

Afghan Kitchen Garden helps Latifa Feed Her Six Children



Latifa is 31 years old and lives in the sub-district of Wali Asr in Mazar-e Sharif with her husband and five children. Her husband works as a daily laborer and is the sole provider of the family.

When Latifa first contacted PIN Urban Poverty (UP) team and requested for support, she was in the early stages of a 6th pregnancy and very worried to feed her family. Upon careful assessment of her living conditions and socio-economic status, she was then enrolled to UP's kitchen gardening activities, funded by the European Union.

"In April I participated in a 3 day training course on urban agriculture, which taught me basic skills to set up a low cost, home based kitchen garden" Latifa explains. She then received an agriculture kit, consisting of 14 different vegetable seeds and seedlings, basic agricultural tools; the likes of spade, watering can, hand sickle and plastic tunnels for autumn harvest, which she used to kick-start her own vegetable production. In the months following, UP female agriculture trainers regularly visited Latifa, provided her with extension support and guidance to manage the kitchen garden. She also received additional trainings on rain water harvesting, irrigation, correct harvesting and storage of vegetables. "In early July I harvested several vegetables, such as tomatoes, courgette, spinach, okra and coriander," Latifa says.



PIN supported 1,000 food insecure households.

Implemented with the support of the European Union, the kitchen gardening activity is part of a larger project seeking to improve resilience and strengthen coping mechanism of highly food insecure households in the informal settlements of urban communities in Afghanistan. "From 2013 to 2016, the UP project has already supported over 1,000 most food insecure households in the urban and peri-urban areas of Mazar-e-Sharif to strengthen their livelihoods system and access to improved nutrition," says PIN Urban Poverty Urban manager Ann-Katrina Bregovic.

However, PIN's years of experience conclusively suggests that helping families grow their own food is not sufficient to ensure their food security and nutritional status. It is also important to have a multi-sectorial approach to sustain the achievements of UP project and ensure that children under the age of 2 do not suffer from irreversible conditions like being stunted due to undernourishment. While



access to nutrient-rich food like vegetable is vital for raising the nutritional status of children, loss of nutrients due to poor storage, improper cooking practices and at brunt of diseases, like diarrhea, leads to the undernourishment of children.

It is in this backdrop PIN has intertwined a cross functional approach to addressing urban food security. Support to establish kitchen garden is hence only a part of the ecosystem and does not end after the first harvest of vegetables. “PIN also provided training on hygiene and nutrition and cooking classes to Latifa and 150 other beneficiaries between 2013 and 2014. These trainings are tailored for mothers, children and the male breadwinners in the family to facilitate their behavioral change for better hygiene and nutrition practices,” says Ann-Katrina Bregovic

“In the first training about hygiene, me together with my children took part in games where we learned about how germs and bacteria spread from hands to objects and to other people’s hands, about spread of diarrhea and importance of hand washing to avoid it,” describes Latifa the training about hygiene. Since most households in Afghanistan do not have access to running water, even simplest of hygienic practices like hand washing is a daily ordeal. Most of these families also cook outside their



house in a wood burning stove and do not even have basic kitchen equipment for food storage. It is therefore UP team not only provides trainings, they also complement beneficiaries’ increased awareness through provision of hygiene kits. These hygiene kits contain a hand washing station, food storage containers, chopping board, water jug and other smaller items. “These kits are intended to maintain adequate food hygiene within the households; helping families to keep drinking water and cooked food stowed away from flies and possible contamination,” says Ann-Katrina Bregovic.



By the end of 2014 Latifa will receive more training about the importance of vegetables for children and pregnant women, and in particular, how she can feed her children better with the little she has. In the upcoming few months, Latifa will also attend cooking sessions where she will learn ways to cook food in a healthier way and preserving its nutrient values. UP will also train her to store vegetables for the winter season by drying or pickling it and support her in another winter harvest with plastic tunnels.

In 2015, Latifa will still receive another package of seeds and extension support from the UP project. By the end of that year Latifa is envisioned to have a viable kitchen garden all year round and a sustainable source of nutrient rich vegetable for her family.

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