



Project to Assist ERRA and its Partners to Restore Livelihoods in the Earthquake Affected Areas of Pakistan

Field Experience – Case Studies



Project Title

Kitchen gardens to organize women and improve household nutrition

Project objectives

Kitchen gardening is used as an approach to have women work together, at the same time improve household nutrition, reduce household expenditures on the purchase of vegetables and increase the productivity of under-utilized resources and assets.

Context

Batora village, Talhatta union council, Balakot tehsil, Mansehra district, lies in close proximity to the fault line. The earthquake killed 40 and damaged all houses.

Growing different types of vegetables in kitchen gardens was a common home-based activity prior to the earthquake. The natural disaster shifted household priority to the restoration of shelters and infrastructure, so that kitchen gardens became neglected. To address the damage and risks brought about by the earthquake to the natural resources based, the Department of Forests initiated Collaborative and Integrated Watershed Management Planning. In this process it was realized that kitchen gardening needed to be picked up again as a way to address deteriorating nutrition and reduce the pressure on the households' income. It was also seen as a way to bring the women together to jointly address some of the problems they were facing.

Population groups targeted

Cultural habits in the village limit the way women can be organized in formal groups. In addition the social impact of the earthquake on many households had been significant, which is why it was decided to start with a small group of 20 households only whose experience could serve as a basis of knowledge and as a demonstration for their peers.

The project

Women farmers with a small plot of land available for cultivation were directly involved in the intervention. They were motivated to grow vegetables like onion, garlic, spinach, peas and okra. Kitchen gardens were developed on five to ten square metre plots of land within household reach. While most already had some prior experience, through an interactive process with an horticulture extension specialist they shared knowledge and identified the need for:

- Vegetable bed raising,
- Spacing of seedlings,
- Orientation of the beds,
- Ensuring seed quality and seed selection and multiplication techniques,
- Ways to supply water at regular intervals,
- The need for fencing,
- Weeding techniques,
- The use of natural fertilizer such as compost.

The small size of the plots, the proximity to the house and limited labour requirement was not perceived as an extra burden on the workload of women. Most important activities were timely provision of water, fencing so poultry and free roaming sheep or goats did not enter the plot, and



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harvesting at the right time.

This case study is a part of a series of studies to document the experience gained implementing the *Livelihoods Rehabilitation Strategy* developed by the Earthquake Reconstruction and Reconstruction Authority (ERRA) of Pakistan as part of its response to the October 8, 2005 earthquake which hit the north of the country and killed over 78,000 people. The Strategy is implemented by ERRA, Government line-departments and Non-Governmental Organizations, with technical assistance provided through FAO using Sida funding.

Building capacities

The establishment of kitchen gardens and adding to skills of the women directly involved in the activities was only one way of building their capacity. Indirectly, by engaging them in these kinds of activities, the women become part of a forum where they exchanged experience and knowledge. This was not only limited to the topic of growing vegetables, but quickly spread to include other issues they felt to be important. With improving nutrition one of the objectives of the activity, gradually, at the time vegetables were harvested, the project staff entered the topic of nutrition. Different ways of preparing the vegetables were discussed and the ways that are more nutritious and healthy. Issues regarding general health were also brought up.

While discussions among the women and their peers is a major factor in the dispersion of the approach, an important tool turned out the maintaining of simple records – actually a kind of in-out booklets – by the women. This recorded the inputs and time spent on the kitchen gardening on the one hand and the produce they obtained – sometimes even income when they managed to sell some of the vegetables – on the other hand. During their discussion they could then easily make a cost-benefit analysis, which turned out to be a major convincing factor.

Kitchen gardening can be a catalyst to introduce a community-based approach and for setting up small groups, especially women group. This is a critical factor in cultures where physical and social mobility of woman is limited. As such it can be used as an entry activity for enterprise development.

Challenges

- ✓ Dependency on availability of water and environmentally suitable conditions.
- ✓ Need to maintain the women's interest and focus from start to completion, in particular through the first harvest.
- ✓ Seasonal nature of the activity makes it more difficult to ensure that it will be replicated in the next planting season.
- ✓ Hard to change traditional ways of preparing food.
- ✓ Cultural setting which limits access to women by outsiders, sometimes even other women.
- ✓ Duplication of the activity to other people in the same villages as well as in other villages.

Opportunities

- ✓ The savings made through not having to spend on buying vegetables are obvious and households become less dependent on markets.
- ✓ The link between the kitchen garden, the kitchen and the table offers an opportunity to carry the process from the garden and impact on the nutrition of the household.
- ✓ Women are involved in a productive activity without having to leave the environment of the house stead and through groups interact more frequently with their peers.
- ✓ Makes use of under-utilised assets and resources.

Considerations for replication

Consumption of vegetables at the level of the households involved in the project has increased and some minor changes in the ways of preparing food were observed. Nevertheless, without a specialized study, the impact on the health and nutrition of the household members, in particular on the children and women, will be hard to ascertain. Even without such hard evidence the activity is regarded as worthwhile if only for the savings



on the household income and the organizing of the women in groups. As such, simple activities like kitchen gardening can become a catalyst for the introduction of other community-based activities in particular when focussing on women in traditional cultures where physical and social mobility of women is limited and it is hard for women to interact with outsiders or leave the environment of their hamlets as in many part of rural Pakistan.

The best measure of the success of the intervention was the fact that neighbouring households started copying what the women's group was doing and asked the project for help. In this way the number of kitchen gardens doubled within the same season. Building on this success, in the next season, the project provided the owners of these kitchen gardens with some quality fruit trees for planting on the periphery of the farm yards. This way, the households' incomes will be further supplemented in the coming years.

For future similar interventions, efforts will be made to use the group formation as a way to also enter into micro-saving. The regular meetings of the kitchen gardening group can be used as a way to encourage the members of the importance of savings. While seeds were provided for free by the project at the initial stage, they will need to be replaced – and bought – in future. The peer pressure of the group can ensure that each woman is able to put aside a few rupees per meeting, thus ensuring the necessary funds to buy new seeds next year. Possibly at a later stage the same group could even run a micro-loan scheme.

This case study received input from Sadia Begum and Piet Vochten.

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