



case
study



Namibia Red Cross's integrated food security intervention

Country context: Namibia

Namibia has become more and more vulnerable to short- and long-term environmental shocks such as droughts, floods and other climate related changes. An economic slow-down and a relatively high HIV-prevalence have made job creation difficult, and poverty and inequality remain unacceptably high. Unemployment is estimated at over 50 per cent (World Bank, 2008). Despite a decline in HIV prevalence rates, from 22 per cent in 2002 to 17.8 per cent in 2008, new HIV infections remain a serious concern. Namibia also has one of the highest tuberculosis prevalence rates in the world at 765 per 100,000. These factors have made life for most poor people unbearable.

The Namibia Red Cross has responded by implementing a number of projects, including an HIV and AIDS programme that includes a food security component. This response takes into account the fact that farming remains one of the main sources of livelihood for most people. However, farming is now threatened by frequent crop failure and insufficient grazing due a number of factors including droughts or localized floods; chronic poverty; rain-fed agriculture and poor access to productive resources; crop and livestock pests and diseases; environmental degradation and crime. This has resulted in increased malnutrition, nearly 24 percent of children under five are stunted and underweight, and it has raised concerns regarding the impact it will have on the population's health in the short-, medium- and long-term.

The Namibia Red Cross's integrated food security project

The Namibia Red Cross introduced an integrated food security project in 2011 in order to address food availability and access as well as malnutrition and poverty within its programme areas. This was implemented as part of the National Society's broader disaster management programme in partnership with government ministries and other international and local organizations. The integrated food security project targeted the Khomas, Caprivi and Ohangwena regions. It aims to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities and households from the risk of food insecurity.

Mission:

To improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity.

Vision:

Reduced vulnerability and enhanced human dignity through local and global networks

Core programme:

The integrated food security project falls under disaster management programme and it supports vulnerable rural communities and people living with HIV.

Goal:

To save lives, protect livelihoods and strengthen recovery from disasters and crisis.

Methodological approach

The food security project is built on Namibia Red Cross's community-based model, mainly driven by volunteers and beneficiaries in the programme areas. This does not only ensure community participation but ownership as the communities identify the projects. For easy management, communities organize themselves into groups led by a management committee. Membership comprises of men and women, people living with HIV and others with different social vulnerabilities. Within this arrangement, responsibilities are shared among members. Community groups identify project ideas, design project proposals in liaison with the local branches of the Red Cross. Projects include gardening, crop planting, goat pass-on and fisheries. The Red Cross provides start-up packs. The Namibia Red Cross liaises with the local government agricultural office for training on farming and regular technical advice. In order to ensure sustainability, particularly for a country that is prone to natural hazards such as droughts and floods, the integrated food security project takes into account locally available capacities and opportunities. Gardening projects are conducted next to natural waters sources such as rivers. Group members, through their leaders create a roster and allocate duties and responsibilities amongst themselves. The inclusion of Red Cross volunteers has made it easy to manage the projects. The Namibia Red Cross supported by the International Federation of the Red Cross, and funding support from Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), implemented Diversified Agriculture and Livelihood Support Options for the Zambezi River Basin project in Caprivi region. Diversified farming is vital in ensuring availability, accessibility and affordability of a variety of foods important for nutritional requirements. The section below provides insights into the Khomas Giving Back and Tusa projects.

Women and girls are more likely to be affected by food insecurity

Lack of adequate food affects the health of all family members, but studies indicate that women and girls suffer the most. In most countries women bear the responsibility of caring for children and often times work twice as much as men. Studies show that girls who are food insecure are twice as likely to report suffering from an illness compared to boys; some drop out of school or are forced into early marriages. Stunting and chronic under-nutrition is higher among female children compared to male children, and higher overall in female-headed households.



Claudia Lipinge, a volunteer and beneficiary of the Khomas Giving Back project, prepares to work in her backyard garden.

The Khomas Giving Back Project

The Giving Back Project, funded by Meatco, a Namibian meat company, was implemented in the Khomas region to help ease the burdens of life for the most vulnerable communities. Meatco provides the funding while the Namibia Red Cross ensures the effective implementation of the project. Started in 2011, the project assisted impoverished households and people living with HIV in informal settlements to grow their own nutritional vegetables and staple cereal crops. The project was implemented in Greenwell Matongo, Havana, Kilimanjaro and Okahandja Park in the Khomas region; by supporting families in maintaining their backyard gardens in order to grow their own vegetables.

Small but useful: Backyard gardens in Khomas

Claudia Lipinge lives in Kilimanjaro, one of the poorest communities in Windhoek. Claudia is a volunteer supervisor for the Namibia Red Cross and also a beneficiary of the backyard garden project.

“The garden project started in 2011. Red Cross volunteers and other community members were trained on how to grow vegetables. For some of us who have these backyard gardens, it has helped us a lot in providing vegetables for family consumption and when we have more than what we need, we sell some of them to supplement our small incomes.”



Community participation enhances ownership of the projects

The Tusa Vegetable Garden in Caprivi region

In Caprivi where the conditions are different from Khomas, the Namibia Red Cross implements two major projects namely the Rural Community Development project jointly funded by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation and the Spanish Red Cross. The Development and Diversified Agriculture and Livelihood Support Options for the Zambezi River Basin project which is funded by the FAO also focuses food security. The goal is to improve communities' quality of life by increasing and diversifying food production through correct use of soil and natural resources. Additionally, the project aims to limit environmental damage and to empower local authorities and communities to deal with flood and emergencies. The two projects take advantage of the availability of water from the Zambezi River tributaries, floodwater from previous years, high temperatures which promote plant growth and mainly the communities' willingness to be part of poverty alleviation solutions.

The Namibia Red Cross organizes trainings for volunteers, lead farmers and beneficiaries regarding different aspects of farming; government agricultural experts also take part in providing the trainings. The training programme includes addresses a variety of issues including project management, early maturity varieties, drought tolerant seeds and vegetable management, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, pre- and post-disaster risk preparedness, prevention and mitigation and conservation tillage. These aspects of the training are also combined with local knowledge where farmers share experience regarding previous farming activities and build the community's capacity to improve on the previous farming methods, particularly on what types of seed to plant according to seasonal and climatic conditions of the area. The training also addresses key issues such as soil management, water use, disease control, group leadership, recordkeeping and marketing. Subsequent workshops are usually designed to facilitate the exchange of information and lessons learned in implementing the project.

Based on the success of such projects such as the Tusa group, the Namibia Red Cross has also incorporated other project components such as the goat pass-on and rain-fed farming project in Caprivi. About 150 goats were procured and distributed to 50 families. After giving birth, the goats are passed on to the next family. Goats are helpful as they multiply fast, provide milk and meat for consumption and are a source for income generating activities.



Members of the project are allocated specific roles and responsibilities.



Mutonga spraying the vegetables.



Volunteers selling vegetables at the markets.

Vegetable garden opened up a new world of hope

Martin Mutonga, is the chairperson of the Tusa vegetable project in Namalubi Village. The group is made up largely of people living with HIV. Caprivi region has among the highest HIV prevalence in Namibia. Most rural communities survive on farming and cattle ranching but they also experience droughts and floods.

"I never thought in my life we would have such a high impact project which can transform people's lives, says Mutonga.

The group started in 2007. Members underwent a training session on how to grow vegetables. After the training, they identified a piece of land near Lyamuhoma River, a tributary to the Zambezi River.

"We organised ourselves to clear the land and fenced it. After discussions with the Namibia Red Cross and agriculture experts from the government, we received seeds, chemicals, tools including tanks. With those tools in our hands we were ready to change our lives. We draw water from Lyamuhoma River using a small engine to the storage tanks. Then from there we are able to water our vegetable gardens. Most of our members rely on the vegetable garden for food and income. This is now a form of employment for most of us."

Learning from experience



The Tusa project is successful because of readily available water sources.

- Projects built on local capacities have a high success rate.
- Using locally available resources makes a project more sustainable and cheaper to manage. The success of the Tusa project largely depends on the availability of natural water from Lyamuhoma River.
- Investments in agriculture and food security projects should be approached from a business perspective. People engage more in projects when there is more than just the primary benefit. The Namibia Red Cross has always been engaged in supporting people living with HIV through food security projects. However, the communities' realization that they can earn a stable income from the garden project is a primary motivation to continue with the project and expand further.
- There is need to integrate community needs into agriculture investments.
- The cost of starting a project is higher at its inception than running it. After the Tusa project received the first start inputs, they have been able to buy seeds, fertilizers and other materials with little help from the Red Cross.



Local knowledge is vital to the success of projects.

Challenges:

Erratic rains have delayed planting in the Caprivi region, except in areas where the irrigation projects were implemented. Accessing vegetable seeds in the region also posed a significant challenge, as suppliers did not have sufficient stocks. However, orders were made from the capital city, Windhoek, to address this issue. Additionally, the short time span allocated to implement the project meant that not all objectives and intended results were fully realized. Communities are, however, eager to continue with the projects even if there is less support from the Red Cross. It should also be noted that floods and an outbreak of foot and mouth disease threatened the goat project, with the government stopping the movement of goats until the situation was under control.



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