

## From School Garden to Home Garden

IFSP is contributing to reconstruction and rehabilitation in Trincomalee district by promoting better supply of food to conflict affected and food insecure households. A programme was launched in 1998/99 at 11 schools in 7 administrative divisions of the



Students maintaining the plants

district to establish vegetable seedlings and fruit plant nurseries. The main criteria for the selection of schools were a permanent water supply, availability of suitable land and easy access. In addition the interest of the school principal and the agricultural teacher as well as the demand for vegetable seedlings and fruit plants in the area were considered. The objective of the school garden programme is to promote the establishment of home gardens in the vicinity of the schools leading to an

increased production of vegetables and fruits for home consumption and for the local market. This innovative programme has been jointly implemented by the Departments of Agriculture (DoA) and Education (DoE) with the conceptual and financial support from the IFSP-GTZ. Based on the successful implementation of the programme in the 11 schools due to the excellent co-operation among the three institutions involved viz. DoA, DoE and IFSP-GTZ, it was decided to expand the programme to 44 new schools in 1999/2000. The school garden programme is now implemented in 55 schools altogether covering all 11 divisions of the district.

### Students' Involvement

The success depends primarily on the students who really form the backbone of the programme. Eight students and one agricultural teacher from each selected school were given a thorough training on the establishment and maintenance of vegetable and fruit plant nurseries, and home gardens. Agricultural instructors, agricultural officers and subject matter officers conducted this training. An agricultural club formed in each selected school played a major role in establishing and maintaining the vegetable plant nurseries and in keeping records of production and sale of seedlings. The programme is expected to be sustained, once the IFSP-GTZ support is discontinued, through the income earned by sale of seedlings.

The students not only benefit through the practical agricultural experience but also develop the leadership qualities and the ability to work together as a team by being involved in the functioning of the club. It is heartening to note that the students work in rotation, even after school hours and during holidays, to maintain the vegetable plant nurseries. The students are motivated by awarding prizes based on poster and essay competitions, among the participating schools, regarding plant nurseries. A quiz competition is being

conducted among all the participating schools to further motivate the students. This competition will be conducted initially at the agricultural instructor range level, then at the agricultural officer segment level and finally at the district level in both the Tamil and the Sinhala media.

### From School Nurseries to Home Garden

The ultimate objective of the programme is to promote the establishment of home gardens in the vicinity of schools. The school nurseries and school gardens not only serve as an entry point to create nutrition and health awareness among the villagers, but also to establish a healthy relationship between the school and the parents living in the adjoining villages. Field days are organized at schools where the students, teachers and the officers of the Department of Agriculture explain to the villagers the technical details of establishing and maintaining the vegetable and fruit plant nurseries. The vegetable seedlings are sold at concessionary prices to the villagers thus meeting the higher demand for seedlings. These seedlings include cabbage, brinjal, chilli, tomato, beetroot, beans, capsicum and other vegetables which are commonly cultivated in these areas. The students play a major role in not only producing and selling seedlings but also in disseminating the necessary technical information to their parents and their neighbours. This helps the extension service in a big way at a time the DoA is shifting from individual to group approach leading to larger extension coverage. Some well maintained home gardens will also be used as demonstrations to arrange extension group activities.

### Progress and Prospects

Vegetable seedling nurseries were established in all the selected schools. Fruit plant nurseries were also raised in most of the schools. In total 97,500 seedlings of different vegetables were produced. The sale of these seedlings resulted in a total revenue of Rs 31,000. This money will be used to purchase the next round of seed

materials and other inputs. As such the school nursery programme becomes self sustainable. A total of 400 home gardens have been established so far with the vegetable seedlings raised in the school nurseries. This helped to produce good quality vegetables for a large number of families and was expected to increase their nutritional status. Continued success of the programme depends, to a great extent, on the dedication of school principals and teachers, motivation of students, active



A satisfied customer: taking the vegetable seedlings home

involvement of parents and the propagation of home gardening by the social mobilisers and the extension officers of the DoA. It is planned to maintain some school gardens throughout the year. They will be equipped with water pump and pipes for irrigation.

#### IFSP news is also available in Tamil and Sinhala

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INTEGRATED FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

