

Chapter 7

Reviving a Forsaken Entrepot Using Integrated School Gardening: An Approach to Curriculum Contextualization

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents success stories from an integrated school gardening undertaken in a community school at an old Newari settlement- Dapcha. These stories depict how once a bustling commercial hub and a historic trade route located high in the hillsides have been set in a state of revival while the authors worked with co-researchers for more than a year. The chapter reflects the research journey of the first author while pursuing the Masters of Philosophy (MPhil) program made possible with concomitant support from the NORHED 'Rupantaran' project. While working on valuing tenets of participatory action research, school gardening was discovered as an evolving pedagogical model as this contributed primarily to curriculum contextualization, and also realized its potential to revive the region's social, ecological, and economic aspects. In a bigger picture, stories evolved considering ecological sanitation (eco-san) based school gardening as roots while shooting up into multiple facets of entrepreneurship under an integrated school gardening project, as a promising pedagogical model.

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INTRODUCTION

Thousands of articles in the areas of educational reform have been published over the last decade with the majority of research suggesting improvement in policies and practices in the areas of teacher professional development (TPD), classroom digitalization (ICT), improvements in assessments and evaluation, etc. However, fewer studies have walked pedagogical transformation through praxis considering the potential of school gardening. A better understanding of the digitalization of learning space, reformation in several areas of TPD, and periodic revision in assessment plans and activities is particularly needed in school education. Traditional school education has put learners off from contextualized learning practices providing an opportunity to design and experiment with integrated school gardening (ISG) on engaged learning. Participation of stakeholders (teacher, students, and community members) in school gardening, particularly in transforming a ‘traditional’ school, can be critical in addressing decontextualized and disengaged curricula (Luitel, 2013; Pant, 2023), which have often disconnected learners from their life (Bajracharya & Brouwer, 1997). Although ISG has been evolving as a comprehensive learning model in school education, a large body of information supports its role in the gradual revival of the local community when stakeholders designed and implemented it from 2019 to 2023.

Funded by NORHED ‘Rupantaran’ project, a pool of researchers (Ph.D., MPhil, and Masters) from Kathmandu University collaborated with stakeholders of a community school in Dapcha, to expand our understanding of the role of stakeholders in transforming a ‘traditional’ school and the community. Earlier, researchers had identified school-specific needs, among which contextualization of the curriculum using local resources (Wagle et al., 2019) was considered a primary, whereas the development of ecological sanitation (eco-san)-based school gardening (Rajbanshi et al., 2021) was recommended as a highly sought requirements for educational improvement. As a continuation in the journey of scientific exploration, the lead author as a part of MPhil research was involved in working on those identified needs with stakeholders, through participatory action research from September 2019 to May 2022. The first co-author, besides undertaking a supervisory role during the research period was involved in an editorial and commentary role in the writing of the book chapter. The second co-author supervised the engineering aspect of the eco-san component, whereas the third co-author implicitly facilitated stakeholders at the school garden.

Dapcha, a place we intervened, now confined under Namobuddha Municipality is an old Newari settlement with large areas of steep hills, predominantly rural landscapes, once served as a bustling commercial hub. The community resembled a museum of history, a piece of the past we neglected while we created more efficient trade routes and transportation systems connecting eastern Nepal with the Capital (situated 50 KM west of Dapcha). An ancient forsaken entrepot on a historic trade route from Kathmandu to Eastern Nepal, located high in the hillsides with abundant natural resources, cultural diversity, and heritage could have excellent economic potential. In the official web portal, the municipality claimed that “the Kathmandu valley’s “farmers markets” mostly feature goods obtained from the Namobuddha mountain flank’s northern villages of Phulbari and Patlekhet, nation’s hub for organic farming” (Namobuddha Municipality, 2022). On the contrary, we noticed that the majority of the youths who are considered as work engines of production are gone in Dapcha, since many have relocated to the city in search of “warmer climes” like other hillside settlements in Nepal, leaving it in a hushed up, expiring bazaar or a dying market town that has only reminisces of the past (Pant, 2023). In addition to it, situation analysis based on the secondary information and discussion with the mayoral team and other stakeholders revealed what Namobuddha wishes to achieve all the way towards environmental

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