



Salt of the Earth
Tree Planting Newsletter
March 2018





Dear valued tree planting supporter, I'm pleased to be sending you your annual tree planting newsletter. This year CRUSADE has done excellent work distributing saplings, vegetables and herbal plants across the area of rural Tamil Nadu in which they work.

It was wonderful to visit some of the homesteads this January, which now have bountiful home gardens providing food for consumption and income as well as shade and a greater sense of tranquility. The holistic programme that CRUSADE has developed is very exciting, and I hope you enjoy hearing about it in this newsletter.

Without all your loyal support none of this work would be possible so a heartfelt thank you from everyone at Salt of the Earth.

Best wishes,

Helena Bullock, Development Officer

CRUSADE's Work 2017-18

From 2017 to date, CRUSADE has continued to implement the Salt of the Earth sponsored tree planting project. The programme includes distribution of fruit and timber seedlings for personal use ranging from fuel provision to income, as well, of course, as providing good quality organic fruit. CRUSADE are also promoting organic vegetable cultivation in homestead plots and conducting training in herbal medicine: they have established a herbal nursery and also distribute herbal plants.

CRUSADE's outreach to the communities is all done through their previously established Women's Self Help Groups (WSHGs), groups that create community identity amongst rural women whilst supporting their personal and financial needs.

With your support, this last year has seen 1,257 fruit seedlings, including mango, guava, gooseberry, pomegranate, chikku, lemon and coconut seedlings, distributed to 585 WSHG members in 38 villages.

In addition, 2,150 vegetable seed packets, including ladies' fingers, brinjal, beans, bitter gourd, bottle gourd, pumpkin and tomato seeds have been distributed to 550 members for organic vegetable cultivation in homestead plots.

The herbal nursery has been established, including 2,000 plants such as aloe vera, insulin, pirandai, karpooravalli, lemongrass and chittarathai. Over 1,200 herbal plants have been distributed and, supported by an awareness-raising programme on their uses for both minor ailments and chronic diseases such as diabetes, provided with a guidebook about growing these plants. CRUSADE promoted herbal medicine among the WSHGs and provided training to 700 members. 585 WSHG members in 32 villages were trained by CRUSADE in nutrition and eating a balanced diet.



The programme has created much-needed awareness of growing fruit trees and vegetables and is developing a passion for consumption of organically grown vegetables. CRUSADE staff have remained on hand to help increase the survival rates of the tree saplings. However, the growing of casuarina trees was not popular amongst WSHG members, and so for the future, CRUSADE will approach small and marginal farmers with these timber-producing saplings.

The interest in tree planting, vegetable cultivation and herbal medicine remains high, and CRUSADE looks forward to continuing this programme in 2018, as well as establishing a nursery of fruit seedlings at their centre at Pudupakkam, improving the future sustainability of the programme.

For this coming year, CRUSADE intend to distribute 1,500 fruit seedlings and 2,500 vegetable seed packets to WSHG members whilst training 500 members in herbal medicine and distributing 2,000 herbal plants.



Kala in her homestead garden

Enhancing Family's Nutrition

If you asked Kala, of Nagathamman WSHG in Kalpakkam village in Minjur block of Tamil Nadu whether home-grown vegetables taste better and healthier than those she previously bought – she will immediately declare that they do.

Kala explains: “Before CRUSADE introduced the concept, we did not give much importance to tree planting and vegetable cultivation as a means of nutrition and income. Today, we not only have nutritious food but are able to sell our produce to the neighbours. My neighbours are happy to buy from me because all the vegetables are grown without chemical spray.”

Kala proudly shows us the plants in her garden. From ladies' fingers, brinjals, greens, beans to pomegranate, lemon, mango and guava trees – her garden is springing to life.

Her husband who is a labourer helps her in weeding and watering the garden. Her sons also lend a hand during the holidays.

During the last season she earned around Rs.1,000 by selling vegetables. “How many days can we buy vegetables from the market? Where will we find money to buy them?” points out Kala. Kala's words echo one of the primary goals of kitchen gardens – enriching their diets by growing food for home consumption.



Section of Maniyammal's garden



Maniyammal & grandchild at her garden

Harvesting Hope

For some, growing vegetables is their profession, whilst for others it is their passion. For Maniyammal, who lives in the small village of Thirunilai in Sholavaram Block in Tamil Nadu, her tree plantation started as an interest that soon blossomed into a real passion.

In a village with 242 houses, Maniyammal's garden catches the eye of any visitor. From brinjals, ladies' fingers, bottle gourd, bitter gourd, green chillies to a coconut tree and mango trees – the garden is beautiful to the eye.

"I am so grateful to CRUSADE for encouraging me to begin this. After I lost my husband two years ago, I seem to spend more of my time in the garden. My son and daughter-in-law help me too," says Maniyammal.

Maniyammal eats the produce from her garden and also sells the surplus to neighbours. She is happy that her grandchildren receive a nutritious meal each day from the produce.

CRUSADE's awareness-raising initiative has made her realize the value of vegetables that grow without any chemical fertilizers. Maniyammal is the President of Panchayat Level Federation, a Group Leader, Health worker and the Director of Action Rural Housing, she has become an icon of change in Thirunilai where women have lived silently and held no authority.

Inspired by CRUSADE's activities such as tree plantation, she is constantly trying to encourage as many women as possible to step outside their boundaries and explore the possibility of a better life.

The distribution of plants and seeds along with the skills imparted through this programme continue to bring hope to families in Thirunilai with each new harvest.