



Nutrition gardens – A promising intervention in the post COVID scenario

Lakshmi Unnithan



Women started kitchen gardens in Badi harvesting nutritious vegetables

As the World grapples with the devastating consequences of the spread of the novel coronavirus, nations are faced with multiple questions that go well beyond the direct impact of contracting the disease. We are dealing with massive loss of livelihoods, unemployment, hunger, and a decline in overall health status of citizens.

The lockdown has had detrimental impact on the agricultural economy even though the government had announced certain measures to protect farmers, however, disruptions in the food

supply chain have significantly impacted farmers across the nation, with small and marginal farmers forced to bear the maximum shock. Farmers have been struggling to harvest and trade perishables for many reasons including shortage of workforce, transportation, and limited market operations.

There are other challenges we have forgotten in the times of COVID pandemic is the extreme weather patterns, water stress, soil degradation that threatens the future supply of food. Diversification of agricultural production can help address these environmental challenges and transition from 'calorie-rich' to 'nutrition-rich' food systems. Developing sustainable food value chains could drive food system transformation.

When in Lockdown what we only think of is to how to get clean food and nutritious at the same time. We have come a long way in terms of being away from whole foods to fat filled burgers and pastas. There was a time when we used to eat food grown in the backyards and we still have many a backyards in Kerala. The idea of local is a novelty these days as to every thing local is given a stamp of modernity and are available right in the supermarkets.

There are many movements nationwide to encourage the nutrition gardens and all the more, local vegetables needs to be incorporated as they definitely improve the nutrition and health, community, culture and ecology.

The Chhattisgarh government, for instance, recognizing its importance has made Badi development a point in their flagship programme called Badi development a point in their flagship programme called NGGB (Narwa Garu-a GhuruaBadi) and has already started work in this direction issuing guidelines around how to develop Badis. Government incentives to develop the so called Back yard home gardens also should actually bring in changes in the direction of Food Security and Nutrition in these challenging times of Weather and Pandemics.

According to a report by PRADAN (Arpon Bhattacharjee and Ajay Gupta, Agriculture World, June 2020) Somi Baghel, a marginal farmer belonging to Bastar, Chhattisgarh, has an inspiring tale when they decided to develop their Badi and they started getting support under multiple programmes of NABARD, district horticulture department, MGNREGA and PRADAN to develop Badi and learn newer techniques of farming that would get them decent earnings.

This gave them a platform to participate in changed ways of farming like growing nutritious kitchen garden in her BADI. BADI is invariably found in all tribal households are planted, with maize, millets and nutritious local vegetables like papayas, moringas, some perennial vines like ivy gourd, ash gourd and green leafy varieties all of which provide a critical supply of cash and food items at times of need. Badis are a priceless resource for rural tribal farmers, particularly women. Many researches conducted around home-steads and its multifaceted role in the well being of rural households also support this argument. The Post COVID scenario saw an increase in women registering for such programmes to developing their BADIS for Food Security.

Localicious is a People's Movement for Local Food and is an initiative by Krishna McKenzie, Solitude Cafe, Auroville, Pondicherry. And all the more Local foods are hardy and are easier to grow in abundance. They need little care and we just have to grow it to water it. It grows easily and is packed full of nutrients and is an economically viable option for everyone. The huge diversity of nutritious spinaches, yams or green papaya could be tapped if the entire community consciously eats a few times a week. There would be a profound change in our consciousness, as we would be reclaiming our connection with mother earth and our nutritional needs. The post

Covid Scenario saw an increase in the number of people who signed for Solitudes community vegetable baskets.

Utthan, an organization from Gujarat was in continuous contact with the communities it serves and they noticed that in the Covid times many villages did not have easy access to vegetables or quality sustainable seed varieties. Being cash strapped, most families would not prioritise vegetable purchase. The worst sufferers would be women and children, as patriarchal practices in families lead to prioritisation of others. Many landless families do not even have the option to grow vegetables.

Kitchen garden kits were provided to 2514 families across 53 villages. Six varieties of seeds were provided to 864 families in coastal and 1650 in tribal areas. The biofertilizer requirement was collectively taken care by Women's Groups and Sustainable agriculture women trainers. The kit was apt for around 1000-1500 sq.ft. of designated land area or for land around people's homes. Locally researched and truthful seed varieties of lady's finger, cluster beans, black eyed pea, bottle gourd, bitter gourd, sponge gourd/ridge gourd were distributed under safety guidelines developed by Utthan wherein use of masks, gloves and distancing by team and village volunteers were ensured. Panchayats and village leaders were roped in with good results. The complementary efforts to ensure good practices included use of digital awareness through pamphlets, videos on package of practices and bio pesticide production by women trainers in 'sustainable agriculture practices'.

The consciousness building efforts for compassion needed during this crisis has led to a commitment by 2514 families to support another 7500 families, especially those who are landless and are unable to grow vegetables due to lack of land or water resources. This is estimated to support nutrition security of 700 grams/ day of vegetable supplies to 7500 families for 2.5 months between mid July to September'20. This quantity suffices for the needs of an average family size of six.

There should be more movements like these where in we understand the importance of adding nutrition by growing diverse food baskets through nutrition gardens. Utmost importance needs to be given to the well being of women and children at these challenging times and none other than local vegetable that could give us immunity than any imported fruit and vegetables. There is definitely a need for like-minded farmers also who are ready to dive in and start valuing their cultural farming heritage, to explore and help create a community with them that will honour them financially.

Lakshmi Unnithan

Editor – Agriculture World

Head PR & Communication

KRISHI JAGRAN, DSR AGRI MEDIA PVT LTD

60/9, 3rd Floor, Yusuf Sarai Market

Near Green Park Metro Station, New Delhi-110016

E-mail: dr.lakshmi@krishijagran.com