

Commercializing Innovation: Need for Strategic Rethink

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Cardamom is one of the world's very ancient spices and is native to the East originating in the forests of the Western Ghats in southern India, where it grows wild. It also grows in Sri Lanka, Guatemala, Indo China and Tanzania. The ancient Indians and Egyptians chewed cardamom seeds as a tooth cleaner; the Greeks and Romans used it as a perfume. Vikings came upon cardamom about one thousand years ago, in Constantinople, and introduced it into Scandinavia, where it remains popular to this day.

Cardamom grows wild in the Western Ghats, largely in Idukki district of Kerala. Much of the world's supply of cardamom comes from these areas of the state. Cardamom is an expensive spice, second only to Saffron. Cardamoms are traditionally grown in partially cleared tropical rain forests, leaving some shade. Similarly, in plantation cultivation, forest undergrowth is cleared and trees thinned to give just enough shade and the rhizome or seeds planted at 3m (10 ft) intervals. Cardamom is used to spice both sweet and savoury dishes. It is widely employed in Indian, Middle Eastern, Arabic, and Swedish cuisine.

With all these positive factors, the small and medium farmers faced many problems like low yielding varieties, labour shortages, innovative farming methods, fewer research and development activities in the early days.

Mr Reji Joseph along with his father Mr Sebastian Joseph Njallani revolutionized cardamom cultivation in Kerala particularly in Idukki district in production, management and productivity. In the 1990s, both father-son duo developed the Njallani, a variety of cardamom that now accounts for 85% of all of the variety, grown in India. Until the introduction of this variety, the conventional yield per hectare was 200-250kg, but Njallani increased that to 1,500-1700kg or more.

Mr J. Thomas, director of the Indian Cardamom Research Institute (ICRI) at Myladumpara in Kerala, describes Joseph's contribution to cardamom cultivation in India as "simply great" and says that it is partly because of him that the country now has a "major place in global cardamom cultivation" after Guatemala.

This was an accidental discovery. The father has an apiary on his farm; bee-keeping, which would bring in additional income. The bees helped cross-pollinate different varieties of cardamom on his farm and he isolated varieties that had emerged from cross-pollination and picked the high-yielding varieties among these, and cross-pollinated them. A decade

later, he developed a variety that produces 120-150 berries (per plant) compared with the 30-40 of normal varieties. He had chosen his family name Njallani. Later ICRI confirmed that this variety yields more than traditional varieties.

The second innovation was a drastic change in the way of cultivation. Traditionally farmers used to plant seedlings and waited for years for the first crop. In the new method, he planted shoots taken (cut out) from the high yielding variety and started harvest from the second year onwards, which is highly appreciated in the community.

Along with this there was a third Innovation, which was pitless cultivation. Traditionally, farmers used to take large pits for planting, but here, it requires only small pits and sometimes without even a pit also.

Cardamom is an expensive spice where Indian cardamom trades around (Rs.1700 per kg in the local market (Dec 2020) and it will be higher depends on the aroma and spicity.

The lives of the farmers in this the region changed after the introduction of Njallani. Their income level increased with higher yields, resulting in improving their standard of living. And with more pluckers required, the farmers started hiring more people, which improved the employment prospects of the marginal agricultural workers and other daily wagers.

Small and medium farmers who grew Njallani started expanding the cultivated area and with high prices, many became rich and some even became millionaires. This family continued to have a modest livelihood, but they are satisfied as they could change the fortune of the country's cardamom growers.

In one interview Sebastian Joseph said that he did not patented Njallani because he doesn't know anything about patenting.

If the Njallani family could have patented the variety, the fortune would have been totally different.

Keywords: Marketing Strategy, Innovation, Intellectual Property Rights

Discussion Points / Questions

This case focus mainly on Innovation which changed the lives of many rural farmers, but unable to get commercialised. Though many innovations are happening, majority are behind the screen.

Questions / Discussions can be framed based on the below points

This case is valuable for courses on Marketing, Strategy and Intellectual Property Rights

- To analyze effective development and deployment of a strategy which could have made a life changing effect.
- To identify and analyze the need of educating people about Intellectual Property Rights
- Demonstrate the practical challenges associated with pursuing growth opportunities at a tactical level; when to make and how to make?
- Apply the knowledge of strategizing and implementing the strategies

Teaching Plan

Following is a teaching plan designed for 50 minutes

- Set up the class by introducing the various aspects, key players and challenges (10 minutes)
- Discuss the key principles of marketing, strategy and IPR and analyse with the possible approaches (conventional and non-conventional) (20 minutes)
- Introduce the various canvases (marketing canvas, strategic canvas) and have students work in teams to fill out (20 minutes)