**Title of Project:** EcoGhardens: Growing Food for Economic Sustainability  
**Country Where Project Took Place:** Ghana  
**Nominating College:** Skidmore College  
**Project Leader:** Priscilla Kayku, Skidmore College, from Ghana; **UWC:** Changshu China  
**Participating Partners:** Agricultural Engineer; Philip Selorm Kayku  
**Landowner:** John Ahiadome on behalf of the Ababio Family  
**Social Media:** @ecoghardens on Instagram  

**Narrative Report**

**Summary**

Amidst food scarcity, national inflation and unemployment in Adenta, EcoGhardens exists as an initiative designed with food gardens and community involvement at the forefront. With EcoGhardens we transformed a 1000 square meter thicket into arable farmland which not only serves as a hands-on teaching ground for community members, but also the basis of our outreach program which encourages community members to grow their own backyard food gardens.

**Project Description**

How did you decide what issue(s) you wanted to address and what approach(es) or strategies you chose to implement in your project?

Deciding what issue to tackle was a crucial and, surprisingly, the easiest part in the entire planning and implementation process. My immediate environment greatly inspired the idea for this project as, at the time, I was residing in Adenta – the very location that would become the project site. Economic inflation typically affects the cost and availability of food and food crops in Ghana, but the COVID-19 pandemic had caused food prices to skyrocket even as household income stayed the same, and in some cases, reduced. The scarcity of fresh food became a staple dinner conversation in my home, and I suspected in many other homes in my community. Over the summer of 2022 I conducted an assessment within the Adenta community. This involved engaging with local residents and stakeholders (market traders, food truck drivers and restaurant workers) to understand their concerns and challenges related to food security, access to fresh produce and environmental sustainability. Their input was valuable in determining which part of the problem resonated the most and where solutions should be targeted at. This assessment suggested a community garden could have the most significant impact. The data I gathered through the research conducted helped me appreciate the enormity and severity of food insecurity which prevailed in my community. It also helped me identify interconnected social issues that could be addressed through a community garden. With the idea of a community garden taking root in my mind, I had to conduct another study to assess its feasibility. This was essential to unearth the practicality and viability of implementing the community garden. I assessed factors like available land, resources, funding opportunities, community interest, and potential partnerships. The results from the feasibility assessment were incredibly positive; a community resident was eager to donate their piece of land for the duration of the project; two local primary schools were excited at the prospect of educational excursions as part of their agriculture lessons; and several community members expressed interest in growing their own food crops. This gave me some assurance that the project would be accepted and participation counted on. As the community garden would address issues that could lead to lasting positive change and growth within the community, the project would be more likely to succeed and garner continued support hence ensuring its sustainability.

Why did you choose your host site? In what ways did local relationships support you or contribute to the project?

Proximity to the problem played a key role in choosing the site for project implementation. Additionally, the location of the available land to be used for the community garden meant we had to implement it in the Adenta community. Moreover, the site’s environmental conditions, such as sunlight exposure, soil quality, and water availability were evaluated and assessed by a local agronomist to be ideal in enhancing the project’s potential for a successful harvest and overall impact. Familiarity with the community members also played a part in choosing the site for implementation as local relationships and community support are key to a sustainable, long term project. With community and local stakeholders enthusiastic about the project and willing to contribute their time, resources, or expertise, it increased the chances of successful implementation and long-term sustainability. Lastly, the neighborhood’s relative safeness ensured the safety and security of the gardeners and visitors and hence minimized any risk that could undermine the project’s progress. The support from the local
community came in different forms and yet contributed equally to the project's implementation. 100kg of manure was donated to EcoGhardens from a local poultry farmer, a resident who owned a wood processing facility offered to run services at no charge, and one more than one occasion, we had community members volunteer to deliver seedlings and other materials to interested households. When challenges arose, the support of local relationships provided practical solutions. Whether it was dealing with unexpected weather conditions or addressing community concerns, having a network of support was crucial.

What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and why?

A key part of the structure for EchoGhardens was in-person presentation and demonstrations on the farm. However, we found, about three weeks into the project that we would have to switch to an online presence. The series of workshops and presentations we conducted under tents had to be replaced with one-on-one WhatsApp texts and calls, pre-recorded videos and routine house-calls. We realized that even with significant community interest, most residents could not be physically present on the farm due to their work hours and other responsibilities. Additionally, there were proximity and travel time restraints as a significant number of interested participants lived on the outskirts of Adenta.

Did other fundraising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?

EcoGhardens was honored to have a significant donation in the form of cash from an anonymous source which helped to boost the project’s capacity.

Are there opportunities for continuing your work on this issue? If so, please describe.

EcoGhardens, a community garden project, opens up numerous opportunities for ongoing work and positive change. On the whole, there is an opportunity to expand the project to additional sites within the same community or replicate the model in neighboring communities facing similar challenges. This can have a cascading effect, increasing access to fresh produce, promoting environmental sustainability, and fostering social cohesion in multiple areas within the country. Within this specific project, there are numerous avenues of expansion and integrating community engagement while tackling food insecurity. For example, we could hold harvest festivals after every major planting season to celebrate individual and community achievement, organize more youth gardening programs to engage young people in hands-on learning about gardening and environmental stewardship, and progressively build a database of small-scale farms and backyard gardens for geospatial work that could inform policy at the local level.

Reflection

How do you define peace?
Peace is harmony; Peace is cooperation but not at one’s expense; Peace is an environment that allows you to thrive—and merely exist; Peace is having choices; Peace is surety of the day’s meals; Peace is hope that all is well.

In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-term? Long-term?
EchoGhardens has brought community members from economically and culturally diverse backgrounds together to work toward a common goal: food security. We have given people a safety net that helps to cushion them from the harsh economic realities regarding food quality and availability in Adenta and Ghana as a whole. EcoGhardens has enhanced community harmony and cooperation as well as the physical well-being of individuals involved in every aspect of the project. A major thing
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that this project highlighted was the communal feeling of anxiety towards food and its availability, irrespective of the income generated per household. The project gives community members an avenue to not only voice their concerns and anxieties towards food availability, but also to motivate one another, to share ideas and resources, to celebrate when plants flower and start fruiting and, overall, to mitigate feelings of isolation and exclusion. As individuals learn skills and sustainable practices relevant to growing food, they develop a sense of empowerment and self-sufficiency. These skills, though primarily targeted to help participants grow their own food, can translate into increased employability and economic opportunities, reducing underlying sources of conflict related to resources and livelihoods.

Identify a significant conflict you observed or encountered in your work (it could be any level of relationship: intra- or inter-personal, community/group based, and/or societal/global). How did you navigate the conflict and what would you like to learn more about as a result.

A significant conflict, albeit brief, emerged due to some community participants reluctance to understand and accept the variation in the number of seedlings allocated per household, which was influenced by differing household sizes. As project manager, I had to calmly but sternly explain to these participants that with a limited number of seedlings, we had to work to avoid wastage while making sure everyone got just what they needed. With a farm as part of the project, I found that I needed to communicate instructions repeatedly and clearly as volunteer farmhands differed daily. There were also several situations where I had to compromise and reschedule responsibilities as the number of available volunteers differed daily. The whole experience forced me to think on my feet, even as I had structured the course of the project.

Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you?

The EcoGhardens project has changed me incredibly, fundamentally, wholly. Working with the community and for the community has had a profound impact on my perspective, both as someone who has lived most of her life here, and as a person who has travelled and experienced several other cultures. It has reinforced my understanding of the need for a sense of community, especially in trying times. It has made me accept that setbacks and what may be perceived as failures are sometimes inevitable but also can be valuable learning opportunities. Most importantly, working on this project has made me appreciate and respect people as individual, complicated, and yet incredibly interesting, intricate worlds on their own.

Personal Statement

A brief statement, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing the value of this project and what you have learned. Indicate the student’s name (yours or your teammates’) for quote attribution.

“This project is an attestation to the transformative power of community collaboration. Through this journey, I’ve learned that collaboration nurtures solutions, and that by tending to shared goals, we sow the seeds of positive change. Witnessing the growth of the garden and the bonds formed within the community has reaffirmed my belief in the potential of collective action to create lasting impact.”

-Priscilla Kayku