

Food security to reduce poverty: Context and new knowledge

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Khulumani



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Who are we?

We are Khulumani Support Group, community activists and participants of the EMG Changing Practice Course. Our group consists of Caroline Rathokolo and Nelson Thaba.



Introducing our Change Project

Our change project is located in Tafelkop, a broad area consisting of over 10 subsections. Nelson decided to focus on Ga-Kopa and Caroline on Ga-Botha village. Both villages are very poor and people are likely to have poor health. Nelson thought that the best way to



engage with the community was through one of the local public schools: Jack Morare Primary School. He implemented a small-scale garden there, where the children can be taught practical skills in crop farming for subsistence. The aim is for the children to extend the required knowledge to their homes. Caroline would also want for youths to become change agents in these areas, instead of staying at home. She believes that working together with the Department of Social Development to build an NPO that offers life skills, computer skills and other short-term courses for free, would be good.

Derick Du Toit of Award advised us to focus on one problem: poverty.

What are the main questions guiding our action research?

Ga-Kopa and Ga-Botha are very poor villages, with very little employment opportunities. This observation led to our main questions:

1. How do people survive in a poverty-stricken place like this, with lack of employment?
2. How can food gardens assist in achieving food security?
3. How can we work together with government to support the youth, and orphans and vulnerable people?

Ga-Kopa and Ga-Botha are very poor villages, with very little employment opportunities.

What is the context? What has already happened?



Ga-Kopa and Ga-Botha (and more villages in the Tafelkop area) can be called socio-economically disadvantaged locations. They are poverty stricken, there is a lack of basic needs such as proper housing and access to clean water. People live in mud houses, which may collapse in heavy rains and storms, and have to queue for hours to fill buckets of water that is safe to use. There is a high unemployment rate. We have however noticed that there are a lot of vendors around. We interviewed one lady who was selling some goodies to schoolkids. She told us that even though her profits were very small, they were enough to maintain her household. Most families depend on government grants for subsistence and RDP houses have been built for the poorest households. Many youths stay at home after finishing matric, as there is no money to further their studies. There are many orphans in the area, that orphanages have to look after, but they seem to battle. For instance, the orphanage in Ga-Botha doesn't access useful information and had no connection with the municipality, until we established it.

In the local primary school that Nelson works with, the teacher-learner ratio is 9:320. Most of the children at this school are either under the care of one parent or of their grandparents, either because they are orphans, or because younger people move to Gauteng in search of greener pastures. The school used to have a vegetable garden before, but due to lack of resources it wasn't kept up and ultimately livestock found its way into the school premises and destroyed the remaining crops. So, this time around, we started with proper fencing which will be followed by a meeting to secure donations of seedlings for the school.

The school used to have a vegetable garden before, but due to lack of resources it wasn't kept up and ultimately livestock found its way into the school premises and destroyed the remaining crops

Building a knowledge network

Government

Jack Morare Primary School

Jack Morare Primary School, located in the Greater Sekhukhune District: Motetema circuit. During a meeting with the school's principal and staff, they made Nelson aware that for the last 10 years the very bad gravel road leading to the school has not been fixed. Especially during the rainy season, the road gets bad, which makes it difficult for teachers to drive on. Clean drinking water is also a challenge for the school – as it is for the entire village – but recently a JoJo company donated two tanks to the school, so they can now harvest rain water during rainy season.

Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

We learned from this department that funding is available for small-scale farmers and that seedlings are issued to those who need them, as long as proper documentation is presented on why seedlings are needed. We were told by Patty Malatji at the information desk of the national department in Pretoria, that we had to engage with the regional department in Limpopo, as our project is in Limpopo. However, we have not been successful in contacting them by phone, as the number is always engaged.

Caroline also spoke to Mr. Nkoko Koena, an official at the department, whose mission it is to advance Food Security programs in rural areas and the establishment of small vegetable gardens at schools, for which seeds are for free. It is clear that they want people to have small gardens to help the community to get fresh produce to prevent malnutrition and to be able to sell crops to raise an income. The department has a program that supports vulnerable workers on farms, forestry and fisheries; they recommend the books: 'You can farm' and 'Farm anatomy'. Shops like Shoprite may also be willing to donate seeds for food gardens.

Department of Social Development (www.socdev.gov.za) and SASSA

Caroline interviewed Mr. Elija Mokoto Mohale who worked for the department in Polokwane for 32 years but is now retired. He informed her about the programs at orphanage centers, providing them with food parcels, school uniforms and grants. They can also identify behavior problems in parental care and lack of discipline in the families, due to a lack of income in the family. They do home visits and identify children that need proper clothing like school uniforms. Their services are however very slow, due to a lack of funds, and they have to deal with very many orphaned children.

Caroline also spoke with Kukie Hlako in a taxi to Mokopane. Kukie works for SASSA in Groblersdal. Their focus is to see every child, orphan, disabled and old person receiving a grant. She referred her to Mr. Mzisa at SASSA Matlelerenkeng Ga-Botha, who visited the social worker Mrs. Nkateko Mashsba about the foster care grants for orphans at Ga-Botha. Mrs. Nkateko then promised to help them, as the court case takes long in granting them money, as they first have to investigate the families.

Elias Motswaledi Municipality

Caroline spoke with Mrs. Bella Kupa, the mayor of this municipality, who said that, although she is still new in the office, she will try to put Ga-Botha up for a water project in the next financial year. She did not want to share her contact details, 'for security reasons'. It was then difficult to arrange an appointment with her.

Community members

Nelson spoke to Nelly Mnguni, of Block V, Soshanguve. She has a vegetable garden of which she sells vegetables to her community. She ensured us her vegetables grow properly and that they never run out, so she's contributing to food security for the community. Nelly Mnguni's goal is to have a small-scale farm, but she started with a vegetable garden to gain experience. She is very aware of the importance of nutrition and the benefits of a healthy lifestyle; tending her garden is a form of exercise for her, she said.

Media sources and documents

Rain Water Harvesting for Homes and Home Food Gardens, by Tim Wigley and Robert Berold. This document taught Nelson how to collect and preserve water in order to re-use it. We learned about the different kinds of tanks and about how to re-use water effectively.

Mulch for a Healthy Garden, by Lunga Mhlonyane. This article talked about the use of mulch to maintain a healthy garden. In addition to knowing how to preserve water externally (with the tanks), we now also learned how to preserve it internally, in the soil. It is the kind of knowledge that community members, including the project team, can immediately use to maintain our own food gardens.

Living Tec, by Shanti Broeng, also talked about mulching, and about using grey water for watering plants and gardens.

Starting Asset-based Community Development and Permaculture at WB Tshume and Emzomncane Primary School, by Carla Collins. This article taught Nelson about the complex topic of permaculture. After giving it time, he did understand that it does a lot of things at once: it provides food, without harming the earth or contributing to global warming, it is eco-friendly.

Article in Daily Sun on growing crops, by Njabulo Nqobco, speaks about the high need for skilled people in agriculture, so it's important to change the mindset of the youth that farming is a career option. Eating fresh vegetables keeps us healthy and will save money as we don't have to buy them.

Farming is God's way, by Siyavuna Abalimi Development Centre. This article talks about soil fertility, composting, and how to keep seeds: in dark and dry places with a cool temperature.

Additional video on YouTube that addressed the issue that most farmers put business first and not people's health: they use chemicals and dyes to makes vegetables more appealing, without considering the harmful effects on people's health.

Limpopo Radio Station, by Thobela F.M., a program called Hlokwa La Tsela interviewed Mrs. Moloko Moremi of SASSA Gauteng, who spoke about poverty among orphans and about how they are going to introduce a new system of grant application, which will speed up the process.

Blog 'You are here' wrote about how one can volunteer in the most efficient way to fight poverty. Stop buying unnecessary things and donate the spare money to centers, engage the media to raise attention and awareness of (also) government officials, so they will commit to action.

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