



When a community suffers serious poverty, this is how school gardens can be made sustainable.

This is the challenge: How can school gardens be sustainable, such that there is no need to supply fresh vegetable seeds every year?

This is the experience of Rehema Namyalo who now lives in Kasasa, near Masaka, Uganda. She recommends:

Grow traditional vegetables which are resistant to pests, diseases and drought, and which can be propagated by collecting their seeds or by taking cuttings. For example:

Traditional green leafy amaranth, it's almost perennial, it doesn't perish, it's tolerant to all kinds of weather and soil conditions, it can be harvested year after year! When the seeds mature, cut off the top and fresh healthy leaves grow again. The more you harvest the leaves, the more it produces!

Grain amaranth is also very good, it grows faster, its seeds can be sown in different places, provided it's not intercropped with wild amaranth to avoid cross pollination.

The seeds of sukuma wiki need to be bought only once, it can then be multiplied by taking cuttings. A few plants can be reserved so that seeds can be collected. Aphids and caterpillars that attack its leaves during dry seasons can be controlled by spraying with water in which either neem or melia leaves have been soaked and to which a little soap has been added.



Traditional green leafy amaranth



Grain amaranth is very nutritious



Sukuma wiki

Other good plants are egg plants, bitter-berries, black night shade and raspberries. Every season, we collect the ripened seeds, sort out the good ones and dry them. We then raise them in the nursery and later transplant them to the main garden which is well prepared.

Pumpkins are very rich in zinc and many other minerals and vitamins. We collect its seeds after eating the flesh. Its vine can be propagated. It does well in a wide range of soil conditions and local climates.

Traditional tomatoes and katunkuma (small bitter berries) are extremely resistant, highly nutritious and medicinal.



This leafy vegetable is known locally as jobyo



Nakati



Rashberries

It is important that the teachers and pupils own their gardens, that they have the responsibility of taking care of it and of harvesting the vegetables. They will enjoy it and develop a love for it and will not neglect it. Judith Nambi suggests that, during the long holidays, a few teachers and pupils who live close to the school take responsibility for looking after the school garden.

Rehema provides an example of what can be achieved:

“I would like to share my experience while working with Molly and Paul schools in Kamuzinda Kyannamukaaka from October 2003 to October 2007. It was an orphanage centre with over 1000 pupils.

The school had 4 acres of hilly land which was degraded due to soil erosion. I was in charge of the agriculture department. There were 2 acres of well-established banana plantation and the 2 acres for seasonal crops like maize, cassava, sweet potatoes and other vegetables. Before I joined them, they were buying food, mainly maize flour and beans, which were very expensive. After working with them for one year, the schools produced all the food they needed and did not need to buy any from elsewhere.

Every day I worked with one primary class and one secondary class, each time for one and half hours. I also trained teachers, mothers and other people from the community in sustainable organic farming skills.”

Suggestions from other colleagues:

Judith Bakirya: Invite former pupils of the school to form a WhatsApp group and to become active in supporting the school garden.

Kennedy Okuda: Schools that have say 3 acres of land could rent out one of the acres to members of the community and use the income to buy seeds.

Obaikol Gideon: Each school could build a solar dryer. Fruits and vegetables could then be dried and sold locally for income.

Once again, I look forward to receiving your feedback on these suggestions.

Best regards, Keith Lindsey