

Report on 'Bio-Intensive Sustainable Mini-Farming Workshop held at Ezemvelo Nature Reserve on September 16-20, 2009

Introduction

This workshop on BIO-INTENSIVE was held at Ezemvelo Nature Reserve in South Africa. Participants came from England, Kenya, Ireland, South Africa, Swaziland, USA and Zimbabwe. Swaziland was represented by members of the Swaziland Scout Association (SSA), Wandile Simelane and Sibonakaliso Mdluli. Simelane is a teacher and Scout leader at Manzana Primary School while Mdluli is a full-time volunteer of the Thirst for Life Scout Initiative.

SSA has an initiative project known as Thirst for Life (TFL) which among some of its activities is a garden project that benefits over 150 HIV/Aids orphaned and vulnerable children from the project area community.

Simelane's Scout Troop is also engaged in a garden project which also aims at alleviating poverty and hunger. This benefits school children who are presently on ARV treatment. A number of these children are destitute and some are heads of their families.

Workshop

This was a five-day workshop with a range of topical lectures on how to grow bio-intensive sustainable mini-agriculture. It put emphasis on small scale farming that can be done on family back yards with production that can sustain the family and have some to sell as well. Bio-intensive also teaches on how best to nurture our country, family, soil, and the planets ecosystem.

Participants were taught on how water conserving principles relate to bio intensive farming as compared to conventional farming. Bio farming uses far less water compared to conventional farming. This is so because crops are closely spaced and they create shade which promotes less evaporation and keep the soil moist. Close spacing of crops also helps to reduce the weed from growing in your bed.

Healthy soil

Pathway to healthy living



The above diagram illustrates the importance of keeping our soil healthy to be able to take care of the plants and have healthy people feeding from the healthy plants. A healthy soil can only be through the use of organic fertilizers such as compost manure, green manure etc.

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Compost preparation

The compost preparation, double digging, and transplanting was one of the field practical lectures done during the course of the workshop. Dry grass which contains carbon that is needed by the soil, greens which contain nitrogen, food waste which has nitrogen and wood ash which contains potassium can be used to make compost heap.

Thereafter, you water your compost occasional. It takes about six months for the compost to fully decompose. Compost can be used as an alternative fertilizer instead of chemical fertilizer. It also improves the quality of crops and yields.

Worth mentioning will be that there are striking differences between compost fertilizers and chemical fertilizer. One of them is that compost fertilizer feeds the soil so that the soil can feed the plants while chemical fertilizer feeds the plants. We further looked at the advantages of double digging the soil which also improves the freirliyt of the soil and transplanting.

This workshop was definitely an eye opener in a sense that as the present generation we have the obligation of doing something in order to stop the depletion of the soil which we need for our livelihood. The global warming of the earth can also be improved through Bio-intensive farming with dwindling amount of water saved.

The Kenyan friends long time implementers of Bio-intensive farming have extended an invitation to us that we should come to Kenya next year to see and share on how they have managed to do it in their country Bio-intensive farming in Kenya also receives support from government and other non-governmental organization. It is therefore my wish to see Bio-intensive farming getting implemented and scattered through the Swaziland Scout Association.

Conclusion

We are confident that the acquired skills and knowledge will help develop the participants, the TFL Scout Centre, their communities and the nation at large. We are keen to contribute towards implementing the bio-farming technology at the TFL Scout Centre, eBuhlebuyeza. We believe this is an ideal project to benefit mainly our HIV/Aids orphaned and vulnerable children in our project area community.

We strongly recommend that we have this new project experimented at the TFL Scout Centre for a three-month period. The experiment will require a volunteer to be at the Centre on full-time basis for the duration of the experiment.

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The experiment requires a special budget of E2, 100.00 (US\$300.00) which will cover out of pocket expenses for the volunteer, meals, transport and communication. The volunteer will compile a comprehensive report at the end of the experimental project.

Acknowledgments

A special thanks to John Jeavon and Steve Moore from the USA who were the facilitators of the workshop. We thank our friend Philip Donnell of 'Food Growing Project' in the USA for coordinating our participation together with Brian Horsley.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Project Director of the TFL Scout Initiative, Bheki Metfula for according us the opportunity to attend this valuable workshop at highly subsidized costs.

We are also grateful and appreciate the support we received from Dr. Themba Ntiwane who provided support towards transport costs to the workshop.

We thank the Head Teacher of Manzana Primary School for being supportive to the TFL Scout Initiative project and its activities.