

The Community Work Programme (CWP) focus on planting gardens has vastly improved local food security. To make this gardening sustainable in the long term, households should be able to access seeds and seedlings when needed, without waiting for CWP deliveries. The aim of this project was to pilot the setting up of nurseries in the Free State and northern Eastern Cape, where there are seven CWP sites. The intention is that these nurseries will be self-sufficient and provide a source of income for those who manage them.

Implementing organisation: Teba Development

EMPLOYMENT CREATION FUND

SEEDLING NURSERIES – SUSTAINING FOOD SECURITY

The planting of thousands of food gardens has created a market for seedlings in areas where there are no outlets. Building nurseries close to where people live will fill this gap.

More than 15 000 homestead gardens have been developed in the seven CWP sites of Sikhulile, Siyanzenzela, Manyano, Thusong, Mantshatlala, Lukhanyo and Intsika Yeto in the Free State and Eastern Cape. In an area where water is scarce, this is a substantial achievement. The impressive mountains in the area are beautiful to view, but the terrain throws up its own set of problems. Rocky soil in an area prone to drought does not encourage crop cultivation.

One way of combating rocky terrain and insecure water supply is by building 'keyhole gardens' in as many plots as possible. These ingenious permanent giant 'grow bags' were designed with exactly this environment in mind, so it is no surprise that they have been seized on so readily.

The average keyhole garden is a stone wall built in a circle about 1m high and 3m in diameter. Every keyhole garden has three trenches of m by 2m that are dug about one spade length deep and filled with layers of tins, ash, compost and soil. A simple woven plastic maize meal bag is planted in the centre. This bag is filled with compost and kept open by three or four sturdy upright sticks.

Keyhole gardeners water their crops through this bag, and this is the real genius of the system. As the bag is filled with thick manure rich in nutrients, waste water can be poured straight through it, and impurities will be filtered so that the crops growing around the bag are well fed.

Keyhole gardens are often placed by kitchen doors or next to bathing areas, so that used water usually discarded on the ground, can be upended into them. In areas where water is far away, entire extended families may use only 20 litres each day for their needs including drinking, cleaning and washing. By recycling this water, keyhole gardens harness the vitality of a commodity that can be in short supply.

With so many already built in the area, keyhole gardens have become a physical representation of CWP work in the area. Passing through these remote regions yields example after example, as the gardens proudly sit next to trenches and kraals. These gardens have also created an immediate market for vegetable seedlings. There are no seedling nurseries in the area, and the setting up of these will test how this market works.

The innovation fund grant was for five pilot nurseries and all the nurseries have been built. They are in Ward 3 of Naledi local municipality at Wepener in the Free State; the Senqu Local Municipality near Sterkspruit in the Eastern Cape – one in Ward 1 at Bikizana village and one in Ward 2 at Macacuma village; and two in Ward 7 of the Elundini Local Municipality (near Mt Fletcher) at the Tsitsana and Ncemvu villages.

Several factors determined who became a recipient. Selection of the nursery operator and owner was guided first by the need that the person had to have gardening and entrepreneurial skills.



The project operates with local CWP Steering Committees. With their input, people were found through the CWP who met both these criteria as well as being in some way disadvantaged, such as having a physical disability. The final selection was made by Mngcunube, the local CWP implementing agent, in consultation with the Steering Committees.

The entire process is run with the tacit approval and involvement of communal figures, in order to stop the likelihood of nepotism and corruption. Once a shortlist of potential sites had been drawn up based on criteria such as garden size, cattle-proof fencing, competency and need, those people were then asked if they'd like to host the project. Many people turned down the offer. Successfully planting and cultivating 18 000 seedlings is a time-consuming job and heavy responsibility, making a success of the project is even more difficult.

Once the recipient had been chosen, the CWP team moved in to construct the greenhouse and irrigation equipment. After investigating various options, Mngcunube decided to buy ready-to-assemble nurseries rather than build them. The nursery kit is a 'tunnel' that can be moved, and is 6m by 3m and 2.14m high. There 200 seedlings per tray and 90 trays per unit with a seedling capacity of 18 000.

After the unit is set up, the only tool needed to continue the process is a watering can. The type of

nursery chosen meant that this is the only tool needed. This represents a major saving and also eliminates the problem of having different tools to look after. The nurseries have also been fenced by the main CWP programme as a security measure

Technical and financial training, assistance and advice is being provided up to and beyond the moment that the nurseries are handed over. A person who provides technical support for CWP homestead gardens has been trained in aspects of nursery production, management and business operations so that he can provide support to the nurseries. A simple manual providing guidance is also being development.

Nursery operators have been trained to grow seedlings from seeds. This will allow for a bigger profit margin, even at a low mark-up for seedlings, and will also prevent potential problems about the nurseries accessing seedlings themselves.

The scale and design are intended to achieve a supply of seedlings within walking or a short taxi ride distance of the intended customers, mostly households with gardens set up through CWP. Because the pilot started in April 2011, the nurseries were set up during the winter and the seedlings will only become available in the spring season. Market development and establishing distribution networks will then start, when households begin planting their summer gardens.

A keen gardener gets a chance to earn a living doing what she loves



Olga Magengenene lives in Sikhulile Senqu municipality near the town of Sterkspruit. She is one of the people chosen to operate a nursery. At 53 years old, Olga is a single mother with eight children of her own and 10 children in her care. Before the CWP enabled Olga to be a farmer, she was selling snacks and living off handouts from others. She has a track record of successfully cultivating on her land, and is a keen gardener eager to turn her green fingers to the beetroot, tomatoes, cabbage and spinach the nursery will incubate.

Already, the rocket-shaped, modern greenhouse singles her out from her neighbours. "I am extremely happy that CWP has provided this for me," she says.

Inside, Olga proudly and tenderly watches over her nursery that sits incongruously by her hillside residence, waiting to provide a well-needed income stream that will certainly keep her busy. Most of the seedlings will be sold, but there is also plenty of scope for the nursery owners to plant some for eating and selling the leftover crop. Olga is being trained on how to keep a record of her income and expenses and calculate her profit.



Typical of the communal spirit in this region, Olga says she hopes to give back to the region as she benefits from the nursery. She says that in the future, with any excess money earned from the venture, she intends to help children in the area and support those families who can't support themselves.

This profile is part of a series that looks at local innovation in the South African government's Community Work Programme (CWP). It was produced by Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) for the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG). For more information about the CWP go to www.cogta.gov.za/cwp.