



Shreeja India

# KITCHEN GARDENING PROJECT REPORT

2023



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*One of our Shreeja Girls, Priyanka Majhi sowing seeds in her own backyard*

### **Nutri-Homes Project**

Shreeja India is a non-profit CSO working towards engaging, educating, and enriching girls from marginalized and backward communities in India. Based on the concept of sports for development, Shreeja India uses both, sports and education as powerful vehicles for social change and for holistic development of individual girls. Our goal is to empower girls and women and enable them to realize their full potentials to build a gender-equitable society. At present, Shreeja India is working with more than 500+ tribal girls in 80 villages in West Bengal. In October 2019, as part of a developmental initiative, a ‘Nutrition Gardening’ pilot project was implemented in Birbhum district with 25 households. Over time the feedback from these recipients revealed the positive impact of the initiative. The endeavour has so far covered 100 households from both the intervening districts. Shreeja India is now scaling up this ‘Kitchen Garden’ or ‘Nutri-homes’ initiative as a sustainable project for ensuring food security and livelihood opportunity for marginalized girls and their families in West Bengal. Consequently, Kitchen gardening and training started with a new set of households in May 2022 in Shreeja India’s Rajnagar facility and on November 2022 in Shreeja India’s Dhatrigram facility. 56 Shreeja Girls were given 11 local and every day consumed nutritious vegetable seeds. **Tomato, Chilli, Eggplant, Long beans, Pumpkin, Cucumber, Radish, Lady Finger, Spinach, Coriander, and Beans.** The distribution of the seeds, Supervising, Monitoring, and reporting was done by our Shreeja Teachers.



### **The Context:**

Food and nutrition are essential for the proper physical and mental development of a person. But unfortunately, India along with 88 other countries is likely to miss the global nutrition targets by 2025, according to the *Global Nutrition Report 2020*. India is also identified as the country with one of the highest numbers of malnutrition cases. A research survey conducted in 2017 revealed that India's "Adivasi" (Schedule Tribe) population, especially the women, are disproportionately affected by undernutrition and anaemia. At Shreeja India, we work with Schedule Tribes and other deprived populace who suffer from the same fate. They work mostly as farm and construction laborers and often have to migrate to other States for work. While their young girls grow up malnourished, their pregnant women also face health challenges leading to various health complications. Their daily diet mostly consists of edible leaves, rice, or rice starch only. They cannot afford nutritious fruits and vegetables from the market. Inadequate knowledge, lack of awareness, and poverty make malnutrition a real threat among the target people we work with.

### **Rationale:**

The lack of food security within the community has worsened with the onset of the pandemic covid-19 leading to lockdown and increased unemployment. Based on the success of the 'Nutrition Gardening' project in Birbhum earlier, there is a genuine demand from both communities for scaling up and continuing the intervention. This will sustainably solve the problem related to food and health conditions and simultaneously provide them with additional income generation opportunities in the near future.

### **Why 'Nutri-Homes'?**

Kitchen gardening can be an excellent way to supplement food production and improve livelihoods in rural areas. It can be established and maintained on a small patch of land with minimal technical inputs. Kitchen gardens provide rural resource-poor communities with a platform for innovations in supplemental food production as well as an opportunity to improve their livelihoods. The establishment of kitchen gardens in rural areas is comparatively easy due to the availability of space and farm families already engaged in agriculture practices. Homestead production of fruits and vegetables provides households with direct access to



important nutrients that may not be readily available or within their economic reach. With this backdrop, Shreeja India's Kitchen Garden Project' was initiated and has been going on yielding several vegetables. We also plan to integrate new nutritious seeds and saplings based on our beneficiary's needs because a diversified diet is the key to combating micronutrient deficiency in India.

### **Project Objectives:**

The primary objectives of Shreeja India's *Nutri-Homes* project are to help marginalized tribal communities to:

1. Create awareness of the benefits of having their own nutrition gardens in their backyards.
2. Impart training and provide essential materials to produce and maintain backyard gardens with nutritious fruits and vegetables regularly.
3. Generate employment within the backward community.
4. Impart leadership training for the beneficiary girls.
5. Improve the quality of lives of all the target beneficiaries.

### **Target Beneficiary Group:**

The primary beneficiaries of the program are rural young girls (10-20 years) and their families from deprived populations. The program is now catering to 56 households from 27 villages of Rajnagar, Birbhum, and Kalna I (Dhatrigran), Purba Bardhaman district respectively. The populace in the remote intervening area remains one of the pivotal focuses of Shreeja India as they are stricken by poverty and decades of deprivation.

### **Villages:**

**Birbhum:** Agay Bandhi, Alighar, Babupur, Baganpara, Bagtipara, Baromesya, Bhurkunda, Borkonda, Gobra, Gurjandihi, Gorkata, Horhore, Kalihir, Keledihi, Sahabad, Sunderkhele

**Purba Bardhaman:** Badhagachi, Belkuli, Dhatrigran, Dhoba, Durgapur, Gramkalna, Keshabpur, Malatipur, Moyal, Niralgachi, Pearinagar



### **Names of the Participants from both districts**

BIRBHUM		PURBA BARDHAMAN	
1	Ameli Murmu	1	Sonali Soren
2	Sakhi Tudu	2	Mitali Mondal
3	Chandana Tudu	3	Kabita Mandi
4	Rubini Kisku	4	Arpita Baskey
5	Marie Mardi	5	Priti Mukherjee
6	Bimal Hemram	6	Riya Majhi
7	Mongoli Murmu	7	Soniya Khatoon
8	Kirandevi Baski	8	Rupali Murmu
9	Sundori Hemram	9	Priyanka Debnath
10	Sonamoni Hasda	10	Sumi Khatum
11	Susmita Hasda	11	Suniya Mandi
12	Mina Hasda	12	Bristi Mandi
13	Rupali Tudu	13	Rima Mahara
14	Shila Soren	14	Annapura Adhikari
15	Rimpa Soren	15	Mallika Kohra
16	Debirani Hemram	16	Laxmi Hembram
17	Shefali Hembram	17	Shiuli Soren
18	Rajani Murmu	18	Priyanka Majhi
19	Ruposhri Murmu	19	Lakhi Santra
20	Rina Hembram	20	Purnima Hembram
21	Babita Marandi	21	Bilkis Khatun
22	Paulina Baski	22	Sonali Mandi
23	Kakoli Soren	23	Pallabi Murmu
24	Sumi Murmu	24	Rakhi Murmu
25	Puja Hembram	25	Ruma Basak
26	Neha Maddi	26	Antara Basak
27	Chandana Tudu	27	Baisakhi Mondal
28	Sokhi Tudu		
29	Purnima Hembram		



### **Project Description:**

Shreeja India identified one young woman from each household as the primary beneficiary for this project. She was provided with seeds of nutritious vegetables (both seasonal and perennial) and required structural support based on the crop calendar of the district, space available in her home backyards, and water availability. A supervisor was appointed to monitor the whole project report the progress and provide necessary support to the beneficiaries. Awareness programs on Nutrition and Healthy Food Intake are being conducted

with the beneficiaries on the need for quality food intake, Types and nature of nutrients in food, and how they affect your body and on maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

As part of the training, in the second phase of the project, the women will also be coached to compost their generated biodegradable waste and use it for harvesting better crops.

### **Background Information**

**Rajnar block in Birbhum district** of West Bengal is situated in the eastern extension of the Chhotanagpur plateau characterized by undulating and dissected terrain interspersed by hillocks and valleys. Often called ‘the land of red soil’ Rajnar, and people residing in the tribal belts need to build resilience and improve the nutrition of children and women. The beneficiaries hardly buy any vegetables from the market. Most of them consume a large amount of rice with locally picked leaves, mustard oil, onions and salt. Occasionally they consume some vegetables or meat that most often they get from hunting.

A major part of Birbhum district of West Bengal has always had water woes. Although the soil is fertile, the land that can come under the plough has water problems. Due to this reason some of the vegetables could not grow.



On the other hand, **Purba Bardhaman** situated in West Bengal characterized by fertile alluvial soil. The only district in West Bengal that is fortunate in agriculture. Almost 58% of the total population belongs to the agricultural population. But the major challenge that came up during the project was Livestock destroying the vegetable plants. Livestock are an integral component of agriculture in India and make multifaceted contributions to the growth and development of the agricultural sector which includes animal husbandry, dairy and fisheries sector plays a significant role in the national economy and the socio-economic development of the country. Livestock also plays an important role in the rural economy by supplementing family earnings and generating gainful employment in the rural sector, particularly among landless laborers, small and marginal farmers, and women. But mostly livestock and gardening did not complement each other in our beneficiaries' villages. Those gallivanting cows and goats that some of our beneficiaries own ruined a few saplings. One of the challenges that need to be prevented through education and training to help promote responsible livestock management practices.

### **Benefits of Nutri-Homes Project for our Beneficiaries**

Kitchen gardening is a great way to grow fresh vegetables and herbs at home even in an urban setting. It is an excellent way to ensure that you have access to fresh produce that is free from harmful chemicals and pesticides. In India, kitchen gardening has become increasingly popular over the years, with many people growing their own vegetables and herbs at home. Both rural and urban kitchen gardening can provide benefits in terms of food security, sustainability, and improved health. The specific approaches and challenges of kitchen gardening can vary based on the location and available resources. In rural areas, for instance, kitchen gardening is typically carried out with more space available for planting crops. As a result, Shreeja Girls were able to take good care of the plants by watering them and adding fertilizers to promote better growth. Our beneficiaries have experienced the benefits of kitchen gardening first-hand.



1. **Improved Food Security:** With the source of fresh vegetables and healthy produce our beneficiaries and their families became less dependent on expensive market foods and were more motivated to cook nutritious vegetables. They readily got fresh vegetables to prepare healthy meals. Kitchen gardening can empower households to take control of their food production and reduce their reliance on external sources. This can help build resilience against external shocks such as droughts, floods, or other disasters such as the covid-19 pandemic that disrupted food supply chains.



2. **Increased nutrition:** Home-grown vegetables are often more nutritious than market-bought produce, as they are fresher and haven't been transported long distances. The seeds were given to the beneficiaries according to the local produce and looking at the nutritional value of the vegetables. Hence all the vegetables yielded have got some nutrients in them. Having a kitchen garden not only fulfils the requirement of nutrition but also saves time and money plus acts as a food and nutritional security.

3. **Reduced food expenses:** By growing their own food, beneficiary households could save money on groceries, especially during times of economic hardship or food shortages. Rima, Shreeja Girl from Keshabpur says “*By planting vegetables in our own homes and using them in our food preparation, we can save some amount of money*”.







4. **Income generation:** Surplus produce from kitchen gardens can be sold or traded in local markets, providing a source of income for our beneficiary households. This could be done if enough seeds and saplings are given in due course. With the little they had yielded they could sell few produce in the market. “আমি সবজি বিচ নিয়েছিলাম , আমার সবজি অনেক ভালো হয়েছিল, তাই আমাদের বাড়ি থেকে সবজি কিনতে হয়নি, আর আমি কিছু সবজি দোকানে ও বিক্রি করেছি, যেনো বাকি জিনিস গুলো নিতে পারি” translates to “I planted the vegetable seeds that were given to us. Those vegetables grew quickly. We didn't need to buy vegetables from the

*store to create our meals. We sold some of the vegetables at adjacent stores in order to purchase the remaining necessities”.*

5. **Environmental benefits:** Kitchen gardening can promote biodiversity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with transport, and protect soil health by reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

6. **Improved physical and mental health:** Gardening is a physical activity that can help our beneficiaries stay active and reduce the risk of chronic diseases. It can also promote mental well-being by providing a sense of accomplishment, reducing stress, and connecting them with nature. One of our Shreeja Girls, Bristi



Mandi says that *she gets happy when she practices gardening and planting saplings*. Kitchen gardening can be a fun and rewarding hobby that can help you relax. Additionally, their parents



seem to appreciate them for growing vegetables and taking care of their home garden. This created a sense of ownership and connection to the work our beneficiaries have done.



7. **Rural backward women turned into community**

**leaders:** Shreeja Girls have become community leaders with persistence and hard work, they make a positive impact on the lives of those around them by providing food and produce to their families and community.

**Conclusion**

Overall, kitchen gardening can have a positive impact on the livelihoods, health, and well-being of rural households, making it a valuable tool for promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development. Consumption of adequate fruits and vegetables is vital for prevention of micronutrient deficiencies. Kitchen gardens can be a source of micro/macronutrients throughout the year especially vegetables as



they are short-duration crops and can be grown easily. Having a kitchen garden not only fulfils the requirement of nutrition but also saves time and money plus acts as a food and nutritional security. Investing in nutrition is a massive step towards building a healthy and prosperous India. Shreeja India works with various organizations to bring health and happiness to the base of the pyramid in India.



## **References**

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