

A Game Changer

Nutri-gardens have become a game-changer in the time of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. They have helped reduction in child malnutrition and regular consumption of chemical-free vegetables and seasonal fruits have helped villagers bridge the nutrient gap. The gardens have helped the tribal community to stave off economic hardship. The tribal women farmers are able to save up to Rs 1,000-1,500 a month. Buying vegetables during summer used to be a daily struggle. But the situation has now changed, the women sell the surplus vegetables and generate constant source of income round the year.



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NUTRITION FROM BACKYARD GARDENS

Tribal women from mining areas show the way

Key Highlights of the Initiation

- More than 8000 tribal household benefited
- Freedom to decide on what they want to eat
- Reduced malnutrition in young women & children
- Helped the community to stave of economic hardship
- Converged with MGNREGS to promote livelihood opportunities

7500 Nutri Garden plot developed with an average size of 2 to 3 decimal each

Keonjhar - 6250
Sundargarh - 750
Mayurbhanj - 654

Nearly 8000 tribal women farmers engaged in this initiative

Each tribal women farmers are able to save upto Rs. 1,000-1,500 a month

More than, 8000 odd tribal women farmers from 16 blocks of Keonjhar, Sundargarh & Mayurbhanj, districts have established their nutrition-gardens under the aegis of Odisha Livelihood Mission (OLM) with the financial support of Rs. 34.78 Cr. from OMBADC. The initiative targets women headed households with beneficiaries like children less than five years age, pregnant women and lactating women. Each farmer gets financial support of Rs 1,000 to prepare a plot of nutri-garden along with the seed kit which contains (13) types of vegetable seeds for the Kharif season and seventeen (17) types of seeds for the Rabi season to improve the nutritional intake of tribal households. However, since the activity involves earthwork, it has been converged with MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) to promote livelihood opportunities among the rural poor.



What is a Nutri Garden?

Basically two models of nutri gardens are being popularised — rectangular and circular. The rectangular shape with seven raised beds is being preferred more compared to the circular one because the former involves relatively easy layout and digging. But, the circular one looks better and it has a compost pit in the middle. Families can start harvesting vegetables 45 days after establishing a nutri-garden. Women self-help groups have taken a lead in setting up of these gardens. Beneficiaries choose crops depending upon the nutritional value, traditional acceptance, harvest frequency, market price, crop seasons and safety hazard scale.



“We have designed the model according to the resources made available locally. We started harvesting vegetables 45 days after establishing a nutri-garden- Rani Nayak of Talapati GP, Kusumi, Mayurbhanj”

“Buying food from the market to feed my 7-member family was a huge financial burden, now we are free to decide our menu - Sulochana Giri of Nangalisila village, Kusumi block Mayurbhanj”



How to Design a Nutri Garden?

These nutri gardens are being made on plot sizes ranging from 2.5 to 3 decimals (1,000-1,300 square feet) on an average. It must receive adequate sunlight through all cropping seasons. The centre of a nutri-garden is marked by fixing a stump. A circle of radius 15 feet is then drawn with this stump as the centre.

Subsequently, four similar circles are drawn with radius of 3, 4.5 and 9 and 10.5 feet. The outermost circle is divided into seven equal parts, wherein seven paths of 1.5 feet width are made in between each part. There is a pit in the centre that helps prepare compost from available agri-residues. Beds are then prepared by mixing good quality farmyard manure in soil. Horticultural plants that need more sunlight are sown in the innermost circle. In the middle circle, plants which can grow under shade are sown. Creepers are sown in the vertices of seven pathways. Outermost circle is meant for leafy vegetables, tubers and other medicinal plants.



“Earlier, we used to grow only mustard in our backyard,” Pramila recalled. “But this year, in addition to mustard, we started cultivating tomatoes, brinjal, reddish, chilies, bottle gourd, pumpkin, saag (green leaves) and tubers.”



“It has been over four months and we have not spent a penny to buy vegetables said Sabitri Patra of Sundargarh”



Those who do not have land are being encouraged to grow vegetables in either containers or gunny bags, said Basanti Dureka of Harichandanpur block, Keonjhar.



“When we started, consumption was not the focus; the aim was to increase household income by selling the vegetable in the nearby marketsaid Basumati of Keonjhar”

“The tribal women of mining affected districts have been earning their place under the sun: At least 7500 of them have established their own vegetable gardens — and the freedom to decide what they get to eat. From Brinjal to chilly and from papaya to lemon, they cultivate it all. This is how they involve themselves for choice while ensuring they diversify their nutrient intake without relying on expensive vegetables from the weekly market”.

Dy. CEO & MLE
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