THE ROLE OF KITCHEN GARDENS IN FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITIONAL DIVERSITY: A CASE STUDY OF WORKERS AT JAMES FINLAY KENYA- KERICHO

Food security and nutritional diversity is one of the key areas that a developing country should address. With varying local opportunities and challenges, the kitchen garden forms a panacea that can address food insecurity and bring in self-reliance, sovereignty and dignity. Households have labour power—the physical ability of household members to generate income (Christopher, 2006). When this labour power is used in the kitchen garden it has the ability to improve food security and nutritional diversity of the household. Even with the dwindling land resource small areas around the house as small as ten square meters can make the difference in the lives of many.

This research was undertaken on workers at James Finlay Kenya to investigate the role of kitchen gardens in addressing food security and nutritional diversity. The research used both qualitative and quantitative approach to collect data from households and stakeholders. Stratified sample was used to pick household respondents.

The findings show that the kitchen gardens at James Finlay are small organic gardens which were started about six years ago. Majority of them are about 10 square meters. The size of the garden was designed to be big enough to produce sufficient vegetables for the household but small enough to be replicated in many areas in Kenya where land as a production unit has become too small. In the innovation uptake the social capital (in this case the predominant Seventh Day Adventist teaching of healthy living by promoting the use of plants as the major source of nutrients, the goodwill from the management) and the human capital in the form of traditional knowledge (71% had kitchen gardens before) played a big role. The management decision to reinforce this innovation by hiring a consultant to bring a positive change to food security and nutritional diversity of the workers acted as a trigger. Almost 48% of the respondents do not buy vegetables after establishing kitchen gardens as compared to 4.2% who were not buying vegetables before the gardens were formalised. About 99% of the respondents think that the kitchen garden has improved their nutritional diversity. Compared to the monoculture of the few gardens that existed before the formal gardens, more than 18 different varieties of vegetable and fruits were recorded in different households during the study indicating that a wide diversity has been achieved. Eighty five % have replicated the garden in their rural homes, and 98% have learnt a new skill indicating that the kitchen garden seems to be positively addressing food security and nutritional diversity and further demonstrating the central role of agriculture in meeting household needs.
James Finlay Kenya management should continue popularising the kitchen garden to bring more workers to self sufficiency in vegetable supply. As an organic garden the phosphorous deficiency should be addressed, possibly by using Finlays IPM crop division to improve the productivity of the gardens. Dudutech products from Finlays IPM approach like Rhizatec (mycelia enhancing roots system) and Vermitec (vermicompost) (Dudutech ltd, 2012) can be used for this purpose. The government can learn from this innovation and include a kitchen garden in its extension program as it has the capacity to address food security and nutritional diversity and especially so with the dwindling land sizes. Further research needs to be done to establish the quantity of vegetables harvested from these gardens. This will further help to establish the cost savings from the kitchen gardens which is important in arriving to wider recommendations.

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