I.a. A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project

Our project’s goals are to reduce youth crime and unemployment rates via the education of Upper-Thamae youth on hydroponics best practices. This will happen in two stages. First, young farmers will learn the necessary knowledge and skills to start their own hydroponic farms. Then, we will consolidate sales of produces from a network of hydroponic farms that will emerge over time by buying it off of farmers and reselling it to higher end markets that are often inaccessible to them.

I.b. Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?
No other fund-raising efforts contributed to our project.

I.c. How did you come up with the idea for your project?
Lerato and Djibril took a class called entrepreneurship in Africa in 2018. This was a non-standard style class that had guest entrepreneurs showcase current solutions they are undertaking to solve contemporary problems on the continent. At the end of the class, we had to deliver a project that tackled one, or several, plights of the African continent. Because we were passionate about agriculture, we did research and came across aquaponics and hydroponics as more sustainable alternative to today’s subsistence agricultural farming. Our project then turned into creating cost effective hydroponics units that can be taught to rural farmers with little to no education.

I.d. Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?
Upper-Thamae, located in the heart of Maseru, Lesotho, is one in many urban villages with high crime rates and youth unemployment rates. Only one in 20 people is still in school or graduated from high school or college. Majority of the youth has been in and out of jail for gangsterism, which is perceived as unavoidable by school dropouts and jobless graduates. To prevent youth’s idleness, community leaders encourage members of society to employ students and fresh graduates as gardeners, car washing employees, and baby-sitters. From time to time, diligent youngsters manage to earn their patrons’ trust, and they obtain the rights to farm their patron’s land for free and reap all the benefits. These young farmers develop a passion for agriculture and selling crops, yet they hardly gain any returns with their scant yield – an unfortunate result of pests, pesticides, draught or floods.

I.e. Why did you choose your host site to work in? a. What was it like to work in your host site?
We chose Lesotho because one of our team members is from there and has the necessary network to allow remote implementation of the project. Lesotho is also ideal for its location. A hydroponics system requires many components that are not readily available in other locations we considered; proximity to South Africa made it easy to obtain hard to get by machineries.

I.f. Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?
Not at all. However, we did understand very early on that the timeline will have to be adjusted. Covid brought along movement restrictions, especially for transactions involving cross border (Lesotho-South Africa) movements. We also had to learn many hydroponics related operations tangentially to building so there was/is a lot of trial and error going on.

I.g. What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?
Communicating over Zoom or Whatsapp was challenging, especially given the language barriers. Often, we had to have calls with cameras off to use less bandwidth. Tiisetso our project manager spoke good English but sometimes Lerato had to translate, so Lerato had to be on every call just in case he was needed. But, all in all, communication issues were not progress halting.

I.h. How do you define peace?

Peace to us is a safe space necessitating non-negotiable aspects to be achieved. These parts include physical, psychological, and financial safety. If one or more of the three legs of peace is inadequate distress and/or lower quality life standard are never far behind, inducing a peaceless state of being.

I.i. How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?

Hydroponics in Greenhouses for Lesotho project aims to take advantage of technological advancements to address challenges that the youth in Upper-Thamae faces and use this as a pilot of how sustainable farming methods can combat crime and reduce unemployment in Lesotho. We are setting up a hydroponics system (growing plants by using water rich in dissolved mineral nutrients in lieu of soil) under a greenhouse. Once the system is fully constructed, Upper-Thamae young farmers can learn and practice hydroponics farming with us. Peace will be a longer-term goal of our project. The hope is to provide a more sustainable, dignified, and realistic way of earning a living than gangsterism for young people, effectively nudging people away from crime and towards agriculture.

I.j. Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?

I.k. was your project impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic? a. If yes, please describe any impacts you and/or community members engaged in your project experienced. b. How did you advance your project goals despite these challenges? i. What advice would you give to future PfP grantees given the pandemic-related challenges you experienced? c. If you were able to implement your project remotely, speak to the highlights and challenges of conducting a remote project

Implementation of the project during COVID-19 required flexibility, to say the least, but at no point did our team think it won’t be possible. The biggest impact the pandemic had was on the adjustment of the implementation timeline. Because most of the materials we needed were sourced from Hydroponics stores in South Africa, the project timeline suffered significant extensions, given that borders were closed and strict lockdowns were in place. On a brighter note, we did considerable screening to find an in-country project manager, and we found the most driven and ethical young woman by the name of Tiisetso Sefatsane. For everything we planned an ocean away, Tiisetso brought realism and spotless execution. Without her we would not have made the progress we have made. With her help, the greenhouse is 90% and the next steps will be hydroponics growing beds as well as the first cycle of produce. We were anxious about keeping track of the project’s progress remotely, but thanks to Tiisetso, we trust that everything will run smoothly even when we become less engaged due to school starting.

I.l. At the end of your narrative, please provide a one- to two-sentence personal statement, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result. For quote attribution, please provide the full name(s) to be listed for team leader and each team member providing individual quotes. If quote provided is reflective of the entire team, please provide all names accordingly. PfP Liaisons are also welcomed to provide a quote reflective of the participating institution’s team and the implementation of their project.

“Tiisetso, the young women who spearheaded on the ground activities, jumped at the occasion to work with us. She is curious, learns fast, works hard, and is willing to forgo immediate financial gains for knowledge! If our project can engage more people like her, they will become the beating heart that drives our project to success.” -- Djibril Rushingabigwi, Team Leader
I.m. Please provide team leader full name and, if applicable, full list of team member names along with associated permanent contact address for our PfP alumni database.

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