

Combating HIV and AIDS in Swaziland by improving food security and nutrition

The development of sustainable, small-scale vegetable gardens has enabled people in rural areas of Swaziland to improve their nutritional status and food security, thereby improving health and prolonging life expectancy. National food security is a critical issue in Swaziland. More than a quarter of the population currently lives on World Food Aid due to poverty, drought and the effects of HIV and AIDS on traditional subsistence agriculture. The number of orphans and vulnerable children increases each year and is expected to exceed 100,000 by 2010. It is therefore vital that food security is improved at the community level.

Skillshare International placed development worker Sam Hodgson as an Agricultural Coordinator at the Moya Centre in July 2005. Moya aims to address food security through sustainable community interventions and education on nutrition and HIV and AIDS. With Sam's assistance, it is improving food security and nutrition for the most vulnerable groups through the development of community vegetable gardens using trench gardening - a drought tolerant, low cost, organic method of growing vegetables at the household or community level.

Nearly 300 people who work with over 5,000 children have been trained in community garden development. Twelve gardens have already been established, six of which produce vegetables for cooking balanced meals for approximately 400 orphaned and vulnerable children.

Another four school gardens have been established, with 20 teachers and 130 community members trained in gardening skills. About 80% of enrolled children have school meals from the kitchens which use vegetables from the garden. One caregiver from Matfuntini Neighbourhood Care Point in the northern Hhohho region of Swaziland, where women care for orphans and vulnerable children, says: *"I can now see that these trenches work. These vegetables grow faster and are healthier than mine at home. I am going to make these trenches at home."*

The training programmes culminate in the establishment of community gardens, owned and managed by a local committee, which provide fresh organic vegetables all year round. This produce boosts the nutritional intake of the community's most vulnerable members in a way which is financially sustainable for even the poorest communities; resulting in improved community health which is not dependent on emergency food aid.



Sam Hodgson, © Skillshare/Sally Marshall



Bonginkhosi Mndzebele, who is the Agricultural Trainer at the Moya Centre, explains: *"This method of empowering communities to become more self-reliant is suitable for poor rural people because it is low cost, drought-resistant and low maintenance. Organic food with a high nutritional value is being produced which boosts the nutritional intake for the most vulnerable people in Swaziland, which is essential for maintaining immune health when living with HIV and AIDS. People now know about the nutritional benefits of vegetables and how to grow them."*

Health is one of Skillshare International's four priority sectors. Our partnership with the Moya Centre contributes towards our work in this sector because vegetable gardens mean better nutrition and increased food security, which improve people's health status.