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INSIGHT

A PUBLICATION OF THE NEELAN TIRUCHELVAM TRUST

About the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust



The Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust is an indigenous, philanthropic organization that supports social justice, human rights, and peace and reconciliation initiatives. The NTT was established in 2001, two years after the assassination of Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam; constitutional scholar, lawyer, activist and politician. Dr. Tiruchelvam sought to engage policymakers as well as the wider public towards his vision of a peaceful Sri Lanka, in an enabling environment of mutual trust and respect, which would transcend all political, socio-economic and cultural barriers. Over the years, the programmes which have been supported by the Trust have evolved, in keeping with the ever changing needs of the communities that it works with. The NTT's vision is the establishment and protection of a just, equitable and peaceful society. The Organization's mission is to collectively promote peace, reconciliation and human rights, sharing responsibility, resources and risks through strategic partnership with civil society, donors and the public sector, business communities, the diaspora and academia.

INSIGHT
is a
bi-annual publication
of the Neelan
Tiruchelvam Trust.
Each issue takes for its
theme an aspect of the
Trust's work, focusing
on issues of social
relevance and projects
led by grantees and
beneficiaries.

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WHY HOME GARDENING?

Our theme for this newsletter reflects the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust's commitment to uplifting the living standards of estate communities in Sri Lanka, and promoting rural employment. It is now well known that malnutrition is an issue among Sri Lankan children, with those in the estate sector being among the most vulnerable. Financial concerns, combined with a lack of information and awareness around nutrition have made it difficult for these families to invest in eating better.

Home gardening, a small scale production system that has been practiced for centuries, offers some interesting solutions. Families with home gardens are more likely to eat fresh, organic, seasonal produce, resulting in a healthier and more varied diet.

Additionally, the gardens' abundance has meant that some families are also able to earn an income from selling their excess produce, making the gardens a buffer against poverty. By providing a little financial management advice along with our training, we have seen how women, even with limited resources and institutional support, can take a small plot and turn it into something that supports themselves and their families. At their best, home gardens can also promote gender equality, as both men and women till the earth together and share the fruits of their labour.

The following NTT grantees have introduced their beneficiaries to home gardening in an effort to improve nutrition and support livelihood activities, particularly among women.

Vanni Rehabilitation Organization for Differently Abled (VAROD) supports home gardening as a method of economically empowering persons with disabilities.

Sirakukul Cultural Forum promotes organic home gardening as a sustainable alternative to increase the income of women while providing nutritious food for families.

Mannar Association for Rehabilitation of Differently Abled People (MARDAP) supports home gardening as a means of promoting social inclusion, and securing the rights of persons with disabilities.

Nawayugam Social Development Forum (NSDF) promotes economic empowerment among women in the plantation sector by introducing home gardening as an additional source of income.

Lanka Evangelical Alliance Development Service (LEADS) promotes chemical free home gardening as a sustainable livelihood option for marginalized and vulnerable communities in the Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts.

Planting the Seeds for a Healthier Lifestyle



Sri Lanka leads the region on many health indicators, but malnutrition among its children has proven a real challenge. The key findings of the 2016 National Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reported that nation-wide stunting among children was 17.3 percent, wasting among children was 15.1 percent, and 20.5 were underweight. Some of the highest rates of both stunting and underweight in children - 32.4 % and 29.6% respectively - were seen in the Hatton District.

The same report noted that a child belonging to the poorest quintile was twice as likely to be underweight than a child in the richest quintile. Child and maternal malnutrition in the estate sector was seen largely as the result of unbalanced diets: families here tended to incorporate more starch in to their meals, neglecting vegetables and proteins at the cost of their health. A vicious cycle was in place, one driven by households' poor socio-economic conditions and a lack of education among women.



Focusing on women is key to improving nutrition - or so the Navayugam Social Development Forum believes. The first home gardens the organization helped establish were in 1995, when they worked with the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) to support people with livelihood interventions which included the provision of cattle, and a focus on organic gardening.

The successes they saw at the time encouraged them to bring the idea to NTT in 2017. Margaret Anthony, Navayugam's programme coordinator says, "our target group was the women, because most often they did not have formal work, and were at home." The organisation hoped that they could help women, who were otherwise house bound, to save while simultaneously improving the entire family's nutrition.



A series of one-day capacity building workshops were organized across five different estates – Velioya’s upper and lower divisions, the Carolina Estate, Diyagala Estate and Kadawala Estate – in Hatton in Sri Lanka’s central province. Trainer Ponsusamy Rajnikanth says it was a challenge to address all the issues in that single day, but that he was nevertheless pleased by the enthusiasm participants showed.

Some 150 women from all five estates benefited from the training. In an effort to understand the context, participants were asked to detail what their family ate typically, how much

they purchased and how much they spent on vegetables every week. “We found that a lot of women were often making packet noodles at home,” says Margaret, pointing out that while this was both easy and convenient it was not necessarily nourishing.

Margaret, ever pragmatic, says she doesn’t want women to stop making the packet noodles – they only need to pull out some fresh leeks and leafy greens from the garden to throw into the pot as well. “While speaking with us, they realised that if they grow vegetables at home, they can actually enjoy more variety than if they only bought from the shop,” she says.

Rajnikanth’s focus was on ensuring that families could see the potential of home gardens, even if they didn’t have a lot to work with. “Some families did not have any land,” he says, adding that in these cases he would explain how they could use different structures and vertical arrangements to grow vegetables and herbs at home. Everyone was taught how to start from scratch, preparing the soil so it was ready for planting. They also learned more advanced techniques like how to use grow bags to raise multiple varieties of leafy greens at the same time.

A focus on organic produce meant that participants were taught how they could dispense with readymade fertilizers and pesticides by simply recycling what they already had access to: when combined, organic waste from their kitchens and dung from their cow sheds were potent fertilizers; certain native trees produced leaves that when made into a pulp discouraged the most ravenous insects, and even ash from wood-fired stoves could be used to create a homemade pesticide.

The project also sought to address the other factor – finances. On average, families here had a monthly income of Rs.10,000. Vegetables were expensive and the Rs.2000 the women spent on average buying them represented a huge bite out of the family budget. “I told them, if they grew the vegetables in their home gardens, they would have that Rs.2000 to spare for something else they really wanted.” It was an incentive that many responded to.

Rajnikanth was also convinced that by learning how to manage their money better, many of these otherwise low-income families could see marked benefits. He had participants account for all their spending, and broke it into necessary and luxury items, encouraging them to prioritise how they spent their money and when to take a loan. For those with the capacity, details were provided on how to scale up their production so they could make some additional income from their gardens.

The project is an extension of Navayugam’s commitment to helping upcountry people enjoy greater social and economic rights, including better access to education, says Margaret. She is particularly proud of how the initiative has helped shift the dynamic at home. “Before, the wife would have to go to the husband to beg for spending money, now there is more equality in the relationship,” she says. When women are raising their own income, their role in decision making increases. Plus, everyone spends more time outdoors, instead of in front of the TV. “The whole family gets involved with the garden,” smiles Margaret.



PROF. ABHAYA BALASURIYA *Shares his Thoughts on Home Gardening*

Home gardens are dynamic sustainable food production systems, and presumably the oldest land use activity, next to shifting (*chena*) cultivation. Almost all home garden systems have evolved to provide food and other requirements of households through generations. They are presently constrained under the pressures of population growth, physical limitations like remoteness of living areas, inadequate market facilities, and shortage of arable lands and capital.

From One Generation to the Next

Many home gardens are handed down from one generation to another. Individual home gardens can be so diverse and so challenging, that it is difficult to recommend one unique approach to managing them. Ideally, they should be optimized for the enhancement of productivity with minimal depletions on the system.

For instance, certain weeds in home gardens are not as harmful as one would think. When under control it is easy to convert them into a useful resource in the control of soil erosion. The outgrowth could be recycled into useful organic input to the soil. When properly handled, they can also help in the efficient use of the fertilizers, which are used occasionally to improve productivity. In addition, quite a few of these weeds could provide useful reservoirs of beneficial symbiotic floral and faunal microorganisms for the sustenance of the garden as well as that of the crops.

When a home garden is made into a sustainable entity, they provide a significant source of minerals and other nutrients, most of which could be harnessed through the foods they produce. Placed together, they can directly add to the dietary diversity of household members. You only have to add each item in rotation to the dietary intake. The advantages are that, they are easily accessible, freshly and cheaply available, and are free from harmful agro-chemical residues.

Intensification and the introduction of selected underutilized fruit and vegetable species (based on their nutrient composition for a better and more balanced dietary intake) can add value to a home garden. The quality of home garden products and their impact on the health of household members has been undisputed over centuries.

Food Security in Times of Trouble

The basic function of a home garden is to provide the subsistence needs of a household, irrespective of the rapid changes in the economic development of a country. When the total produce of a single crop exceeds the dietary needs of the household, the glut could always be traded among the households in the vicinity, especially if it falls short of the quantity required for the market. Ideally, the small gluts could be bartered among neighbors, supplementing the diet as well as the overall economy of the household.

Traditional management of home gardens in Sri Lanka is characterized by low inputs and simple technologies. One reason for the low level of management in home gardens is the lack of available labor, as family members are busy with other jobs.

There have been numerous attempts by different governments to encourage various aspects of home gardening, be it urban or at the village level. There have been fertilizer subsidies aimed at home gardening, and national agriculture development programmes like 'Divineguma', provided plant material (seed/plants) and simple tools with the intention of promoting home gardening. Promotional programmes were aired on TV and radio, and as a result people were ready to take up the idea. Unfortunately, successive governments have not followed through on activities initiated by their predecessors, and many of these efforts have not gone far.

The Unexpected Benefits of Home Gardens

Depending on the scale of operations, home gardens can become important contributors in 'carbon sequestration' (to reduce green-house effect), flood control, ameliorating microclimate, water quality, soil erosion control, pest and disease control and in the sustenance of symbiotic relationships between plants, and between plants and animals.

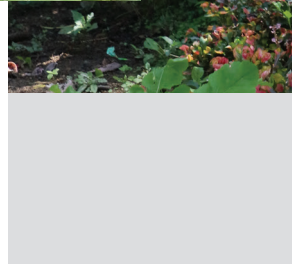
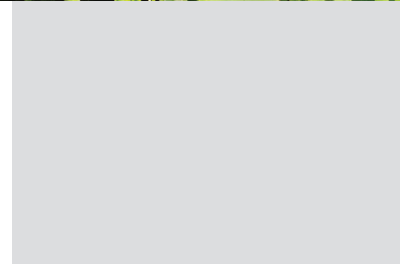
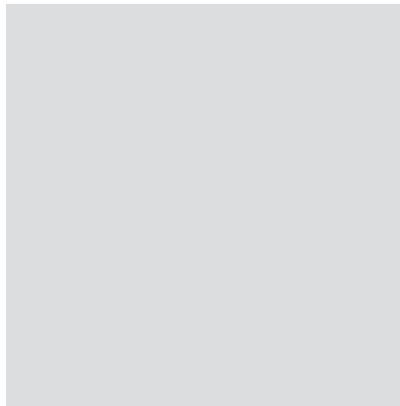
Home gardens can also support employment, social status, pleasure, and pride, promote benefit sharing, and build up mutual relationships. They are renowned providers of habitat



for wild flora and fauna including pollinators; nutrient cycling; nutrient and seed dispersal; resource utilization, etc. Therefore, home gardens are recognized as reservoirs of conservation and use of germplasm for a wide variety of useful species.

There is also a higher organic matter incorporation in home gardens when compared to crop fields, which has helped enhance soil chemical and physical properties, and crop yields. All in all, home gardens can be considered a benchmark for upgrading land use systems.

With a PhD in Plant Pathology, Prof. Abhaya Balasuriya has more than 40 years of experience in agriculture, plant pathology and horticulture in both the public and private sector. He is presently attached to the Sri Lanka Development Journalist's Forum as a Director of Administration.



FROM PLOT *to* PLATE

How women in Sri Lanka's tea estates are turning to home gardening to improve their livelihoods and nourish their families





Marina and Jesudas gathering ingredients for a nutritious lunch from the fresh produce in their garden.

For Poldas Marina, her garden is her grocery store. The small square of land in front of her home is a riot of green: spicy coriander grows alongside cooling mint; small plants are weighted with clumps of chillies; spring onions sprout out of fertile soil, growing tall alongside rows of leeks, capsicum and radishes. Every day, Marina chooses something from the garden for her pot, serving up fresh vegetables to her family of four.

“When I was young, my mother too had a garden,” remembers Marina, as she briskly chops spring onions by her firewood stove. The 37-year-old moved to Valioya Estate’s Upper Division five years ago when she met and married J. Jesudas. When her parents paid a visit, Marina recruited them to help her set up her own home garden. This gave her an advantage when she was selected as a beneficiary for training by the Hatton-based Navayugam Social Development Forum, who received funding from the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust.

The training gave Marina and Jesudas an understanding of organic farming. She learned how to fertilize the soil using cow dung and recycling organic waste from her kitchens, and was shown how specific leaves and the ash from

her hearth could be used to keep pests at bay. Today, her harvest can be so abundant that Marina often has something to share with her relatives.

“Even during months when we have a low income, we can manage our food with home gardening,” says Marina, estimating they save Rs.500 per week thanks to this produce. She is careful that she does not fritter this away. As part of the training she attended in 2017 Marina was offered some guidance in financial management. She says it was a learning experience, and that subsequently they have been able to reduce loans taken by the family. “We actually have some savings now,” she says.

The couple have plans to expand. A plot opposite their home will provide an ideal space to start growing vegetables for commercial sale, says Jesudas, voicing an interest in growing aloe vera for local cosmetic companies, and decorative ferns for export.

Meanwhile, Jesudas appreciates all the work his wife puts in to ensuring their family eats well: “There is peace of mind for us in growing our own vegetables,” he says. “There are no chemicals and we know the soil is clean.”

For Dharmalingam Jensie too, her family's health is the prime motivation behind maintaining a garden. Jensie has two sons: Leon, the elder, is just 10, while Mathew is 5. Jensie says the two boys and their grandmother are master gardeners, who spend hours weeding and pruning with no complaint.

Jensie's plot is much larger than Marina's and she makes good use of it, with a variety of leafy greens, beans, tomatoes, carrots, radish, lime and cabbage thriving in the dark soil. (Scattered throughout are the rose bushes Jensie's mother has a soft spot for.) They also have several small trees, including one planted by Mathew called Mara thakali or simply tree tomato. Encased in a thick green skin, the fruit is brighter and tarter than any tomato off the vine.

"The children love fresh vegetables," says Jensie, giving thanks that they are very unlike other kids their age in this preference. "They never want to eat fast food, they always go for

the carrots and the beans."

Jensie attended the same training as Marina and says she came away happy to know that her family had many good practices already in place when it came to organic gardening. "However, I did not know about how to use grow bags to raise different varieties of plants together," she says, adding that she has since implemented this technique. She also learned which varieties grew well together, and which were better kept apart.

The result is their garden has begun to thrive. "Today, I have enough to feed the family and still earn Rs.4,000 to Rs.5,000 a month from selling vegetables," she says, explaining she has decided to reinvest the money in her children's education.

Jensie is so proud that this is something her family can do together. "It is a wonderful thing. I learned it from my mother, and now my children also go out into the garden. I want it to keep going like this from generation to generation."

A garden to call her own...The doorway to the lush green garden of goodness that Jensie has created for herself and her family.



NTT NEWS

Discourse Building Programme

To coincide with International Human Rights day in response to the political situation in Sri Lanka, NTT partnered with Prof. Chandraguptha Thenuwara of the Faculty of Visual and Performing Arts of University of Colombo to conduct the "Human rights arts festival 2018". The event created space for artists of various backgrounds to demonstrate how art can be used as a powerful medium to advocate for social change, justice, human rights and democracy. The event took place at the JDA Perera Gallery in Colombo from 10th to 15th December 2018.

Sithie Tiruchelvam Women's Fellowship Programme

NTT in partnership with EKTA, a resource center for women in India, organised a two country feminist capacity building training for grassroots women leaders from Sri Lanka and India. The training was held under the second phase of the Women's Fellowship Programme organised in Madurai from the 13th to 22nd October 2018. 12 emerging women activists representing eight districts across the island participated in the training.

Remembering Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam

The 19th annual Neelan Tiruchelvam memorial lecture was organised on the 29th July 2018 at the BMICH auditorium in Colombo with the participation of more than 250 visitors. Mr. T.M. Krishna, a musician, author and commentator on the intersections of culture, society and politics delivered a lecture on "Liberal Vision Challenged".

Building up the NTT Library

In keeping with the value of promoting the progress of knowledge, NTT added more reference material to its library. A large collection of Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam's books were donated by his family to the NTT library.

New grants from NTT

Eight new grants amounting to 24.5 million Sri Lankan Rupees were approved by the NTT Programme Committee and granted to civil society organisations.

From our Partners

Dabindu Collective

Under a grant provided by NTT, the Dabindu Collective conducted three one day awareness programmes on gender for 75 selected women workers in the garment industry in Kilinochchi and Vavuniya Districts. Further to this, a one day programme on occupational health and safety was conducted for 25 women workers in Omanthai. Simultaneously, a campaign on "Violence Against Women" was held in the Northern Province. Dabindu also published two editions of their Tamil newsletter and distributed them among the factory workers in the Western and Northern Provinces.

Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF)

During the month of July, 30 youth representing Jaffna, Matara and Trincomalee Districts participated in a series training programmes to engage and produce evidence based mobile video stories to address the issues faced by marginalised and vulnerable people. As part of its activities, a series of 30 short videos stories that showcased social issues was produced by the participants. 23 advocacy letters were sent to relevant local authorities to organize evidence based discussions on the identified issues.

Pulathisi

Initiating the project funded by NTT, Pulathisi conducted introductory workshops on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and radio production for 20 students from three schools in Polonnaruwa. The trained students produced ten radio dramas about GBV and these dramas will be aired on local radio channels.

Center for Handicapped (CFH)

In an effort to empower disabled persons, 38 beneficiaries from war affected and vulnerable families from Kilinochchi District were provided with prosthetic limbs and physiotherapy services. The same beneficiaries participated in a life skills training programme that helped them to identify their hidden potential and motivate them to improve their quality of life.

Lanka Evangelical Alliance Development Service (LEADS)

As part of the 'Local Economic Assessment and Development' Project and the study carried out to identify the opportunities and improve the income of families living in the Malayalapuram GN Division in the Kilinochchi District, LEADS will continue to support value chain development for those who are interested in beekeeping and home gardening.

LIRNEasia

As part of the project funded by NTT, a baseline survey among farmers who are ready to enter the export value chain was conducted in Jaffna, Kurunegala and Gampaha Districts. Parallel to this a meeting between farmers from the North and South was organised to build capacity and to enable farmers in the north to build relationships with sourcing partners in the South. A video documentary that showcases the linkages between farmers from the North and South of Sri Lanka before and during the conflict was produced to show how business relationships can contribute towards promoting reconciliation among the communities.

Mannar Association for Rehabilitation of Differently Abled People (MARDAP)


20 differently abled persons continue to attend the vocational training on incense stick and handicraft making organised at the centres in the Mullaitivu and Mannar Districts. 40 PWDs and their family members attended the livelihood training sessions and received financial assistance to start or increase their family income status with buy back guarantees from MARDAP.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 19TH ANNUAL NEELAN TIRUCHELVAM MEMORIAL LECTURE

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