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Community Food Projects: Emerging from a backyard garden

by Sostain Moyo, Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe

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of **Stories
Change**

*Connecting traditional knowledge and
innovations for fair and sustainable
food systems*

United Nations
Decade of
**FAMILY
FARMING**
2019-2028





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Stories of change: *Connecting traditional knowledge and innovations for fair and sustainable food systems*

In December 2017, the [United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Family Farming \(UNDAF, 2019-2028\)](#) thus constituting a framework that recognizes the importance of family farmers, which includes peasants, indigenous people, traditional communities, pastoralists, fisherfolks, upland farmers, and many other groups of food producers that possess a unique potential to promote transformative changes in the way food is grown, produced, processed and distributed.

All over the world, there are thousands of stories of distinctive work carried out anonymously by family farmers, including women and youth, on successful transitions to more inclusive, sustainable and fair food systems. Those stories are based on co-creation and sharing of traditional knowledge and innovations that are helping to make food systems sustainable, leaving no one behind.

In this context, the [Family Farming Knowledge Platform](#) in collaboration with the [Barefoot Guide Connection](#) organized a series of “writeshops”, writing classes to support practitioners to write their own experience, generating knowledge which highlight the practices, changes, innovations and impacts of what they do in support of family farming.

These writeshops represented an opportunity to share the creative process through which identify, recognize, write and exchange stories and experiences from young people, women, farmers, small-scale producers who work to promote, improve and strengthen family farming and achieve prosperous and inclusive rural societies.

This initiative was conceived to provide a space to highlight the human, cultural and social dimensions of family farming, including the human rights embedded in family farming and its social and economic organization.

The stories presented in this compilation - selected among those written during the writeshops, highlight the different ways in which family farmers responsibly and creatively manage their natural resources, landscapes and ecosystems as well as the cultural and symbolic values that define their identity.

Cover photo by Tatenda-Ishe Moyo

Community Food Projects: Emerging from a backyard garden

By Sostain Moyo,
Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe

My wife and I have always dreamt about going back to the rural areas to start farming. Mainly to start growing our own food, spending days tending a flock of chickens, and maybe growing a big garden for our family and perhaps allow our children to enjoy what nature is there to offer them. We are fortunate to have a good provision of land back in our rural area and have always yearned for a homestead, but our thinking was always that this can only happen in the rural areas.

But COVID-19 changed all that. Read on to see how.

It was ten days into the first 21 days of lockdown of the COVID-19 crisis. We, like all other families in our neighborhood had stocked food in the house, using the little cash we had on food, in fear that we would not be able go out and buy, or there would not be any food remaining in the shops and at the marketplace.

And now all the food we had bought was finished. Last night, our little boy Taonaishe was crying and complaining that he was still hungry after his supper was eaten. We all felt this pestering hunger.

“Daddy I am hungry.” But there was no more food and no money at this moment. All I could do was just to take him in my arms and cuddle him, while searching my mind for a way to find

something to eat. Then I remembered that I had seen spiked cucumbers fruits growing in the garden but I don't even remember how they ended up there. We had seen them growing and started tendering them.



Photo by Tatenda-Ishe Moyo.

I said my boy, “Let’s go outside into the garden.” When we got into the backyard garden, I headed for the cucumber plants. Their leaves had back grown quite large and healthy, covering a large area too, and some were climbing up our neglected chicken-run fence. I checked around, looking carefully for snakes. Usually, this place is infested by house snakes. So, I was careful and told Taonaishe to stand back.

Nature comes to our rescue with her gifts

My eyes opened wide with excitement, as I saw a bunch of huge, spiked cucumbers there. There

were six or so on this plant. “Come look, young man!” He was so excited to see this. Before I could even pick some cucumbers, he had rushed to call his mum and tell her the good news. In no time the whole family was gathered in the garden, and we were all enjoying the juiciest self-grown cucumbers.

Looking further, we realized that the backyard garden had lots of other plants that we could use as food. We found there plenty of blackjack and amaranth growing in the backyard, both edible and highly nutritious. From this moment we decided to take more care than before of the back yard garden and started growing a variety of vegetables there, including some medicinal herbs.



Photo by Tatenda-Ishe Moyo.

This was the birth of the community food projects I am currently involved. I am teaching families to be self-reliant, to grow their own food

and eat plant-based diets, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We continue to enjoy a mix of nature-provided vegetables and those which we ourselves began to grow in the garden as weeks turn into months. This has become our lifestyle and livelihood as a family. My wife and I are so excited because our children are really enjoying themselves, trying new foods, and learning new skills when they are playing productive games with plants in our garden. Now the garden has totally changed. It's no longer neglected as was before. We have set up proper kitchen garden in our backyard.

Woken up by the crisis, we start Project CHENGETA

The COVID-19 crisis was able to teach us that having a good garden, no matter where or how small it can be, is good for survival. The crisis awoke to the fact that we don't need to go back to the rural areas if we want to homestead. We started homesteading here in the city. In our neighborhood, during these extended COVID-19 restrictions, almost every household now grows a garden or just grows something at home, in any small available spaces. In the past most households, including ours, would have neglected backyards gardens, and we would depend on the grocery store shelves to provide their nutrition.

Starting with just a small backyard garden project, my wife and I brought community food projects to Chitungwiza community in response to the COVID-19 induced food and nutrition crisis. We integrated growing food gardens in our homesteading program activities, teaching families to grow their own foods at home, no matter how small their space may be. The two of us started Project CHENGETA concept three years ago. However, it is still going through the process of getting formal registration. “Chengeta” is in our mother tongue, Shona, and means “keeping

well protected” or simply means “stewardship”. Our mission is to partner with vulnerable and poor families to achieve health, economic self-sufficiency and community stability. We strive to do so in a nurturing, supportive environment where our participants are treated with respect. We help them to build a sense of self-reliance, economically empowered and responsible for their own health and well-being.

In the last three years since we started as a business (social enterprise), Project CHENGETA has served over 100 families, including more than 1,500 children. We work with poor young parents, teen parents, families with members with disability, youth and adults living with HIV/AIDS or in other difficult circumstances who may be striving to build both skills and self-confidence to make ends meet.

So, with this new initiative, we are seeing opportunities to build food self-sufficiency among poor and struggling families in the face of COVID-19 crisis, and other disaster related situations, building back-better, through home gardens whether in the backyard or front, hanging pots, or in sacks, whichever where there is a little space. Thereby, we have managed to expand it broadly to strengthening community food systems, through partnering with established community-based organizations, local authorities, schools and other local economic development agencies operating in our region.

The basic concept of our home gardening intervention arose from our family experience, where we discovered healthy and nutritious food in our own backyard garden. Nature is there, offering us gifts, if we look.

Homesteading is about creating a lifestyle that is first of all genuine. We are teaching families to recognize their needs, not only on food and nutrition alone, but also on energy, economic, and health needs, and finding out how they can be met creatively and responsibly.



Photo by Tatenda-Ishe Moyo.

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