One of Karuna-Shechen’s most innovative and effective initiatives in India is our

[*small money* BIG CHANGE](http://karuna-shechen.org/news/small-changes-make-big-difference/) program, which funds community-based and sustainable projects that make a direct positive change to their quality of life. These projects are proactive and involve the cooperation of the community. They are usually small and inexpensive, but they have a dynamic impact in the lives of our under-served beneficiaries.

Karuna-Shechen developed the Kitchen Gardens program to reach thousands of mothers and families in India who suffer from malnutrition. We found that the best solution to this crisis, other than awareness and education, is to help families plant kitchen gardens — a simple way to produce nutrient-rich, organic vegetables right in their own backyards.

We provide non-GMO seeds, fruit trees, manuals, and on-site training, and we continue to offer support and encouragement as the gardens grow. This initiative has proved to be very successful in the district of Bihar, India, where 10,500 households under our program have created on-going kitchen gardens. Our participants are mainly women who feel empowered being proactive and learning about how to combat malnutrition. Kitchen gardens also increase communication and social skills within the community.

"Because sustainable food production is so important, I help train and support villagers to grow organic vegetable gardens. In my village, Karuna-Shechen provided training on the use of traditional techniques and distributed a handbook villagers can follow. Now, they are able to produce abundant gardens and use pesticides they prepare themselves from local ingredients."

*~ Saraswati T., one of our food security volunteers*

In Bihar, kitchen gardens have improved the living conditions of thousands of villagers, very often families of 5 people. Our program helped them to cultivate traditional vegetables — onions, peppers, and beans. The villagers grow their vegetables and share the surplus with their community, which stimulates cooperation and boosts the social fabric. Eating these vegetables has an enormously positive impact on the health of the most vulnerable families.

GLOBAL GIVING PROJECT

We are implementing the kitchen garden program in a second remote district, Jharkhand, where the population faces many difficulties. They have no or very few belongings, except for one or two pots for cooking and storing water. There is a high incidence of malnutrition, especially in the villages.

Karuna-Shechen, with the help of Global Giving, plans to plant kitchen gardens for villages and families in Jharkand. Helping 450 families (that is the size of a small village) is just the beginning, as we plan to continue and expand into other communities.

With help from our donors and Global Giving, we will provide over 23 varieties of non-GMO seeds and seasonal fruit trees. Our local team will instruct the women on good soil cultivation and sustainability. Rainwater harvesting tanks will be installed, and a pond will be dug to supply water for additional crops and soil cultivation.

ABOUT KARUNA-SHECHEN

Karuna-Shechen began its work in the mid-1980s when our founder, Matthieu Ricard, initiated a number of small programs to improve the living conditions of the Himalayan people. Matthieu had lived in the region for over fifty years. He is an internationally best selling author, Buddhist monk, photographer, popular speaker at TED, Davos, and the United Nations, and an inspired humanitarian: <http://www.matthieuricard.org>

Our programs are designed to address the inequalities and suffering of people in India, Nepal, and Tibet. Our activities concentrate on four sectors of intervention: health, education, community development, and cultural preservation.

We have established an effective, collaborative team of trained workers from the local population and local NGOs in the field. Working within communities, we identify the greatest needs and create sustainable solutions in cooperative partnership with our beneficiaries.

Over the years, our vision has remained unchanged. It is based on community engagement and empowerment, grassroots cooperation, and respect for unique cultural identities. We strive to create projects that are sustainable models so that they can be duplicated and continued in the future.

We have international branches that raise funds for our programs and make the public aware of our activities and the conditions that we address. We are delighted to partner with Global Giving to actualize our vision of “compassion in action.”

<http://www.karuna-shechen.org>