

Bio-intensive gardening in Rajasthan schools yields positive results

Initiates skill-building process among students, teachers for environment protection and inculcates water-efficient habits

Special Correspondent

JAIPUR: A pilot project for promoting bio-intensive gardens at government schools in Jaipur, Tonk and Udaipur districts of Rajasthan has started yielding positive results by initiating a skill-building process among students and teachers for environment protection, maintenance of nutrition levels and inculcation of water-efficient habits.

The year-long project was undertaken at 50 government schools and 10 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas with the aim of raising the

standard of living and bringing about behavioural changes among children and local communities towards the environment.

Its implementation also strengthened efforts to add nutrition to meals, water efficiency, organic farming, team work, better environmental conditions and skill-building. It successfully conveyed the message that the initiative for planting trees would help protect the environment.

Banswara-based NGO Vaagdhara took up the project in collaboration with UNICEF to use its rich expe-

rience in bio-intensive gardening. It set the target to grow cost-effective gardens and provide chemical-free vegetables to young students through the project. "The concept was very well accepted in the schools we selected. Students understood that growing vegetables and planting trees would not only make their schools beautiful but also make the environment clean and green," said Vaagdhara secretary Jayesh Joshi here.

Bio-intensive gardening in schools has been a perfect example of "learning by doing".

Growing vegetables, trees and flowers not only sensitised the children to the need to protect the environment but also enhanced their ability to work together in tilling the land, planting saplings and watering the plants.

At the Government Girls' Middle School at Sewa in Dudu block of Jaipur district, teams of students from Standard VI to VIII contributed an hour each per week for caretaking and development of garden. They learnt the techniques of soil-digging, seed plantation, terrace gardening, irrigation and apply-

ing fertilisers.

According to Mr. Joshi, the vegetables grown at the Government Middle School in Gokulpura Kheri near Sanganer in Jaipur were used in mid-day meals. However, the garden could not sustain itself for lack of fencing and shortage of water supply during the Diwali break in October last year.

The activities launched under the project in the Government Middle School at Dibro in Malpura block of Tonk district generated awareness among students about medicinal plants and organic fertil-

isers. The newly-acquired skills also helped the students in growing plants at their homes.

Girls at Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya in Udaipur applied the classroom studies of science to the garden developed in the school and grew vegetables which added nutrition to their meals.

During a survey of the school they expressed the desire to grow more flowering plants.

According to Mr. Joshi, both the students and the teachers who took part enthusiastically in the project

are still maintaining the gardens in almost all the schools.

The children developed a sense of ownership by naming the plants after themselves and are taking more interest in gardening.

The pilot project has trained about 600 school children and 60 teachers.

Mr. Joshi affirmed that full-scale implementation of the project would improve students' attendance in schools while value additions such as seed banks and organic manure pits would make it immensely popular in all educational institutions.