

## **Eco-Clubs**

The eco club programme relaunched during 2015 in the surrounding villages of Coimbatore. There are 10 participating schools covering 500 students under an innovative and experimental organic school garden programme. The aim is to provide practical life organic gardening skills to the students and for them to learn about nutrition, and sustainable ways to improve the environment.

### **Need for school garden program**

Gardening in school provides the opportunity to attain systematic knowledge and skill in the production of plants for human use. The initiative will impart gardening knowledge to future generations. Educators have long recognized that outdoor experiences encourage a child's social, physical, emotional as well as intellectual development. Gardening is an inspiring subject in the learning process because it is effortless, and requires involuntary attention from the children. With the massive increase in population in India there is an urgent need to improve crop productivity to achieve self-sufficiency and eradicate malnutrition. Children learn the techniques of food production and grow vegetables that can also be included in their school meals, thus helping to provide a balanced diet.

Additionally, the school garden acts as a realistic laboratory of learning, where facts learned in the classroom can be applied practically. For example, while growing crops students study the weather pattern of the region, and so engage in climate studies with the help of a rain gauge, hygrometer, thermometer and anemometer (measures wind speed). Children's artistic activities improve while designing the garden, sowing the seeds, selecting the seed varieties based on colour, size, and shape and so on. Children also gain mathematical knowledge by demarking the plot area, deciding the amount of seeds and manure, first ascertaining the length and breadth of rows, and the size of the master beds. Further they learn how to calculate the cost of production and learn basic budget finance skills. Gardening also enhances cooperation among peer groups and the students acquire social skills. In addition they learn the names of plants, all about pests and predators in the ecosystem and gain a holistic sense of biological thinking. In today's educational system parental involvement is of utmost importance. The steering committee established in each school ensures the eco-club is integrated into the school syllabus as an optional subject. School management will review progress and be given the opportunity to strengthen the gardening programme.

Schools are also be encouraged to organize outreach programmes such as seed fairs, horticultural shows, and soil day celebrations to involve the local community. Competition amongst selected schools will also provide a platform for students to showcase their talents and building awareness of their role in contributing to the nation's food security.

### **Objectives**

- Giving pupils knowledge and skills for better agricultural productivity and sustainable agricultural and horticultural practices; giving environmental education a sustainable and practical dimension, and helps change attitudes towards agriculture and rural life.

- Improving food diversity to combat micro-nutrient deficiencies among school children and improve overall food security.
- Provide a holistic sense of biological thinking including the environment
- Provide life skills in finance and economics

### **Project timescale**

The proposed project shall be implemented in 30 rural government schools within the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve over a 3- 5 year period, using organic gardening technologies such as biodynamics.

### **Stakeholders**

The various stakeholders involved in these projects are the Headmaster/Headmistress of the school, the District Education Officer, Parent Teachers Association members, parents, and also farming groups.

The year in pictures:

Here, students of Ettimadai school create awareness among the NSS students of Nehru college on the topic “Impact of pesticides on the health of future generation.”



This was followed up by GoHT’s education manager speaking as chief guest at the valedictory function of Nehru College, addressing the gathering about the role of youth in achieving India’s Millennium development goal.



At the Government High school in Vazhukuparai the newly formed eco-club students under GoHT guidance converted a waste tip or 'dump yard' into an organic garden. More than 8 beds were prepared to build top soil.



Here, in the following photograph, Ettimadai school children exhibit their traditional varieties of millets and grains to show the richness of agro botanical nutrient strength in traditional varieties.



Below, Irula Tribal children preparing Jeevamirtham



Chavadi children enriching their soil with cow dung slurry



And collecting biomass from the school surroundings