

How kitchen gardens are doing wonders in the remote villages of Odisha

Small patches of vegetable gardens at the backyards of the marginalised and resource-poor communities in the remote villages of Bargarh, Odisha show us the way to a sustainable solution

By [Trina Chakrabarti](#) / Published: Thursday 06 May 2021 / [Down To Earth](#)



In March 2020, the world suddenly came to a standstill as governments, medical practitioners, health workers and scientists began a long battle against the novel coronavirus or SARS-CoV-2. As most countries, India included, declared a nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the



virus, the world has not been the same since. We had to adapt to the ‘new normal’ — both at home and at workplaces — while we practiced precautions to avoid the infection.

In the midst of this, as all economic activities came to a halt, the lives of people from marginalised sections of our society were deeply impacted. The past thirteen months have brought back the focus on ‘survival’, as the importance of healthy eating habits and nutritious food intake has never before been — or seemed — so important.

It was all the more important for us Indians, as our country is home to the maximum number of malnourished children in the world. One out of every three children in our country is malnourished.

CRY – Child Rights and You is an organisation working to ensure children have access to food and nutritional security. It has been our constant endeavour to find creative solutions to every such hindrance in the path of a child’s growth and development process.

When access to healthy and nutritious food became a serious concern, especially in resource-poor states like Odisha, our partner organisations at the grass-roots level came up with an innovative solution.

This solution would not only provide the communities with a diverse and rich diet, but also build their immunity and resilience. Since our aim was to come up with sustainable solutions, one of the unique ways we tried to combat hunger and nutritional security was by promoting the creation of kitchen gardens.

How did we and our partner organisation do it? Come, listen to Trilochan and Nirmali Bhoi. Their family has been one among the many who benefited greatly from this initiative. They are from Bhengrajpur village in Paikmal block, Bargarh district, Odisha.

Trilochan is a daily wage worker who lost his job during the lockdown and it greatly impacted his family’s chances of survival. He has two children and his wife Nirmali is a lactating mother. Her need for nutritious and wholesome food too couldn’t be ignored.



CRY's field staff working in the area got in touch with her and encouraged them to plant vegetables in the small piece of land that they had beside their hut. The idea was to create a small kitchen garden with locally available, supplemental and nutritious plants and vegetables.

“Initially, I was a little sceptic about it”, recalls Trilochan. “I couldn't imagine how just a couple of papaya, moringa and bitter gourd plants could meet up all our needs!” But the idea caught Nirmali's fancy, as she wanted to give it a try.

“We were already starving, so what worse could happen to us,” she said. They thus sprouted their small patch of green. In a couple of months, the garden started providing for the family's consumption. In a couple of months, it also turned out to be a viable livelihood option for the family as well.

Nirmali planted papaya, moringa, okra, cow pea, pumpkin, coriander, guar and bitter gourd plants. As the days went by, the kitchen garden not only helped the family put nutritious food on their plate, but increased their income by enabling them to sell the surplus produce to their neighbours.

Nirmali's successful venture has inspired her neighbours to follow her footsteps, paving the way for a healthier future for the children of this village.

Western Odisha is an area that is particularly plagued by maternal and child malnourishment. Our partners from the state have been leading this fight against malnutrition through promoting kitchen gardens.

The more pregnant and lactating mothers, households with adolescent children as well as severely underweight children adopt the practice, the better they will be able to fight for their survival.

The areas CRY works in face serious issues like [drought](#) and [migration](#) and the [kitchen](#) garden has proved to be not only an innovative but also a practical solution for the tribal populations we serve.



Our field workers at the grass roots level have been mobilising and motivating the cash-strapped and resource-poor communities we work with to adopt this healthy practice.

What has also helped are the government resources like saplings and seeds of [moringa](#) and other plants like papaya, chilly, banana, maize, beans, brinjal and other vegetables, that can be easily resourced locally. With a directed push and planned implementation by the government that has already started taking shape, kitchen gardens are showing us a pathway towards a healthier future.

This is proof enough that when intent and action come together, wonders can happen! As the ancient proverb goes, when you give someone a bowl of rice, you can only feed them for a day, but when you teach them how to grow their own food, you save their lives

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Sources: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/food/how-kitchen-gardens-are-doing-wonders-in-the-remote-villages-of-odisha-76806>