

No more waste - no more flies - and home-grown food.. ..Tulsi Gyawali's journey to cleaning up the mess

By Chesha Wettasinha, Secretariat, Prolinnova Oversight Group

Tulsi Gyawali lives with her family in Bharatpur, Chitwan, a peri-urban area of Nepal. During the troubled years of the Maoist uprising in Nepal, many people moved from rural to peri-urban areas for safety. Thus, Chitwan's population increased rapidly. And, with the population, came the refuse.

Once clean neighbourhoods were fast becoming smelly rubbish dumps. With no proper waste disposal system, people simply threw their rubbish into the streets. Soon there were rotting piles, hordes of flies, crows and stray dogs, that became a menace.

Tulsi was not happy. Having been raised in a pristinely clean mountainous village, she was appalled at how much waste she and others were producing in their homes. She decided to take action and put her will and creativity to work.

She was determined, first and foremost, that she was going to reduce the waste in her home to a minimum. She knew she had to do it herself before she could convince others. And so she got to work.

First she separated all her household rubbish – paper, plastics, perishables, bottles, tins etc. Then she began composting the perishables such as kitchen waste and leftover food. She used the compost to set up an urban roof garden in pots and started growing her own vegetables. She made rope out of the plastic bags and wove it into baskets. She re-used the tins and bottles for planting seeds, storing food, as vases for flowers and for a myriad other purposes.

Soon, she found she had reduced the waste in her home to a minimum. And, added to this, she was hardly buying any vegetables from the market as her garden was producing enough for the

family. These were also home-grown vegetables, produced without any chemical treatment.

She began to sell her baskets and some of the excess compost to generate extra income. And, to her delight, there were less flies around the house and the nasty smell that lingered was all but gone.

Not enough

This was not enough, however. She now needed to do something to clean up her street. So she began approaching her neighbours, one woman at a time, and encouraged them to follow her example. Soon she'd set up a women's group and all of them started recycling their waste, sharing their experiences and learning together. Slowly but surely the street got cleaned up and the piles of rubbish disappeared. Added to this, many of the women started up little urban gardens to grow their own organic vegetables.

Around this time, Ecoscentre in Chitwan, a partner of Prolinnova-Nepal, discovered Tulsi, documenting her story and sharing it with others. In addition, Practical Action Nepal, another Prolinnova partner, got her involved in the urban council through one of their projects.

Tulsi joined a training workshop in compost making and even got the chance to visit India to learn more. On her return, she took up vermi-composting and got involved in experimenting with different forms of composting for small spaces. Together with development agents and technical staff from Prolinnova Nepal, Tulsi began to adapt the design of some of the compost chambers to fit her needs. Soon, she became known for her innovations in compost making and



Tulsi Gyawali

urban gardening and was giving training to others.

In 2009 Tulsi won the Female Innovator of the Year award given by Prolinnova Nepal. She presented her innovations at the National Farmer Innovation Fair in 2009 in Kathmandu and was featured live on Kanthipur Television. She was invited by the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science of the Tribhuvan University in Chitwan to share her experiences with students and teachers at a seminar on



Credit: Chesha Wettasinha

a persistent spirit and the right support from service providers... and things happen. Prolinnova's mission is to discover such innovators, men and women, young and old, give them due recognition, support them to improve their innovations through a process of farmer-led joint research. Farmers take the lead and other external actors support them in a process of co-construction of knowledge.

Prolinnova is a CSO-led international network that promotes local innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management and is currently operational in 21 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The international secretariat of Prolinnova is being hosted by KIT since July 2015. More information can be found at: www.prolinnova.net

Thanks are due to Basanta Ranabhat, Dharma Dangol and Suman Manandhar of Prolinnova Nepal who have supported Tulsi from her small beginnings. They also read my draft and provided comments and more recent information. Ecoscenter, based in Chitwan, continues to support Tulsi in her mission.

Global farmer innovation fair 2021

Prolinnova and A Growing Culture (AGC) ran a virtual Farmer Innovation Fair (FIF) in February, giving farmers in Africa and Asia the chance to showcase their innovations and to learn from each other.

The event highlighted the achievements and experiences of farmer innovators, who displayed their work directly and individually or as group representatives. Presentations were given in conversation with other farmers and facilitators and/or in video clips.

FIF presentations will be posted on the Prolinnova website: <http://www.prolinnova.net>

Agroecology. Her presentation was applauded by the faculty.

She also addressed delegates of the Innovation Asia Pacific Symposium co-organised by Prolinnova partners, CIAT-Asia and ICIMOD, in 2009. In 2012, she travelled to Cambodia to participate in an international workshop on Climate Change, Innovation and Gender and shared her experiences.

Since 2015, Bharatpur Sub-metropolitan city (previously Bharatpur Municipality) started to

promote roof top farming in urban areas and Tulsi has been instrumental in convincing the city authorities to launch this programme. Since the launch, she has been involved in facilitating training on roof-top farming in addition to solid waste management, continuing her mission to make the change she wants to see in her country.

Things happen

From one woman, an innovative and low-cost solution to a pressing problem,