult to pinpoint a clear "model" for replication. Within our small sample size of interviewees, it seems as though the families with a clear passion for their gardens and high motivation to work hard to bring their products to market have succeeded in doing so. Khmer greens and herbs have been the most successful; they are not high-value crops, but they are fairly easy to grow, and there is a constant demand. These crops are also not imported as much, so prices are more stable than those of crops such as long beans. Although we talked to a limited number of individuals, it also appears as though successful families either restricted their crops to those that would grow well in drought or flood conditions (depending on which they are affected by most); or benefit already from water management infrastructure such as water tanks which helps them diversify their crops and helps them build their resilience.

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