

THE GREEN INITIATIVE SANTO'S KITCHEN GARDEN

The words of famous painter, Pablo Picasso: "Action is the foundational key to success," finds resonance with Santo Devi's story. A resident of Bedoulia village of Bajidpur Panchayat in Samastipur block of Bihar, Santo is a member of a below poverty level family. She and her husband work as wage labourers. The family barely makes ends meet. However, for Santo conceding to life's challenges has never been a solution.

During one of the training sessions of the Village Leadership School conducted by Sehgal Foundation in Bedoulia village, Santo learnt about the benefits of kitchen gardening and started being inquisitive about the initiative. Says she: "I gathered courage and expressed willingness to receive the kitchen garden kit distributed by the foundation. I wanted to try something new. And, why not?

In February 2017, after receiving the kit consisting of seeds of 10 types of vegetables, I started sowing in the backyard of my house, toiling hard, and following the instructions given in the school to the 'T'. I took care of the garden like it were my own child - watering the seeds at regular intervals, feeding them with organic manure from time to time and keeping the garden clean. By the third week of February, my efforts were rewarded. I planted almost all the seeds except lal saag (amaranth) and bhindi (okra). There was boom in my kitchen garden within two months of sowing the seeds."

After retaining the adequate amount of vegetables for family consumption, Santo Devi sold the surplus at the local bi-weekly market (haat). She earned approximately Rs 150 per day from the sale of vegetables in the haat. Besides, not buying any vegetables for

home consumption helped her save a considerable amount of money. "I used the surplus income, generated from the sale of vegetables, to cater to other household needs like buying stationeries for my school going children," adds Santo with a smile.

Apart from increase in income, the kitchen garden initiative has helped many families to ensure food and nutrition security for her family. As Santo explains: "I do admit that there is an improvement in the nutrition status of the family, though it is not possible to measure the same at this stage. However, the diversification of the menu in my household and the regular intake of nutrient rich vegetables have improved the energy and efficiency levels of my family members."

Overall, the success of Santo Devi's kitchen garden did not simply yield socio-economic benefits, but also empowered her as woman and a mother, who being the primary care taker of her garden is now able to ensure nutritious food for her family. She now feels confident and looks forward to many more profitable seasons of kitchen gardening. Though kitchen gardening did not provide her enough means to step out of poverty, yet the boom of vegetables in her garden provided her with the much needed self confidence, and also helped her meet some of the immediate needs of her family apart from addressing nutritional deficiency.

Life is all about taking chances, trying something new...This adage is so aptly applied to Santo's story. She took the initiative to learn, understand and apply; she mustered the courage to take a risk, a chance, and try something different, which yielded the results she desired, both for herself and her family. Kudos to an initiative well taken.

