

Medak Schools Grow Their Mid-day Meal

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Around 15,000 students from 150 schools of Medak district have been growing and eating healthy green vegetables, hand picked from their own school gardens. The schools are a part of the Student Amateur School Yard Agriculture project piloted by CEE Andhra Pradesh state office with support from UNICEF and



Department of Education, Medak district.

The Student Amateur School Yard Agriculture (SASYA) project was initiated in 2007 by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in coordination with Department of Education and field implementation support from Centre for Environment Education. It was initiated with the hope that school gardens would help

A. improve the school environment by making gardens

B. improve nutrition standards of children by using the vegetables grown in the gardens

C. provide students an opportunity to learn about gardening and community engagement

*Medak district was selected for implementation of the project on pilot basis as UNICEF has been working intensively with the schools in Medak district through interventions such as providing infrastructure, garden implements, formation of water and sanitation committees etc. CEE has conducted environment education and sanitation awareness campaigns in schools etc in the district. Also, Medak district is a semi arid district with rain fed agriculture where there is scope for demonstration of sustainable agricultural practices. **Developing the Concept***



The idea was discussed with representatives from Education Dept and NGOs -VISION a Rural Development Society, SCOPE, ASSMA, SEEDS and SPACE working with farmers in Medak district. Concepts, ideas and work plan for the garden were developed and agreed by all.

Planning the School Gardens

The teachers at school level developed the detailed plan and schedule of activities for their own school's garden with the help of the Field Coordinators and some farmers from the village their school was located in.



The farmers helped identify suitable vegetables, and gave inputs on the sowing and maintenance help they would be able to provide from time to time etc. They also discussed how the community could contribute to the programme.

Out of the 150 schools selected, gardens were initiated in 136 schools. Seven schools had some problems in making the gardens as the soil was not suitable for gardening (rocky soils) or there wasn't enough space (due to ongoing construction activities in the compound) or there were issues of protection. In seven other schools, even though the garden was initiated, they dried up due to insufficient water.



Community Involvement

In addition to the inputs in the initial planning, the village community supported the programme all through the year. Community contributions came in the form of ready-to-sow plots to raise the nursery beds, seeds, ploughing and preparing the land, implements, farm yard manure, making a fence around the garden etc.

The mid-day meal cooks helped to water the garden, harvest the vegetables and use them in the meal preparation.



With an aim to exhibit the organic kitchen garden to the community for possible replication in the villages, the farmers were invited to the school. They helped in planning the garden, crop selection, space etc. and all support required during garden initiation (ploughing the land, provision of farmyard manure, seeds, making fence around the garden etc.) and management. The mid day meal cooks were also involved in garden management aspects like regular watering, harvesting, utilizing the produce for cooking etc.

The village communities appreciated the initiative and agreed to provide their support for the gardens in the future as well.

Involvement of Teachers and Students

Teachers and students played an active role in initiation and maintenance of the garden. The students were engaged by the teachers in planning the garden, selection of vegetables by knowing their favourite varieties, and in identifying their own roles and responsibilities in maintaining it.

Student committees were formed by the teacher and field coordinator and responsibilities of each committee were decided. The responsibilities included regular watering, weeding, harvesting, preparation of botanical extracts, compost pit maintenance etc. Some students took on the responsibility of tending the garden

during the holidays.

Mid-day Meal Menu

The midday meals are cooked at the school itself by the cook, who is a member of Self Help Groups in the village. The required vegetables are usually purchased from the market.

Based on the menu of the mid-day meals, about thirteen types of vegetables were short-listed for growing in the garden. These include climbers, herbs, trees, tubers etc.

In most gardens, the leafy vegetables were ready to be harvested in a month after sowing. They were cooked as part of the mid-day meal. In some cases where the produce was more than what the school could use, the excess was taken by the teacher or the community or sold. The teachers maintained a record of the cultural operations carried out during each week, quantity of the produce, produce utilization, etc. **Teachers' Manual and Information Support**
A manual for teachers was developed in Telugu to help them conduct the programme. The manual contains information and activities on bottle drip irrigation and compost pits etc.

Suggestions on which textbook lessons may be taught effectively with the garden have also been provided in the manual. A bimonthly newsletter was circulated to share news and updates between the schools, the field coordinators and others involved in the programme. The newsletter included observations made by CEE staff during monitoring visits and articles from the coordinators that highlighted good practices (such as spray of botanicals, garden management during holidays) and issues (lack of fence etc.) Three issues of the news letters were done during the project period. The Experience and Scope for Up-scaling



The pilot project ended in 2007. Of the 136 schools that were able to develop gardens,

108 schools want to continue the activity in the coming year as well. Many schools have started collecting seeds for the next year. Most schools produced the vegetables without using chemicals. The 'organic farming' practices they followed included:

- Using compost, cattle manure, goat manure and vermicompost as fertilizers
- Using neem oil, custard apple decoction, ash, chilli and garlic decoctions as pesticides
- Using the available space in an efficient manner in making plots and managing the interspaces so that the gardens were bio-diverse
- Using waste water from the school drinking water and hand wash points for irrigating the garden
- Using bottle drip methods for irrigation

Based on the experience, the CEE AP team has identified the following factors that help successful initiation and management of the garden in schools:

Availability of open space of 3-4 cents (one cent is 40 sq mts), water for irrigation, protection to the compound etc. Interest and willingness among the teachers Strong existing linkages between Gram Panchayat and school, or possibility of developing the links Seeds, garden tools available with the school or willingness to obtain from community or market Support from community in land preparation and making compost pits especially in primary schools as young children find it difficult to take on the heavy work.

For more information contact: Vanitha Kommu

Centre for Environment Education

Andhra Pradesh State Office Door No.: 6-3-348/2

Dwarakapuri Colony

Panjagutta, Hyderabad - 500 482 Telefax: 040-23352586

Ph: 040-23352596, 65883100

E-mail: vanitha.kommu@ceeindia.org [**Curriculum Linkages of the Mid day Meal Garden Programme** also provided in the original article first published on **Education for Change**]