

KITCHEN MANAGEMENT FOR THE VILLAGE HOME-SRI LANKAN EXPERIENCE

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Young or old, rich or poor, rural woman or urban woman, what is it that women want and need in their kitchens?

All that they need are light and ventilation, no smoke or soot, easy storage of dry food ingredients, and a hygienic place to keep their washed utensils. This can be provided in the most stylish and expensive manner. But the same basic needs can also be fulfilled in a village kitchen using your imagination and innovativeness.

It is just such an improved kitchen for the village woman that has been designed and is being promoted by "Integrated Development Agency- IDEA" a Sri Lankan NGO based in Kandy.

By doing this they have thrown out the myth that the poor need just to put three bricks or stones together in a sheltered place, light a fire and their kitchen is ready! Unfortunately this is a myth prevalent even today among the so called educated people. I found this out recently while talking to a retired woman Vice Chancellor of a good University from Tamil Nadu in India.

She very airily dismissed the very idea of kitchen management for the poor by saying "oh! The poor do not need kitchen management! It is the rich who need it and can afford it" So much for education I thought.

As I entered the kitchen designed and planned by IDEA in Kandy, I looked around in pleasant surprise. It was very well planned and had all the features needed for a good kitchen, using material easily available locally in all villages.



The improved earthen cook stove or "chullha" was not on the ground as is customary. It had been put on a platform at a convenient working height. What was even more interesting was that instead of the usual thin pipe chimney, it had been given a wide brick chimney, the dimensions of the cooking platform. For optimum utilization of space simple shelves using rods were built above the stove at least two and half to three feet above the stoves. These were used for either drying fire wood, or even food stuff. Underneath the platform too a similar shelve had been made for storing firewood and other materials.



Ventilation was provided very cleverly, by leaving a gap of at least 12 inches above the wall and the roof. Bamboo pieces formed a grill, while letting in both air and light. Small holes in the wall did the same work, and a window near the work place ensured fresh air.



For light the first thing I noticed on roof was the piece of glass fitted on the roof where a rectangle of the thatch had been cut out of the roof. This provided overhead light! One wall

too had a piece of glass fitted in for light. No electric bulbs but letting in as much natural light as possible.



A work surface has been built along one wall, using old bricks plastered with mud. Shelves made from the wood taken from old crates, provided excellent storage. To make sure that small bottles and tins would not fall off, a thin strip of wood was nailed across for safety.



The grinding stone, a must in any home in the South Asian region, was also fixed on a small stand made from bricks plastered with mud. This eliminated sitting on the ground for grinding, and ensured cleanliness, apart from keeping the woman's clothes clean.

An innovative utensil basket/rack has been designed using old pipes and chicken wire mesh. This helped the water to drain out and keep the cleaned utensils dry and off the ground.

In the corner even a small sink has been provided with a pipe for waste water leading out into the greenery. This pipe was at least 6-8 feet long which meant no puddle of water near the kitchen.



Specially thoughtful was the small space provided in front of the kitchen door, with a small earthen wall wide enough to sit on. This space was meant to be used by the children while the mother worked inside the kitchen. This way the mother could keep an eye on them, yet they would be away from the kitchen.



As I stood in the center of this kitchen, looking critically in all directions, I could not find anything missing which a good kitchen needs.

It was a simple kitchen. It was an inexpensive kitchen. But it was an efficient kitchen, which surely helped the woman to have an improved work environment, and take out some of the drudgery she has to undergo daily.
