

<https://swachhindia.ndtv.com/national-nutrition-week-2020-gujarat-ngo-helps-distressed-families-grow-kitchen-gardens-during-covid-19-pandemic-to-improve-their-nutritional-well-being-49304/>

Gujarat NGO Helps Distressed Families Grow Kitchen Gardens During COVID-19 Pandemic To Improve Their Nutritional Well-Being

National Nutrition Week 2020 India: Gujarat based NGO Utthan has helped over 2,500 women in rural areas of Gujarat in setting up 'emergency kitchen gardens' in and around their house with an aim to provide nutrition security to over one lakh families as each woman growing vegetables shares the produce with three other families

[Gujarat](#), [National Nutrition Month](#), [Nutrition](#)

Written By: [Barkha Mathur](#) | Edited By: [Sonia Bhaskar](#)

| September 13, 2020 12:47 PM |



Women show the way in two districts of Gujarat to grow kitchen gardens to meet nutrition needs of their families and those around them during the COVID-19 lockdown

HIGHLIGHTS

- Kitchen gardens are providing 700 gm/day for vegetable to one lakh families
- Vegetables supply vital vitamins and minerals for a healthy body: Experts
- Women grow nutrient rich vegetables like bottle gourd, okra, Ridge gourd

New Delhi: The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it unprecedented challenges for everybody but the worst of it is being faced by the economically vulnerable communities who

were already on the margin and living hand-to-mouth. The loss of daily wages due to the lockdown and the inability to meet basic needs of food and nutrition led lakhs of migrant workers to return to their villages. As they migrated back to their villages, the added burden of feeding extra mouths back in the village further aggravated the existing financial difficulties. In a cash strapped situation, most of the time families compromise on their nutrition and restrict buying vegetables and fruits to prioritise other expenses. With an aim to encourage people in rural areas to grow their own vegetables and eat healthy without any extra cost, Utthan, a non-governmental organisation based in Gujarat started setting up 'emergency kitchen gardens' at the homes of families impacted by the [COVID-19](#) lockdown in Dahod and Bhavnagar district of Gujarat.

Also Read: [This Is How The Dairy Model In Gujarat Is Ending Malnutrition Among Kids](#)

While speaking with NDTV about the initiative, Pallavi Sobti Rajpal, Deputy CEO of Utthan said that the months of May and June provided favourable climatic conditions for the growth of vegetables as monsoon was setting in. She said,

Kitchen garden kits were provided to over 2,500 families across 53 villages in Dahod and Mahisagar, tribal dominated districts and Bhavnagar, a coastal district. Six truthful varieties of seeds of Okra, cluster beans, black eyed pea, bottle gourd, bitter gourd, sponge gourd/ridged gourd were provided to these families. The bio fertilizer requirement was met collectively by groups women's federations trained by Utthan who produced it. One kit that costs Rs. 350 each is adequate for around 1000-1500 square feet of land around people's homes. An important component of this initiative is that each family maintaining a kitchen garden has to share the produce with three families. Thus, improving nutritional well-being of over one lakh families. In the next phase we are upscaling this to 5000 more families.

She further said that the worst sufferers in families that have poor access to food are women and girls, as the patriarchal practices in our country lead to prioritisation of feeding the male members of the family. She said,

During the initial days of lockdown, we identified a few issues that were gripping the rural areas of Gujarat. Food and nutrition security was found to be a major issue along with loss of livelihood, restricted movement and lack of access to health facilities. The food relief announced by the central government in terms of ration was only catering to the needs of grains along with which only 1 kg of gram was being provided. This relief also came to many people at village level quite late-till April 20-25- because of poor clarity within the administration and the lockdown which caused a supply chain disruption in various districts especially in the tribal and coastal region. People who were daily wagers were the worst affected by this. In Gujarat, there is a culture of storing grains at home but it is difficult for those who have a hand to mouth existence every day. Additionally, the support announced covers merely 15 days of grain support. Also, a family cannot survive only on grains. The

number of people to be fed in the family also increased during this period due to reverse migration. So the Public Distribution System does fall short in many ways.

Ms. Rajpal added that the organisation's field team provided trainings and conducted various hands on sessions to one member of the family, mostly women on how to set up the garden, sow seeds and take care of the plants. Ms. Rajpal highlighted at least 15 per cent of these families are absolutely landless who opted to grow the garden on their terrace or in sacks. The organisation has been monitoring each kitchen garden closely through regular visits and also by involving the panchayat representatives. Since the organisation has been working in Dahod and Bhavnagar districts for over four decades on issues of livelihood, gender and agriculture, they have already gained the trust of the people and built relationship with community leaders, women's Self Help Groups and village development committees. These groups are instrumental in identifying the marginalised and ensuring that families who grow kitchen gardens share the produce with other families. Ms. Rajpal said,

Till now, we have received only positive feedback from the families. It is such a heartening to see how people living at subsistence level are ready to help each other in times of crisis like these.

Also Read: [Surat Based NGO Offers Skill Training, Ration To Sex Workers Amid COVID-19 Crisis](#)

Kitchen Gardens To Provide Nutritional Security During Financial Crisis Instigated By The Pandemic

According to Ms. Rajpal, the rural areas of Dahod and Mahisagar which has a Scheduled Tribes dominant population are dependent on migrant income, agriculture and animal husbandry. In Bhavnagar district, most people are dependent on daily wage work and agriculture. While most men are involved in the diamond industry, women work as labourers in the agriculture sector. However, with the imposition of the COVID-19 lockdown, almost all the daily wage workers and migrants lost livelihood. The villages have seen an unprecedented return of almost all the residents. Many walked long distances without food and water and hence got very sick, she said. Some who went back a second time to find a source of livelihood when the country started easing the restrictions in June are also back now after failing to find any work. Those involved in farming in these districts are farmers with landholding smaller than one acre, said Ms. Rajpal. She further said that these marginal farmers faced further cash crunch and food crisis because the Rabi crop (wheat) could not be sold at fair prices in the market because of which some of them could not sow kharif crop. With this, both the districts also witnessed a surge in employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Act (MNREGA), said Ms. Rajpal.

Both of my sons were working in the city, one as rickshaw-puller and the other one as a construction worker. Both lost livelihood during the lockdown in April and we had to borrow about Rs. 10,000 from my son's previous employer for some emergency needs here at home. For about two months, even my husband who is farm labourer couldn't find work. So all three of them got enrolled under NREGA. Each of them gets an income of Rs. 224 per day which was revised from Rs. 198 by the state government due to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. The wages are minimum but enough to help us sustain here. We are yet to pay off the loan, said Wahidaben, a 35-year-old woman from Konjdi village of Mahuva block in BHavnagar district.

Wahidaben who is an APL (Above Poverty Line) ration cardholder does not get any foodgrains from the government. She added that two women in her neighbourhood have set up kitchen garden at their homes and she has been taking vegetables from one of them since last three weeks. This has not only helped her in feeding her family nutritious food but also saved her some money which she can use for buying grains. She said,

My neighbour Rehmatben is kind enough to share the vegetables produced in her kitchen garden with me whenever I need. She has given me about 1.5 kgs each of bottle gourd, bitter gourd and lady fingers and some black eyed pea. This has saved me almost Rs. 500 considering how expensive vegetables are in this area. I do not have any land because of which I could not grow my own vegetables but I am thankful to Rehmatben who is always ready to share.

Acknowledging the role of kitchen gardens in making people self-reliant in terms of nutrition and food security Renukaben Ganva, Taluka Development Officer, Kadana block of Dahid district said that over 60 per cent of population of the district comes under BPL (Below Poverty Line) and nutrition is one of the biggest challenges that come with poverty. She said,

The district has poor health and nutrition related statistics but we are constantly working hard to improve the situation. There is a lack of awareness and also a lack of acceptance towards change among the people. I am new in this district but what I gathered is that culturally, people are used to eating only carbohydrates in the form of wheat and rice. It can be because there is a grain support from the government through Public Distribution System. However, decentralised efforts like creating kitchen gardens and growing vegetables at home can go a long way in ensuring nutrition security as vegetables are a great source of nutrition. I am glad to know that women are significantly involved in this initiative and are even making their own fertiliser. Healthy people are economically more productive which will help pulling these families out of poverty in the long run.

Also Read: [Gujarat Adds Toor Dal In Ration List Of Groceries To Fight Malnutrition In The State](#)

Balanced Diet And Dietary Diversity Via Home Grown Vegetables

Gitaben Parghi, 30-year-old from Karmel village of Fatehpura block in Dahod district is among 2,500 plus people who receive support from Utthan in developing the kitchen garden. Gitaben's husband is a farm labourer. She has a 13-year-old son and 9 year-old-daughter. She created her kitchen garden on a patch of empty land near her house. She said,

Initially, there was a rumour in our village that coronavirus is spreading through vegetables also. We were all very scared and did not buy any vegetables for almost a month. Along with this, there were also the financial problems that we were facing at that time. The costs of vegetables were soaring and my husband who is a farm labourer was unable to get any money home after the harvest of the Rabi crop was over. I feel proud of my kitchen garden because we are able to eat fresh vegetables every day without worrying about purchasing any. I planted the vegetable in June and have been enjoying the produce since past one month.

Gitaben further said that she shares the produce with three families in her neighbourhood. She said,

Whenever they need the vegetables, they come and we give them. It makes me happy to see that other parents are able to feed their children nutritious food because of my efforts. I am saying this because my daughter was born pre-mature, before completing seven months and since her birth she has been facing health related complications. It is necessary that she eats good food. I was very worried because we were not able to buy any vegetables for my daughter. Now as I am growing my own vegetables, I am no longer worried. Not only am I able to feed my daughter good vegetables that have no chemicals or pesticides, I also feel empowered and have a sense of food security. My children have also developed an interest in taking up gardening as hobby and help me in maintaining the garden.

According to Jitendra Maru, 48-year-old field staff member of Utthan, the organisation has been working on building awareness among people in the rural areas on following a more balanced diet by including more vegetables in their plate. He said,

We have been receiving positive response from the families. Most of them say that they will continue maintaining the kitchen garden even after the crisis is over. They have a sense of security and the practice of growing one's own food does allow people to eat a diverse variety of vegetables and even legumes.

Lata Taivyad, another member of Utthan's field team said that balanced food intake contributes to the well-being of women and helps overcome common health issues like anaemia. She said,

We tell the communities that one of the easiest ways of ensuring access to adequate macro and micro nutrients is to produce and consume different kinds of vegetables in their kitchen garden which can be established and maintained on a small patch of land with minimum technical and financial inputs.

She further highlighted that while the state government provides a supplementary nutrition rich food item called 'Sukhri' to children every day and 'Poshan Ahaar' to pregnant women under ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme), there is not much focus on the nutritional needs of non-pregnant women and men in the state. She said,

Barring the first few days of the lockdown, when the work of Anganwadis was completely shut, there has been timely supply of supplementary nutrition and take-home-rations for children and pregnant women. But what about other women and men? I believe that the pandemic has been an eye-opening event for all of us that has shown how important it is for people to learn how to grow their own food.

Also Read: [For A Malnutrition-Free Gujarat, State's Chief Minister Vijay Rupani Launched The Two-Year Nutrition Campaign](#)

“It Is No Regular Garden, It Is My Garden Of Hope,” Says 40-Year-Old Rehmatben Sheikh

For Rehmatben Sheikh, 40-year-old from Konjdi village, Mahuva Block of Bhavnagar district, the kitchen garden created by her with support from Utthan is a source of hope and pride. She lost her husband 10 years ago and has three sons of age 20 years, 18 years and 17 years. Being a single parent of three children she picked up many petty jobs to raise her kids and sent them to school. Before losing her livelihood due to the lockdown, she used to work as a daily wage worker. Her two elder sons who worked in a brick kiln in Kutch returned back due to closure. Until now, they have got a week of work each under NREGA. Only recently, Rehmatben has found work at a local onion dehydration unit in Mahuva town, Bhavnagar. Rehmatben believes becoming a cultivator and growing food for her family is one of her biggest achievements. She said,

When I got to know about the training that Utthan was conducting on kitchen gardening, I also went and participated. While Utthan's field team was more than enthusiastic to support me, my neighbours and relatives laughed at me because I decided to create a garden on my home's terrace as I had no land available for growing anything. For creating a roof garden, I put a layer of cement on the roof so that it doesn't get damaged with the water, then I put a layer of bricks on it. Over the bricks I put mud along with fertilisers and started sowing seeds. Now those very neighbours and relatives are in awe of my efforts. I share the produce from my garden with three other families. If I am able to produce even more, I may think of selling in the market too. This is no regular garden for me, it is my garden of hope.

Can Kitchen Garden Improve The Current Status Of Malnutrition And Existing Vulnerabilities In Dahod And Bhavnagar Districts Of Gujarat?

According to Ms. Rajpal, Dahod has the worst nutrition-related indicators among the districts of Gujarat. The last edition of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) conducted in 2015-16 show in the rural areas of Dahod, 44.9 per cent children under five years are stunted or have low-height-for-age which is worse than the state's average of 42.9 per cent. About 25.1 per cent are wasted or have low-weight-for-height which is slightly better than the state's average of 28.5 per cent. Almost 51.7 per cent children under five years in the rural areas of Dahod are underweight or have low-weight-for-age which is worse than the state's average of 44.2 per cent. The rural areas of Dahod also a poor performer when it comes to tackling anaemia as 59.6 per cent children aged 6-59 months are anaemic but when compared with the state's average of 64.6 per cent, it is better. NFHS-4 data also reveals that less than 8 per cent mothers had antenatal care in rural areas in the district against the state's average of 24 per cent and only 27 per cent of the children in rural areas are fully immunised while almost 50.4 per cent children in the state have received full immunisation. About 58 per cent of all women in the age group 15-49 years in the rural areas of Dahod are anaemic which is at par with the state's average of 57.5 per cent. According to Laxman Rathod, a field officer at Utthan, Dahod is also one of the districts of Gujarat that has a high prevalence of child marriage especially among girls in the age group 15-17 years. He further said because of early marriage and childbirth, most women in this area suffer from various health issues. He also highlighted that because the hamlets villages of Dahod are quite dispersed, tough local geography together with a poor level of literacy and development, means information about entitlements and announcements of the various scheme are very slow to reach.

The NFHS-4 data for Bhavnagar shows that in rural areas of the district, 48.5 per cent children under five years are stunted which is worse than Dahod and the state average. The statistics for children under five years suffering from wasting and are underweight (23.9 per cent and 43.7 per cent respectively) are better than Dahod and the state. However, 66.4 per cent children in the age group 6-59 months are anaemic which is more than that of Dahod and the state as a whole. Only about 52 per cent of children in Bhavnagar are fully immunised. 12 per cent of mothers in the rural areas received proper antenatal care in Bhavnagar. About 54 per cent of all women in the age group 15-49 years in the rural areas of Bhavnagar district is anaemic which is better in comparison to the state as a whole.

According to Basanta Kumar Kar, an expert in the field of nutrition and recipient of the Global Nutrition Leadership Award, in any adverse situation, those hit the hardest are children, adolescents, pregnant and lactating mothers who may be anaemic, malnourished, need

additional nutrition, special care and support. Such vulnerable groups could cope with safety programmes and community self-help care, he said, adding that communities becoming self-reliant in food production, nutrition and food safety is an important step towards helping them. He said,

“It is necessary to stop food and nutrition disruption at local level and improve sustained availability, accessibility and consumption of safe and nutritious diets at the household level. It is the basic premise for India to ever reach a malnutrition-free status.”

He explained how local-level food production and kitchen gardens have helped improve iron deficiency among women in the states of Sikkim and Chhattisgarh. He highlighted that making people self-reliant in terms of food and nutrition would address calorie inadequacy, hidden hunger and lack of protein and micronutrients. This, along with better access to WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) and improved healthcare facilities at the village level would improve the statistics related nutrition and health in the rural areas.

Also Read: [In Gujarat, 1000 Adolescent Girls Are Learning About Nutrition And Fighting Anaemia](#)

NDTV – Dettol Banega Swasth India campaign is an extension of the five-year-old Banega Swachh India initiative helmed by Campaign Ambassador Amitabh Bachchan. It aims to spread awareness about critical health issues facing the country. In wake of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the need for WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) is reaffirmed as handwashing is one of the ways to prevent Coronavirus infection and other diseases. The campaign highlights the importance of nutrition and healthcare for women and children to prevent maternal and child mortality, fight malnutrition, stunting, wasting, anaemia and disease prevention through vaccines. Importance of programmes like Public Distribution System (PDS), Mid-day Meal Scheme, POSHAN Abhiyan and the role of Aganwadis and ASHA workers are also covered. Only a Swachh or clean India where toilets are used and open defecation free (ODF) status achieved as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, can eradicate diseases like diarrhoea and become a Swasth or healthy India. The campaign will continue to cover issues like air pollution, waste management, plastic ban, manual scavenging and sanitation workers and menstrual hygiene.