

Swaziland National Trust Commission

Working together for food security

The Swaziland National Trust Commission (SNTC) is responsible for the conservation of the kingdom's natural ecosystems and cultural heritage. This is achieved through sustainable use of resources, environmental education, community outreach and ecology research. The Community Outreach Programme (COP) is implemented through the two national parks, Mlawula and Malolotje. Water source protection is the priority at Malolotje, while the Mlawula project focuses mainly on fruit tree orchards and backyard gardens. The COP aims to advise, promote and facilitate community-managed activities which improve the quality of life and reduce environmental impact.

This project has been implemented in three communities under COP, one of which is KaShewula Homestead Gardens at Mlawula, where Skillshare International development worker (DW) Philip Nicklin works. Jolina Ifumbatsa is from the Mswati area, where SNTC has been working to develop food security: *"Before Philip came, my garden was not enclosed so the animals like goats and chickens would eat the seeds that I'd just planted. Every time I'd water the plants the animals would come and eat. I was growing some of the crops before but now I've learnt to grow different crops and have learnt that intercropping is better. I'm not sure how old I am but I want to be healthy and it is better to eat different types of crops such as cabbage, tomatoes, beetroot, spinach, maize and green peppers. By cooking different foods we can improve our health. In my family there are 5 adults and 3 children and we work together. I normally come to the garden early in the morning while it's still not hot and in the afternoon I do the watering. The main problem is the crickets that feed on the leaves. If the fence breaks I will cut some poles and make sure that the garden keeps functioning. I am planning to increase the garden but the first thing is to eat for ourselves and then maybe to sell. There are others who aren't from the association who have seen the help of growing vegetables. Now our friends have seen the light and they have used branches to make the fence and they are growing more crops."*

Siboniso Jele has worked for SNTC as the Community Outreach Ranger and Environmental Officer since April 2003: *"Having Philip as a counterpart is very good because he has many ideas about working with communities and he understands what they want. I've learnt how to approach the communities and target the groups more effectively. For example, before we targeted elders to try and stop the poaching but now we are looking for youngsters. We find the ones who are active in the forest and work with them. I've also learnt computer skills and how to write project proposals and reports. International volunteers have wide experience and they are not selfish with the knowledge they have and share it with you. In Swaziland, people only have small experience. International volunteers can help get donors to support things and have experience of interacting with people at higher levels."*

Members of the homestead associations like Jolina Ifumbatsa have ownership of the project and are active in designing and mapping out their own gardens. They are encouraged to involve their family members so that they are collectively responsible for the plot. The income generated by selling produce from the communal garden creates a fund used for sustaining both the communal and homestead backyard gardens.