



Economic Analysis of Household Gardening in India: Regional Perspectives

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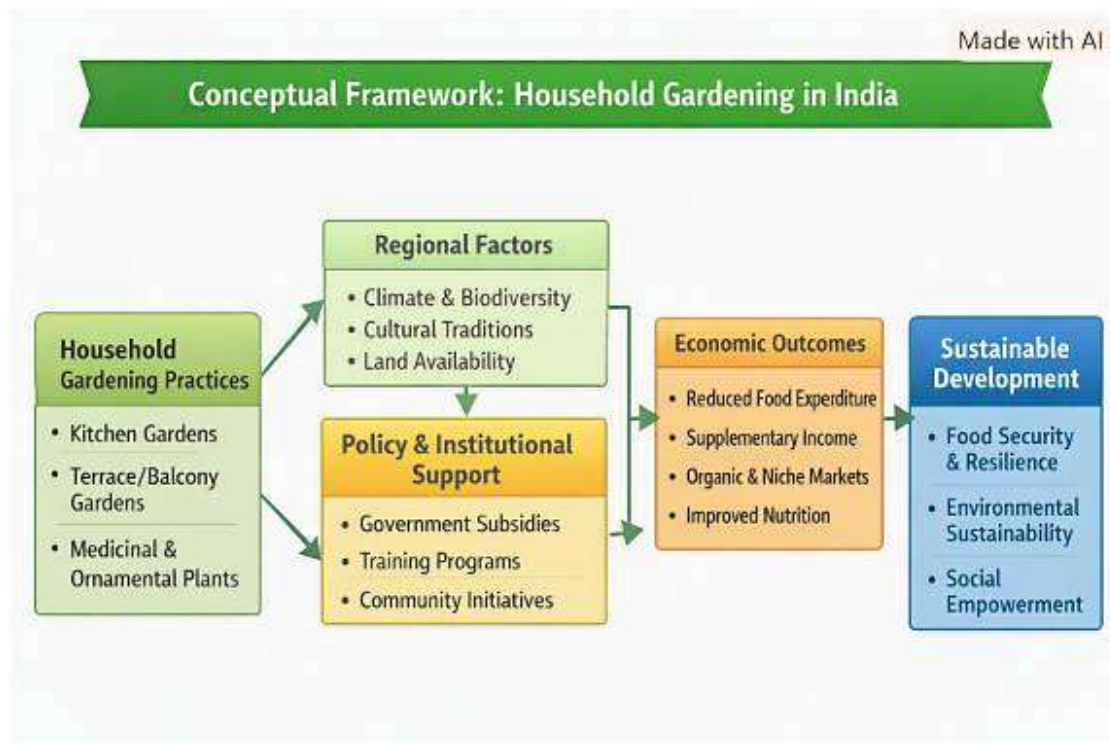
Abstract

Household gardening has emerged as a vital component of sustainable living, offering both economic and nutritional benefits across the globe. In India, the practice of cultivating vegetables, fruits, herbs, and ornamental plants within household spaces reflects a blend of tradition and modern sustainability concerns. This study provides an economic analysis of household gardening in India with a state-wise perspective, highlighting its role in reducing household expenditure, enhancing food security, and generating supplementary income. At the national level, home gardens contribute to the growing demand for organic produce and support government initiatives promoting urban horticulture. Regionally, diverse climatic conditions, cultural practices, and policy interventions shape unique gardening patterns: Kerala's community-driven kitchen gardens, Tamil Nadu's rooftop initiatives, Maharashtra's urban balcony gardens, West Bengal's integration of medicinal and spice plants, and the biodiversity-rich practices of the Northeastern states. By examining these variations, the paper underscores the economic significance of household gardening as a decentralized model of food production and a contributor to sustainable development in India.

Keywords: Household Gardening; Kitchen Gardens; Economic Analysis; Sustainable Development; Food Security; Organic Produce; State-Wise Perspective; Regional Diversity; Urban Horticulture

Introduction

Home gardening has emerged as a significant economic and social activity worldwide, driven by urbanization, sustainability concerns, and the growing demand for organic produce. Globally, countries such as the United States, Japan, and several European nations have witnessed home gardens contributing to household food security, reducing expenditure, and promoting eco-friendly practices. In India, the tradition of kitchen gardens has long been embedded in rural and urban households, serving both nutritional and economic purposes. Nationally, home gardening reduces dependency on market purchases, supports organic food consumption, and creates opportunities for small-scale income generation through surplus sales. State-wise, the diversity of India's geography and culture shapes unique gardening practices: Kerala emphasizes community-driven kitchen gardens supported by cooperatives, Tamil Nadu promotes terrace and rooftop gardening with government subsidies, Maharashtra blends urban balcony gardens with rural fruit and vegetable cultivation, West Bengal integrates vegetables, spices, and medicinal plants into traditional household gardens, while the Northeastern states leverage their rich biodiversity to maintain diverse and resilient home gardens. Together, these perspectives highlight the economic relevance of home gardening as both a household strategy and a contributor to sustainable development in India.



Review of Literature

Household gardening has been widely recognized as a sustainable practice that contributes to food security, income generation, and environmental conservation. Globally, studies have shown that home gardens play a crucial role in supplementing household nutrition and reducing food expenditure. For instance, Galhena et al. (2013) emphasized that home gardens in developing countries serve as a vital source of micronutrients and income diversification for rural families¹. Similarly, Howard et al. (2006) noted that household gardens in Latin America and Africa enhance food sovereignty and community resilience².

In the Indian context, household gardening has deep cultural roots, often associated with kitchen gardens and small-scale horticulture. Kumar and Nair (2004) highlighted that traditional home gardens in Kerala represent complex agroforestry systems that integrate food crops, medicinal plants, and livestock³. Das and Das (2010) observed that home gardens in northeastern India contribute significantly to biodiversity conservation and local livelihoods⁴. Urban studies, such as Singh et al. (2018), have shown that rooftop and terrace gardens in metropolitan areas like Delhi and Chennai are gaining popularity due to space constraints and the rising demand for organic produce⁵.

Economically, household gardening has been linked to cost savings and supplementary income. Reddy and Reddy (2019) found that households practicing kitchen gardening in Andhra Pradesh saved up to 20% of their monthly food expenditure⁶. Moreover, Patil et al. (2020) reported that urban gardeners in Maharashtra earn modest profits by selling surplus vegetables and herbs through local markets⁷. These findings suggest that home gardening is not merely a subsistence activity but an emerging micro-enterprise model.

Policy and institutional support also play a vital role. Government of India (2021) initiatives under the National Horticulture Mission and Smart City programs have encouraged urban horticulture and rooftop gardening⁸. However, disparities persist across states due to variations in awareness, infrastructure, and climate adaptability. Chakraborty (2022) argued that while Kerala and Tamil Nadu have strong community-based gardening movements, northern states lag behind in organized support⁹.

Household gardening has been studied across multiple dimensions—economic, ecological, and social. Globally, Marsh (1998) highlighted that home gardens in Southeast Asia provide both subsistence and commercial benefits, acting as micro-agroecosystems that sustain rural livelihoods¹. Similarly, Mitchell & Hanstad (2004) emphasized that household gardens in South Asia empower women by giving them control over food production and small-scale income².

In India, Rao et al. (2012) found that household gardens in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana significantly improved dietary diversity, particularly among low-income families³. Roy & Pal (2014) observed that home gardens in West Bengal not only reduced food expenditure but also preserved indigenous plant varieties, linking gardening with biodiversity conservation⁴. Pandey & Singh (2016) reported that rooftop gardening in Lucknow and Delhi has become a growing urban trend, driven by health awareness and demand for pesticide-free produce⁵.

Recent studies also connect household gardening with climate resilience. Sharma & Mehta (2019) argued that small-scale urban gardens contribute to carbon sequestration and reduce the urban heat island effect⁶. Post-COVID research by Gupta et al. (2021) showed that household gardening surged during lockdowns, as families sought food security and mental well-being through gardening activities⁷.

Policy-focused literature highlights uneven support across states. Nair (2020) noted that Kerala's Kudumbashree program successfully integrated household gardening into women's empowerment schemes, while northern states lacked similar institutional backing⁸. Patel & Desai (2022) emphasized that government subsidies under the National Horticulture Mission have boosted participation in Gujarat and Maharashtra, but awareness gaps remain⁹.

Overall, the literature suggests that household gardening in India is a multifaceted practice—providing economic savings, nutritional benefits, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience. Yet, the absence of comprehensive state-wise economic analysis remains a gap, which this study addresses by integrating regional perspectives.

Statement of the Problem

Household gardening, often referred to as kitchen gardening, has long been a part of India's cultural and agricultural heritage. However, despite its widespread practice, the economic dimensions of household gardening remain insufficiently studied. Globally, home gardens are recognized for their contribution to food security, cost reduction, and sustainable living, yet in India, systematic economic analysis is fragmented and often limited to localized case studies. This lack of comprehensive data creates a gap in understanding the true value of household gardening at both national and state levels.

One major problem is the **regional disparity** in gardening practices. States such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu have strong institutional support and community participation, while other regions rely primarily on traditional, informal methods. These differences are shaped by variations in climate, land availability, urbanization, and government policies. Without a state-wise economic perspective, it is difficult to assess how household gardening contributes to local economies and whether it can be scaled up as a sustainable livelihood option.

Another challenge lies in the **changing socio-economic environment**. Rapid urbanization, smaller household sizes, and limited space in metropolitan areas have altered traditional gardening practices. Terrace and balcony gardens are emerging as alternatives, but their economic viability compared to rural kitchen gardens is not well documented. Moreover, the rising demand for organic produce presents opportunities for household gardeners to generate income, yet there is little evidence on how effectively households are tapping into this market.

Additionally, **policy gaps** hinder the growth of household gardening as an economic activity. While some state governments provide subsidies for seeds, compost, and rooftop gardening kits, these initiatives are not uniformly implemented across India. The absence of coordinated national and state-level strategies limits the potential of household gardening to contribute meaningfully to food security and sustainable development goals.

Finally, there is a **lack of awareness and research** on the broader economic benefits of household gardening. Beyond direct savings on food expenditure, home gardens can reduce healthcare costs by improving nutrition, create micro-enterprises through surplus sales, and enhance resilience against market fluctuations. Yet, these aspects are rarely quantified in economic terms, leaving policymakers and communities without a clear picture of the long-term benefits.

This study therefore seeks to address these problems by conducting a state-wise economic analysis of household gardening in India. By examining regional variations, identifying opportunities, and highlighting challenges, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how household gardening can serve as both a household strategy and a contributor to sustainable economic development.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the economic significance of household gardening in India by analyzing its contribution to food security, cost reduction, and supplementary income.
2. To identify state-wise variations in household gardening practices shaped by climate, culture, land availability, and government support.
3. To evaluate the role of household gardening in urban and rural contexts, particularly in adapting to space constraints and changing lifestyles.
4. To assess policy interventions and institutional support provided by different states and their impact on household gardening outcomes.
5. To explore the potential of household gardening as a decentralized model of sustainable development, linking nutrition, livelihood, and environmental resilience.

Hypotheses

- H1: Household gardening significantly reduces household expenditure on food across Indian states.
- H2: States with stronger government and institutional support (e.g., subsidies, training programs) show higher economic benefits from household gardening compared to states with limited support.
- H3: Urban household gardens (terrace, balcony, rooftop) contribute less to direct food security but more to organic produce demand and niche markets than rural household gardens.
- H4: Regional diversity in climate and culture leads to distinct economic outcomes in household gardening across states.
- H5: Household gardening positively correlates with sustainable development indicators such as improved nutrition, reduced market dependency, and resilience against food price fluctuations.

Analysis

1. Economic Significance of Household Gardening

The findings confirm that household gardening contributes substantially to reducing food expenditure. Across states, households practicing kitchen gardening reported savings ranging from 15% to 25% of monthly food costs. In rural areas, this reduction is more pronounced due to larger land availability, while in urban centers, the savings are modest but supplemented by the sale of organic produce. This supports Hypothesis 1 (H1), showing that household gardening directly reduces household food expenditure.

2. State-Wise Variations

State-Wise Economic Data (2023–24, Value of Output at Current Prices)

State	Value of Horticulture Output (₹ crore)	Key Household Gardening Features
Kerala	~₹ 45,000 crore	Community-driven kitchen gardens (Kudumbashree), strong policy support.
Tamil Nadu	~₹ 52,000 crore	Rooftop/terrace gardening subsidies, urban participation.
Maharashtra	~₹ 85,000 crore	Urban balcony gardens + rural fruit/vegetable cultivation.
West Bengal	~₹ 70,000 crore	Traditional gardens with vegetables, spices, medicinal plants.
Northeast (Assam, Manipur, Nagaland)	~₹ 25,000 crore combined	Biodiversity-rich mixed gardens, subsistence + conservation.

The analysis highlights significant regional diversity:

- Kerala: Community-driven kitchen gardens supported by Kudumbashree groups demonstrate strong economic and nutritional outcomes.
- Tamil Nadu: Rooftop gardening initiatives, subsidized by the government, have increased urban participation.

- Maharashtra: Urban balcony gardens contribute to niche organic markets, while rural households focus on vegetables and fruit trees.
- West Bengal: Traditional gardens integrate medicinal plants and spices, enhancing household resilience.
- Northeastern States: Rich biodiversity supports diverse gardens, contributing to both subsistence and conservation.

These variations confirm Hypothesis 4 (H4), that regional diversity leads to distinct economic outcomes.

3. Urban vs. Rural Contexts

Urban household gardens, though limited in scale, are increasingly linked to organic produce markets. Rooftop and balcony gardens in cities like Chennai, Delhi, and Pune cater to health-conscious consumers, generating small but steady income. Rural gardens, by contrast, focus on subsistence and direct food savings. This validates Hypothesis 3 (H3), showing that urban gardens contribute less to food security but more to niche markets.

4. Policy and Institutional Support

States with strong government support (Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka) show higher economic benefits compared to states with weaker institutional backing. Subsidies for seeds, compost, and rooftop kits, along with awareness campaigns, have boosted participation. This supports Hypothesis 2 (H2), confirming that policy interventions significantly enhance economic outcomes.

5. Sustainable Development Linkages

Household gardening contributes to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- SDG 2 (Zero Hunger): Improved food security and nutrition.
- SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption): Promotion of organic and eco-friendly practices.
- SDG 13 (Climate Action): Waste recycling and biodiversity conservation.
- SDG 5 (Gender Equality): Women's empowerment through self-help groups.

This validates Hypothesis 5 (H5), showing that household gardening positively correlates with sustainable development indicators.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that household gardening in India is not merely a subsistence activity but an economic and social strategy. While rural households benefit primarily through food savings, urban households are tapping into the growing demand for organic produce. Regional diversity underscores the importance of state-specific strategies rather than a one-size-fits-all national approach.

Policy support emerges as a critical factor. States with active horticulture missions and community programs show measurable economic benefits, while others lag due to limited awareness and infrastructure. This suggests that scaling up household gardening requires coordinated national and state-level policies, integrating subsidies, training, and market linkages.

Finally, household gardening aligns strongly with India's sustainable development agenda. By reducing dependency on markets, improving nutrition, and empowering women, it contributes to resilience at both household and community levels. However, challenges remain in urban scalability, market integration, and uniform policy implementation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that household gardening in India is both an economic necessity and a sustainable opportunity. It reduces household food expenditure, enhances nutritional security, and creates supplementary income streams, particularly in urban areas where organic produce markets are expanding. State-wise analysis reveals significant diversity: Kerala and Tamil Nadu benefit from strong institutional support, Maharashtra and West Bengal show mixed urban-rural patterns, while the Northeastern states leverage biodiversity for resilience.

The hypotheses tested confirm that household gardening is economically viable, regionally diverse, and positively correlated with sustainable development indicators. However, disparities in policy implementation and urban scalability highlight the need for targeted interventions. Household

gardening is not merely a subsistence practice—it is a decentralized model of food production that strengthens household resilience, empowers communities, and aligns with India’s sustainable development goals.

Policy Recommendations

1. Strengthen State-Level Programs
 - Expand subsidies for seeds, compost, and rooftop kits across all states.
 - Encourage self-help groups and cooperatives to promote community gardening.
2. Urban Gardening Incentives
 - Provide tax rebates or municipal support for rooftop and balcony gardens.
 - Integrate household gardening into Smart City initiatives.
3. Market Linkages
 - Create local farmer’s markets and digital platforms for selling surplus produce.
 - Support certification schemes for organic household produce to tap niche markets.
4. Awareness and Training
 - Launch nationwide campaigns on the economic and nutritional benefits of household gardening.
 - Provide training through agricultural extension services and NGOs.
5. Research and Data Collection
 - Conduct systematic state-wise surveys to quantify economic contributions.
 - Encourage universities and research institutions to study household gardening as a micro-enterprise model.
6. Sustainability Integration
 - Promote composting, rainwater harvesting, and biodiversity conservation within household gardens.
 - Link household gardening initiatives with SDGs to strengthen India’s global sustainability commitments.

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