

FROM SMALL SEEDS – A KITCHEN GARDEN PROJECT FOR WOMEN IN THE BHITARKANIKA AREA OF ODISHA

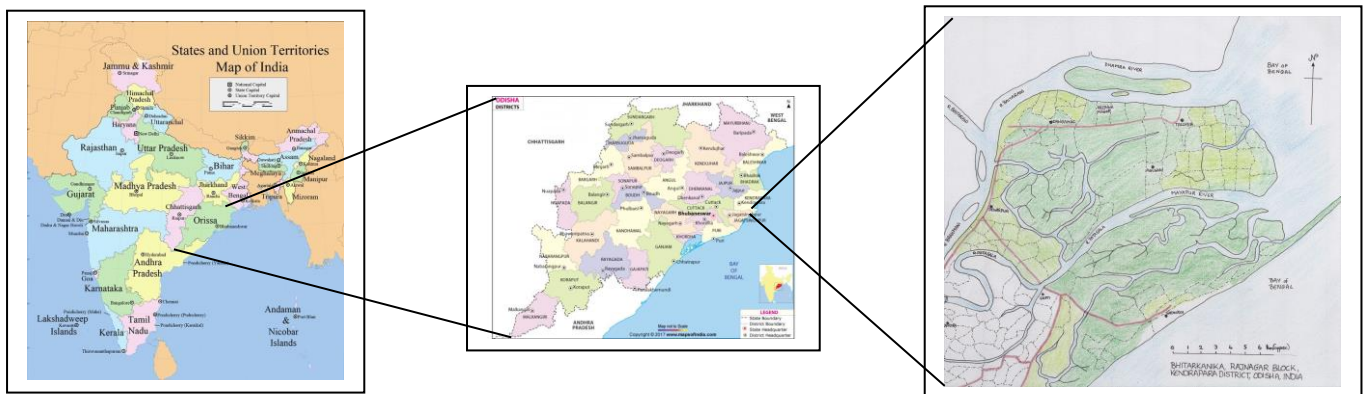


The **aim** of this project is to provide relief during the Covid pandemic and into the future, by helping to improve the diet of families and increase their income. The prospect of hunger is one of the key issues currently facing people across India.

While both men and women traditionally carry out the growing of vegetables, this project is aimed primarily at improving the horticultural skills of women thus increasing their capacity to contribute to the family income. They will do this by sustainably increasing the range, quantity and quality of the fruit and vegetables that they produce, enabling their families to have a better diet, while selling surpluses as individuals or together.

Stage 1 will focus on 400 women in ten villages of the three Gram Panchayats of Dangamal, Krishnanagar and Talchua in Bhitarkanika, Rajnagar, Kendrapara, Odisha (see map below).

Stage 2 – depends on availability of funding, but if we are able to raise the money we plan to implement this in the following year. Stage 2 will use the Stage 1 villages as a model and, using key Stage 1 participants as voluntary peer educators, apply the lessons learnt to a further 800 women in neighbouring villages and beyond. Stage 2 will run for the same time length, but in the following year, having allowed the work of Stage 1 to be firmly established and consolidated.



The project area is shown in the right-hand map, on the northern edge of Bhitarkanika National Park which is the area coloured green. The three Gram Panchayats, Dangamal, Krushnanagar and Talchua, either abut or are close to the Baitarani River.

Background

The project will be based in Odisha in an area along the coast of the Bay of Bengal. It will focus on three Gram Panchayats on the northern edge of Bhitarkanika National Park, by the Baitarani River. This is a relatively remote corner of Odisha, one of the poorest states of India. It has a mixed population of distinct communities: indigenous tribal people, people of Odishan origin, and descendants of migrants from Bengal, some of which are fishing communities. Land tenure in the area is a complicated issue, with many families not yet owning the deeds to their land. About 45% are marginal farmers, growing paddy. Most of the remainder are wage labourers, dependent on seasonal agricultural work. There is little opportunity for employment except for work that arises from tourism associated with Bhitarkanika National Park, within which the villages are set. Dangamal is one of the main entry points into the park, providing a flourishing but seasonal boat hire trade, and restaurant/snack facilities for visitors. In addition, there are a number of forestry-related opportunities, though these are relatively few. Talchua is a small fishing port. Underemployment is a major issue, and many young men, particularly, migrate to other parts of India and to the Gulf in order to earn money to boost the family incomes. For the women, there is little opportunity for employment, other than seasonal farm work, and the woman's role is seen primarily as that of home-maker and carer.

The number below the Poverty Line (BPL), varies from village to village, but averages 65%, twice that of the state (32.59%), in a state which already has the second highest BPL level in India (21.92% BPL).

Agriculture is primarily focussed on the production of paddy, and many families have small kitchen gardens where they grow a limited amount of vegetables to supplement the family diet. The quality of soil in the kitchen gardens is generally poor, and the skill level in vegetable growing is basic. Families buy in commercial seed and fertiliser and pesticides, and have little understanding of how they can improve the quality of their land and increase fruit and vegetable production.

Our partner, CHALE CHALO, has been working in Kendrapara District for fifteen years. With a small team, they have mobilised countless volunteers to carry out restoration and protection of mangrove forest, environment education in schools and the community, income generation through Women's Self-help Groups, access to government schemes and benefits, and the promotion of sustainable agriculture. A particular success of local villagers is the campaign against illegal prawn farming, run by a criminal mafia. The construction of these ponds had caused loss of trees and mangrove along the river banks, and has led to soil erosion and water pollution. The campaign led to the destruction of over 400 illegal ponds, and the land is now being returned to forest. This campaign called for enormous courage in the face of threats of violence from the mafia, and proved that these communities have the capacity to organise and work well together.

Near to the proposed project area, volunteers have carried out a pilot for creating and developing kitchen gardens and homestead orchards. It is the success of these that has inspired the idea for this project, and they provide the well-tested foundation of our approach. A photograph of one of these gardens can be seen above. Over the years that our partners have been working in the District, they have built good working relationships with local government, especially the Forestry and Horticulture Departments. They are highly respected by the local communities and have built a reputation for effectiveness, transparency and integrity, qualities which are rare and precious in the area.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Stage 1

Preliminary

- Women's meetings in proposed villages to discuss the project
- Survey of existing village kitchen gardens
- Visits to Balaram's village kitchen gardens (Note: Balaram is a volunteer who has led the initiative for kitchen gardens, homestead orchards, compost and pesticide making, and seed banks in villages near to the project area)

Training on

- Veg. growing – requirements of vegetables, improving production and quality
- Nurseries for fruit trees – raising from seed
- Caring for fruit trees
- Compost-making
- Pesticide-making
- Grafting – to reproduce trees which are difficult to raise from seed
- Growing for sale – as individuals and as groups, direct and to middlemen

The training will concentrate on learning through practical work, from those with practical experience, and expert input as appropriate. CHALE CHALO has a large number of volunteers with considerable experience in all these areas.

Action:

- Setting up vegetable gardens
- Planting of fruit trees
- Establishing nursery beds
- Establishing tree nurseries
- Compost-making
- Pesticide-making
- Forming village seed banks
- Establishing ways of selling surplus produce, either as individuals or in groups.
- Provision of ongoing advice and support of project participants.

Stage 2

- Identifying potential volunteer peer educators
- Identifying Stage 2 beneficiaries through women-led village-based meetings of potential participants.
- Providing the volunteers with leadership and presentational skills and support
- Providing expertise and training as necessary
- Providing admin and organisational support to volunteers.

Much of Stage 2 Activity will depend on the confidence, skills and capacity of the women volunteers, and a detailed plan for this work will be developed in the time between Stages 1 and 2.

Time Scale:

Stage 1 will run for seven months from June, 2021 to December, 2021.

Stage 2 will run for seven months from June, 2022 to December, 2022.

No of beneficiaries:

Stage 1: 400 women from 200-300 households, and their families.

Stage 2: 800 women from 400-600 households, and their families, plus continuing advice and support for the original Stage 1 participants.

Other contributing stakeholders:

CHALE CHALO volunteers, Horticulture Department, local PRI representatives

Staffing: Stage 1

1. Program Facilitator (Balaram)
2. Nursery Worker for raising Vegetables and Fruit Seedlings (Subrat)
3. Trainer & field support (3 months – Rama)

Budget: Stage 1 (Total Amount Rs.5,22,000 = £5,051)

1. Seasonal Vegetable Seeds for 400 women farmers: Rs. 400 x 400 = Rs.1,60,000
2. Nursery Development to raise and distribute papaya, drumstick, guava, jackfruit, brinjal, tomato, chilli seedlings, etc., among 400 families: Rs. 60,000
3. Training, demonstrations, exposure visits, expert input, handholding etc:
Rs.300 x 300 = Rs. 90,000
4. Program Facilitator: Rs.9,000 x 7 mons. = Rs. 63,000
5. Nursery Worker: Rs.7,000 x 7 mons. = Rs. 49,000
6. Trainer and field support: Rs.10,000 x 3 mons. = Rs.30,000
7. Transport of seedlings and project activities: Rs. 40,000
8. Admin. and Overheads: Rs. 30,000

The project will have the support of local farmers and keepers of kitchen gardens, as well as trained volunteers. They will contribute theoretical and local knowledge and practical skills. The beneficiaries will be active participants, and will enable and support the scaling up and replication of the project. This work of creating sustainable family kitchen gardens will help improve family diets, support the recovery of lost livelihoods and nutrition deficiency due to Covid situation, and will help boost immune system to fight COVID pandemic.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The project will be overseen by the Director of CHALE CHALO, and the Project Officer will provide weekly reports on activities, with monthly reviews of progress. Brief updates will be provided to IVDT on a monthly basis, and more detailed reports with photographs three-monthly. It is unlikely that IVDT will be able to make a monitoring visit in the current year, so it will depend on reliable documentation of project activities in order to ensure that work is on track, and it is the responsibility of the Director of CHALE CHALO to ensure that this is provided as required. It is hoped that in due course IVDT will be able to make a visit to the project area, and will then be able to make a retrospective assessment.



On the left is a homestead pit which provides a rapid turnover in the production of compost. It is this that makes a valuable contribution to improving soil quality.

On the right a group of women is being interviewed by our Eco-Radio programme about the seed bank that they have set up to preserve local varieties that are especially suited to the conditions of their area. Activities such as these play an important role in creating sustainable kitchen gardens.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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