

Gardens of Life

Kitchen gardens in the CIWC project communities are bringing communities together and helping women put organic food on their tables.



a. Basti Sheikhan Wali, Kot Addu, Taunsa Barrage
b. Muhammad Alam Meerani village, Guddu Barrage

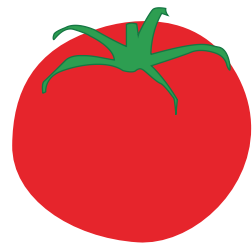
Rising food prices and lack of wholesome produce has become a matter of life and death. Through a socio-economic survey, the project teams were able to identify that lack of nutritious food affects people's health and ultimately their livelihood opportunities and aspirations. The survey was conducted at all project sites. Food laced with pesticides and grown with sewage water gives rise to diseases, ailments and avoidable medical expenses. It is also one of the main reasons why people choose to indulge in illegal overfishing: to provide sustenance for their family. In fishermen communities, seasonal vegetables, grown without harmful pesticides was a challenge. However, women associated with the local CBOs rose to meet the challenge head on and now proudly tell a tale of championing a cause close to their hearts, homes and hearths.

In Kot Addu, one of the pioneering kitchen gardeners is Haseena Mai of Basti Sheikhan Wali near Taunsa Barrage. A stout, sturdy woman with bright eyes, Haseena has become the go-to person for fresh vegetables. Without a male member of the large family to earn a proper living, Haseena had to rely on her wits to keep the family going. When the project team approached her with the idea of starting a kitchen garden, she was initially reluctant.

"I had a 10 marla plot (253m²)," she says. "I was always in fear of land-grabbers encroaching upon it. I didn't know what to do. Then I was told by the CBO and the project team to use the plot for a kitchen garden. It sounded like a lot of work. I am not a farmer. But after receiving training and seed packets, I took a chance because I had no other source of getting food."

Starting with her own kitchen, Haseena now shares her fresh produce with neighbours and friends with an open heart. She also maintains that the quality of her vegetables has compelled people from Kot Addu to come over and buy it from her.

"I didn't want to sell it but some people insisted that I take money for it. Previously I used to spend around Rs. 250 per day to buy vegetables from vendors to cook a meal for my family. Now I don't have to worry about going anywhere or spending money. I just have to walk to my plot to get what I need."



Kitchen gardens have brought communities together through the barter of various vegetables for grains, pulses, wheat and rice.

Haseena has grown cucumbers, onions, tomatoes, mint, green coriander, green chillies, radishes, spinach, peas, bitter gourd and okra. She is especially proud of her green salad. Her's is one of dozens of families that have benefitted from the innovative idea of a kitchen garden. Apart from the 25 households selected to participate in the kitchen gardening component of the project from the communities around Taunsa Barrage, a similar number of households were selected from all the communities around Guddu and Sukkur barrages. In total, 10 communities in the CIWC now have more than 100 kitchen gardens of large and small sizes, depending on the pieces of land available to them. A projected saving of Rs. 6,000 per kitchen gardening household, per month, is a reliable figure. It is a comforting thought for the participating families, which often don't earn enough to eat three meals a day.

According to the project teams and the project manager, Dr Masood Arshad, this project component shows homegrown innovation that has become an extremely useful part of the project. It supports the commitment to provide diversified livelihood options to the fisher communities. Through training, the communities, especially women, have learned about wholesome vegetables that are nutritious and easy to grow. With emphasis on doing away with the use of pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides, the vegetables grown in the kitchen gardens have an intense taste, heady aroma and great nutritional value. The sustainability of these kitchen gardens also becomes obvious with each season.

In Muhammad Alam Meerani village near Guddu Barrage, there are three combined plots dedicated for kitchen gardening by the community. Their harvest has included fresh spinach, zucchini, tomatoes, ash gourd, okra, Indian round gourd, green chillies, onions and radishes. Abid Hussain, the president of the CBO Sindhu Mallah Goth Sudhar Tanzeem, stresses the importance of kitchen gardens in his community.

"Some of the families registered with our CBO could only afford rotten vegetables that were left behind at the end of the day with sellers. Now, at least they don't have to eat rotten food



Fresh, nutritious lettuce grown in the kitchen gardens without any pesticides or harmful chemicals.



Resilient Haseena Bibi is a pioneer kitchen gardener affiliated with the project that other kitchen gardeners look up to.

which only made them sick."

Apart from providing sustenance, the kitchen gardens also teach the communities about sustainability. In Kot Addu, where the communities have larger gardens and biogas plants, slurry from the latter helps in keeping the harvest healthy. Using indigenous tips and tricks to keep pests away from vegetables has also ensured that the vegetables are organic. Additionally, in a move to signify their commitment to the project, fisher communities residing in Muhammad Chuttal Meerani, Sher Dil Mahar, Muhammad Alam Meerani and Chachran Sharif have discarded their illegal nets. They are now using them to protect their kitchen gardens from stray and wild animals, and theft. The nets have a smaller mesh size and were previously used to capture even the smallest of fish, which had not reached maturity. What was once used by the fishermen to destroy the lifecycle of fish in the Indus now protects what's used to sustain their families.

A quick talk with the community will show how they believe with all their hearts, that this is a better deal.



Kitchen gardens are sustainable and environment friendly, providing an alternative livelihood to those who would otherwise partake in illegal fishing, hunting or logging.