

## The kitchen garden initiative shows a promising future to Phulan Devi

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Agriculture is the primary occupation for Phulan Devi and her husband Kamlesh Mahato, in Ajna village, block Kalyanpur, Bihar. They own a small farm of one *bigha* (approximately 1,600 square meters) on which they grow commercial crops such as paddy, wheat, corn, and sometimes vegetables such as tomatoes. Her family used to buy vegetables from the market for their own use.

Phulan was part of the village leadership school, a citizen leadership platform organized under the aegis of Sehgal Foundation's Good Rural Governance program. These leadership schools inform citizens about government programs intended to benefit them, and to make them aware of their rights and entitlements. In one session of the village leadership school, Phulan learned about the distribution of kitchen garden seeds by the Sehgal Foundation Agriculture Development team. Curious, she decided to create a "kitchen garden" in her backyard.

Phulan planted almost all the ten types of seeds provided in the kit, about 50 meters away from her house. Being a farmer herself, she was aware of the correct use of fertilizers and pesticides. She attempted to experiment in her kitchen garden, and her innovative approach and careful supervision resulted in a boom in her backyard. *Karela* (bitter gourd), *kheera* (cucumber), *bhindi* (okra) grew in

abundance, which resulted in a huge sale of the surplus produce in the local market. Because of this, Phulan earned Rs 6,000 as extra income, which she invested in her household.

Phulan and her husband were convinced of the benefits of the kitchen garden and decided to continue with the initiative. They now enjoy the results of their hard work, not only in the form of extra income, but also in the form of diversification of their household diet, leading to more balanced meals at the end of a hard day's work. Phulan Devi noted, "The first year's experience with the kitchen garden initiative has been extremely promising and I am looking forward to investing more time in the coming years on this initiative." She made a helpful suggestion to the foundation to divide the distribution of seeds in two batches, instead of providing them all at once, which she says could maximize the utilization of the distributed seeds.

Phulan's story clearly illustrates how kitchen gardening provides a platform to the rural poor and marginalized communities, creating supplemental food production as well as an opportunity to improve livelihoods. Family labor, including women and children, become particularly important in the management of these gardens. Empowered with a minimum skill set and knowledge, rural households can easily confront challenges such as crop losses and other negative implications, making kitchen gardens a profitable initiative.

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