

## **Biointensive Gardening as a Tool**

### **for Combatting Malnutrition**

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**Abstract:** Malnutrition is a public health problem in Cavite, Philippines, where 18.9% of children ages 0-5 years old are classified as underweight or wasted. To help combat malnutrition and improve the eating practices of children, the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction established bio-intensive gardens (BIG) in 27 daycare centers in Cavite. This study aimed to evaluate the implementation of BIGs in order to identify benefits and challenges associated with the program. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 33 daycare center workers and 85 parents from three purposively selected municipalities in Cavite. Data were transcribed and analyzed. Data analysis revealed that the main benefit associated with BIG was improved preference for vegetables at home among children as observed by mothers. Other benefits were reflected in the following themes: complementary support to feeding programs, promotion of local indigenous crops, and nutritional education of the children. Challenges encountered included the following themes: lack of long-term political and parental support, poor access to land and water, and lack of active child participation. Recommendations included advocating for political support, performing container gardening, selecting more weather-resistant crops, and providing incentives for child and parental participation.

**Keywords:** Bio-intensive gardening, malnutrition, pre-school children, feeding programs, Cavite