



Incorporated association not for gain
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Report on Phase 1 of the Namibia LifeChange Centres Foundation vegetable garden project: Introduce table gardens

Background

During November 2012, 11 candidates formed part of a table garden training event organised and presented by Namibia Horticulture Trust (NHT) and the Namibia Life Change Centres Foundation (NLCCF) and funded by Letshego Namibia. This training commenced the first phase of the NLCCF's project to establish vegetable gardens at some of the centres in the NLCCF network, with the goal to create job opportunities, teach gardening and entrepreneurial skills to beneficiaries and provide nutritional food to the centre and the community. Through this first phase of introducing table gardens, small, efficient gardens were to be established throughout needy communities across Namibia via centres in the NLCCF network.

Participants of the training were equipped to implement and sustain table gardens at their various centres, with the aim of enlarging the centres' capacity and possible expansion of small gardens into the community.

Participants

Centres from across Namibia made use of the opportunity to partake in Phase 1 of the vegetable garden project. Seven of the eleven participants were from towns outside of Windhoek, while four of them represented a centre and pre-schools working amongst the poor and needy in Windhoek.

A list of the organisations that formed part of the table garden project and their respective representatives are as follows:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1) Salome Victor | House of Love for OVC, Rundu |
| 2) Ester Indongo | Tov Multipurpose Centre, Tsumeb |
| 3) Maria Khaises | Okahandja Samaritans Network, Okahandja |
| 4) Julius Mbuende | Oshakati Life Change Centre, Oshakati |
| 5) Kalusha Petrus | Opuwo Christian School, Opuwo |
| 6) Hans Nguvauva | More Abundant Life Welfare Organisation, Swakopmund |
| 7) Christof Katjimune | Light for the Children, Gobabis |
| 8) Ismael Gôagoseb | Windhoek Life Change Centre, Windhoek |
| 9) Selma Shilunga | Talohole Pre-primary, Windhoek |
| 10) Kristophine Katoto | Happy Home Base Kindergarten, Windhoek |
| 11) Sophia Himarwa | Mekky Kindergarten, Windhoek |

Training

The training was held on 20 and 21 November 2012 at the premises of the Windhoek Life Change Centre in Windhoek. Mr. Albert Fosso of NHT presented the training and covered the following topics:

- * Urban horticulture
- * Micro- and table gardening



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- * How to choose a good cultivar
- * When to plant and harvest which crops (planting calendar)
- * Substrates and nutrients (including options to produce own compost)
- * Problems to expect and how to address them
- * How to ensure sustainability of the garden
- * Basic entrepreneurial skills necessary for sustainable gardening

Participants have specifically been trained to produce their own compost, as many centres where the vegetables are produced are situated in rural areas that do not have easy access or funds to get compost or fertiliser.

A significant amount of practical work was incorporated into the training, which allowed participants to gain a practical understanding of the theoretical concepts explained. Practical sessions included choosing cultivars according to a given season, determining the period of planting, growing and harvesting that will be needed for specific cultivars, and planting seeds themselves. Evaluation of the training was done by means of a written test.

At the end of the training, each participant was provided with a table garden kit to help with establishing the garden and maintaining it. A kit included 16 planting bags, compost, fertiliser and seeds for 4 different cultivars.

Planting and making use of the kit

All of the eleven centres have made at least one attempt to establish a table garden at the centre.

Please see Annexure A for a table that summarizes how each centre has made use of the materials received, how planting has been done and the outcome of each planting attempt. Information is also provided on each centre's approach to preparing compost or making use of an alternative.

Expenses

As reported in December 2012, expenses for the training amounted to N\$ 8,023. This resulted in a surplus of N\$277 which has been used for costs related to the monitoring of the implementation of the table gardens.

Actual expenses for the training against the original budget are as follows:

		Budget	Actual N\$
Training costs		6,000	4,651
Trainer	Training costs		3,000
Evaluation	Training costs		400
Agrigro Namibia	Training material		1,035
Shoprite	Training material		16
WLCC	Training facilities		100
NLCCF	Training material		100



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Refreshments for training		800	1,042
Aroma Kitchen	Lunches		800
Metro	Refreshments		144
Woerman & Brock	Refreshments		61
Woerman & Brock	Refreshments		37
Transportation		1500	2,330
Transport attendees	Transport		2,030
WLCC – Whk attendees	Transport in Whk		200
NLCCF	Transport in Whk		100
Accommodation in Windhoek			Participants' own costs
Total		8,300	8,023

It was mentioned in the funding proposal to Letshego that the proposed amount for transport is not fixed: *“Once nominees have passed the selection criteria necessary to guarantee the best possible results for Phase 1, a final amount for transport costs can be calculated.”* With NHT’s cooperation to provide the training at a lower cost than initially quoted, savings on the training costs allowed for sufficient funds to assist participants with their full transport costs of N\$ 2,230.

All these expenses are supported with invoices and other supporting documents and are available on request.

Monitoring

After completion of the training a realistic and measurable action plan was prepared that provided participants with a framework to assist them in implementing specific actions at a set time and served as a basis according to which they were monitored and able to report.

Centres had to report monthly on the progress of the table gardens. Reporting was done telephonically, via e-mail and by providing photos. A photo journal has been kept to keep track of the progress at each centre (see Annexure B for part of the photo journal). Monitoring visits have been made to six of the eleven centres to ensure that the information received is correct. The remaining five centres could not be visited due to logistical reasons, e.g. distance and school holidays.

Outcome of Phase 1

The goal of Phase 1 was to introduce table gardens to the centres and train them in establishing these gardens, in order for centres to acquire gardening and entrepreneurial skills and have the opportunity to teach these skills to others in the community that they serve, while producing nutritious food for the centre itself. The longer term goal is that small, efficient gardens will be established throughout the community as a result of others learning the required skills from the centre.



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The outcome of centres' gardening efforts are summarised below to indicate whether centres have successfully reached the goals of phase 1 of the table garden project.

Centres that have exceeded expectations:

- * **Happy Home Base Kindergarten, Windhoek** – Planted all 16 planting bags, along with other containers and garden is healthy and growing well. Plants covered under a net.
- * **Mekky Kindergarten, Windhoek** – Erected a good shade net. Planted all 16 planting bags, along with other containers and garden is healthy and growing well.
- * **Okahandja Samaritans Network, Okahandja** – Planted all 16 planting bags, along with other planting bags. Vegetables are grown in a tunnel, are healthy and taken good care off.

Centres that have met the expectations:

- * **House of Love for OVC's, Rundu** – 8 bags were planted, which flourished and were harvested from. As a result of pests, only 5 bags remained at the end of March. People were added to work in the garden.
- * **More Abundant Life Welfare, Swakopmund** – 7 planting bags were planted, along with planting in the ground. Although all the plants are not in a good condition, they are still alive and taken care of.
- * **Opuwo Christian School, Opuwo** – Planted 8 bags and in the ground. Vegetables are growing well and the children are involved.
- * **Oshakati Life Change Centre, Oshakati** – 7 bags have been planted and are growing well.
- * **Talohole Kindergarten, Windhoek** - Planted 6 bags and have harvested already.

Centres that have performed below expectations:

- * **Light for the Children, Gobabis** – One attempt was made, but the table garden didn't receive the necessary attention due to other garden initiatives at the centre that are more effective and will be expanded.
- * **Tov Multipurpose Centre, Tsumeb** – Grew well and bigger children were involved, but plants died due to a lack of water and not being placed in a secure area.
- * **Windhoek Life Change Centre, Windhoek** – Grew well and then died due to a lack of water.

Centres where the outcome of the table garden project has been poorer than expected were questioned as to the reasons for the outcome. Most of these reasons served as lessons to improve the centre's approach to future gardening and are discussed under the "Conclusion and lessons learned".

The impact of Phase 1

Value has been added to the centres and individuals through the skills that have been obtained during and after the training. The encouragement and support that they received in the establishment of a garden, along with the skills that were learned through planting, making mistakes and learning what works best in each centres' circumstances equipped most of the centres to continue with the gardening. These skills allow for vegetable gardens to continue to improve and move closer to the goal of providing nutritious food and an income in eleven communities across Namibia where people are severely affected by poverty, unemployment and malnutrition. People in these needy communities will be motivated to start their own vegetable gardens as they see the improvement in the lives of those who benefit from the gardens and are taught by someone at the centre who has attended the table garden training, on how to start their own gardens.



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These skills do not only benefit the centres and communities where it is being practiced, but individuals who have attended the training testify that their own mindsets have been changed to see the possibility of producing nutritious food wherever they are and that they are able to provide for themselves and their families in this way. Ester Indonga from Tsumeb confirms this by stating “This (the training and table garden project) has helped me a lot. I know now that wherever I am I never need to suffer from poverty or be hungry.”

At the **House of Love for OVC's in Rundu**, two people have been added to the gardening team at the beginning of March 2013 because taking care of the garden became too much for the current gardeners due to the expansion caused by being a part of the table garden project. These two people are now equipped with gardening skills and new job prospects which will benefit themselves, the centre and the community as they produce vegetables to generate income and provide nutritious food to the centre's soup kitchen.

At **Opuwo Christian School** and **Tov Multipurpose Centre** the children who benefit from the centre have been involved in the gardening as part of their development curriculum, and it has been reported that the children enjoy helping to plant and take care of the garden. These children are learning the skills of gardening and will possibly learn entrepreneurial and planning skills as the garden expands, which can empower them to apply the learned skills in other areas of their lives, as well as finding a future gardening job or producing food for their own families.

This first phase of the vegetable garden project has created a relationship between NHT and **Light for the Children in Gobabis**. Through this relationship, partnerships are being formed between NHT and some of the centre's international and local partners to explore the possibility of specialised gardening on a larger and more effective scale which will involve more partners, skills and monitoring. Partnerships formed through this network have the possibility of benefitting not only the greater Gobabis community, but also the rest of Namibia.

Through the process of training and establishing table gardens, relationships have been built that ensure the continuous, long-term impact of the project. During training, contact has been established between different centres in the NLCCF network, who can now assist and motivate each other to continue with their gardens in an effective way.

Conclusion and lessons learned

The table garden project created the opportunity for centres to gain practical experience in gardening and to determine what approach to gardening will be most effective at their centres. This learning experience included numerous successes, challenges, choices and mistakes which have all contributed to valuable lessons being learned, by both centres and partners, in order to improve the effectiveness of the vegetable gardens in future. The lessons learned included the following:

- * Great care should be taken to have the garden in a safe location which is protected from, amongst others, animals and small children.
- * It is important to have one person who is dedicated and take the final responsibility for the gardening. Where more than one person takes responsibility, roles can become unclear and the garden does not receive the proper attention.



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- * When it is necessary for the person responsible to leave the garden for a while, special attention should be paid to train a responsible person who will be able to take care of the garden.
- * It will be helpful for participants to be practically involved in making a compost heap during training, as the fertiliser has not proven to be effective at all of the centres and centres want to be better equipped in the process of producing and using their own compost.
- * A project like this will show greater results when not conducted over a December/January holiday. It might have been better to postpone training until the beginning of 2013 in order to ensure that participants will be at the garden site for the entire duration of the project.
- * Site visits prove to be very effective and more site visits should be incorporated into the next phases of the vegetable garden project.
- * Training and gardening skills provided should be basic and the main focus should not be on specialised gardening methods. Only a small number of the centres have the need and capacity to manage specialised gardens, like those planned to be established during Phase 3. Centres who will benefit from these and are able to make a success of it will however still be supported in establishing specialised gardens.

These lessons will be taken into account when expanding and enhancing vegetable gardens at the centres in future. The gardens established during Phase 1 have prepared the way for moving into Phase 2 and 3 of the project. Phase 2 will entail the implementation and enhancement of basic open-air gardens, while appropriate specialised gardens (tunnels, hydroponics, or irrigation) will be established during Phase 3. Before implementation, careful consideration will be given and success of previous phases reviewed to determine whether centres will be able to establish and sustain these types of gardens.

The support and guidance that the NLCCF has provided to the centres during Phase 1 of the vegetable garden project will be continued even though phase 1 has come to an end. Consistent support helps the gardens to continue to improve and expand, which will enable the centres to reach the goal of creating job opportunities, obtaining skills and provide nutritional food to an even greater extent.