



Rooftop gardening: Making our living space greener

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A buzzword that one will hear at least once or twice every day in Bangladesh is “development”. And with development comes an even greater push for urbanisation, which brings with it certain consequences for the environment.

So, as more high-rise buildings take over our cities, it should be a primary concern for us to ensure that these buildings have elements of greenery. With our rising population, our horizontal real estate continues to shrink, and the only option left is to look at establishing green and eco-friendly facilities from a vertical perspective.

While mass-scale, global change is something Bangladesh cannot do alone, and individual consumer-level behavioural change having little to no effect, there are only a few options left on the table. One such option, with respect to our rapid urbanisation, is the use of rooftop garden.

The availability of such a facility in one’s building has more than one environmental benefit. It benefits residents by supplying a fresh supply of oxygen and also helps by providing a hobby that is accessible at one’s fingertips.

Nadira Ahmed, 42, works in the corporate sector, and her advice for people looking to get into the practice of rooftop gardening is to start small.

“I enjoy working in my garden. It helps reduce mental stress that comes with city life. Whatever I grow in my garden, I distribute to my neighbours. As a result of rooftop gardening, there is little dust and more fresh supply of oxygen,” added Nadira.

In the last couple of years, the initiative of rooftop gardening has increased

primarily through individual effort in large cities and urban areas. Joining the efforts, many real estate companies have slowly begun to incorporate such facilities within their newer buildings.

However, there are no systematic arrangements or policies in place to better facilitate such structures on a large scale. For instance, there are no easily accessible government resources on how individuals can start to create their own



PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

rooftop garden. In India, for example, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) recently proposed a policy that will make it mandatory for all buildings to have space for a rooftop garden. This policy has been proposed, and plans to be rolled out in the near future. This is the type of initiative governments all over the world should be looking to replicate.

However, relying solely on the government cannot be the right approach towards protecting the environment. If we truly care about the consequences of climate change, then we must step forward and do our part, as insignificant as it might seem in the bigger picture. Additionally, the market itself needs to establish a demand and supply for rooftop gardens, otherwise

we cannot ensure that such measures become sustainable in the long run.

Afsana Rahman, 45, from Monipuripara in Dhaka, initiated the idea of a rooftop garden in her own building, back in 2015. In the primary setup phase, she struggled heavily, due to her lack of knowledge and experience with gardening.

“In the first two years, most of my plants did not survive due to wrong selection of seeds and plants. It took me two years to understand the proper ways of gardening and choosing the right plants and fruits to grow. Nowadays, people are learning gardening techniques through Facebook and TV reports, but a more useful set of guidelines can ensure that fewer people struggle in the initial phase,” said Afsana.

Experts say that rooftop gardens need continuous efforts. Occasional or even seasonal attempts at gardening will rarely be successful.

Arifur Rahman, 35, a tenant who lives in a garret, in the Mohammadpur area of Dhaka, shared his experience with rooftop gardening.

“When I sought permission from my house owner to do rooftop gardening, he dismissed the idea. He was concerned that such a garden would harm the roof’s condition. Thankfully, I was able to convince him, and was able to make a small but beautiful rooftop garden with around 50 plants, including a mixture of fruits and vegetables. But when there was a rising fear of dengue fever in the city, I had to shut down the garden as the building owner was afraid of mosquitoes breeding in the pots,” he added.

City planners have a crucial role to play here, as they need to be the ones setting the standards on how to make our cities green and eco-friendly.

In Dhaka, the two City Corporations have announced that they will issue a tax rebate for those building rooftop gardens. The government has also been rewarding the best rooftop gardeners. Simultaneously, the agricultural department has also taken up a programme to further facilitate rooftop gardens in our cities and villages. However, these efforts need to be channelled together in a more structural and systematic way to see proper success.

Rahat Raja is an agriculturalist and agro-journalist, and has reported on many rooftop gardens. He says, “The government can work on creating a series of campaigns through different mediums, to inspire more people to come forward and take the initiative to start rooftop gardens.”

As the world continues on its trajectory, Bangladesh faces unforeseen levels of environmental threats. While we cannot change how the world operates, we can take small, incremental steps such as rooftop gardening to at least be able to tell our future generations that if nothing else, we tried.



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