

Discover Newsletter for colleagues in Africa

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When a community suffers serious poverty, how can school gardens be made sustainable?

I want to share the experience of Eric Kihuluka in Kaliro District in Uganda. I invite you to share your own experience. Please suggest solutions to the challenges I list below.

The good news:

In Kaliro District there are 220 schools. A few years ago, Eric and his colleagues visited every school, provided vegetable seeds and helped the schools to establish school gardens. They have also encouraged tree planting.

Eric and his colleagues have encouraged schools to provide school lunches. These consist mainly of maize porridge. When the school gardens are successful, the maize is supplemented with sikuma wiki, egg plants, carrots, cabbage or other vitamin rich vegetables. For children who come to school hungry, school lunches (or even sometimes school breakfasts) help pupils to stay awake and to concentrate.

In a few schools they have teachers who lead in “music, dance and drama”, through which pupils reflect on many aspects of their traditional ways of life.

All these activities have been enjoyed by both teachers and pupils. So much so, that the dropout rate between primary class 1 and primary class 7 declined significantly.

The challenges

1. Poverty. Eric says that for school lunches, parents contribute 7000 shillings (about 2 USD) each to cater for 89 days of the school term. That means 78.6 shillings (2 cents) per day. If the school were to demand more, many parents could not and would not pay more.
2. Every year the schools need fresh seeds to start their gardens off again. Eric says he likes to provide each school with 3 tins of seeds, at a total cost of 30,000 shillings (about 8.6 USD) This is a modest sum for one school. For 100 schools, however, the cost would be 3 million shillings (833 USD).
When seeds are not provided, the gardens are neglected, and the school dropout rate increases again. Children who are not educated are most likely to continue the cycle of large families and poverty.
3. The dry season and the long school holidays. As trees mature, they provide shade, help to maintain the soil fertility, and provide some fruits. But how can the gardens be looked after during the long school holidays? Or is it the case that, at this time of year, most of the vegetables have been harvested?



Pupils at Kasokwe Primary School proudly showed me their vegetable garden when I visited the school in 2019.

Please share your experience and your ideas!

How can schools continue to have school gardens without needing external financial support for buying fresh seeds every year?

I look forward to hearing from you!

Best regards, Keith Lindsey