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Warren Park 2 Herbal and Nutrition Garden



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The focus of the case study is on the herbal and nutrition garden situated in Warren Park area of Harare, and it is dedicated in providing fresh fruits, herbs and also envisaging to become a center for learning purposes by different groups which include the elderly, youth, women and man, for the benefit of humanity.

1. Context: Location, population and socio-economic features

The Herbal and nutrition garden is located in Warren Park two suburb of Harare on a two-hectare piece of land allocated for the community initiative under a five year lease agreement by Harare City Council. Warren Park constituency covers areas such as Warren Park one, Warren Park D, Lincoln green, Ridgeview and belvedere Warren Park two is a densely populated suburb in southwest of Harare. Warren park two is a mixture of medium and low-density suburbs and used to be part of Kambuzuma constituency. The new constituency also received parts of Harare Central, according to the ZimStat Census Report of 2012. The total population of Warren Park constituency was 87 768 with 41 579 males and 46 192 females. Males constituted 48% and females 52% of the total population of the constituency. The constituency had a total of 21 569 households (2012 Census report). However, due to lack of employment opportunities in the formal sector, many people have found themselves in the informal sector to earn a living (Willemsse, 2011).

The area has many open spaces being utilised by the residents for urban agriculture to improve household food security in the face of increased urban poverty. Residents in Warren Park two are highly poverty stricken as they face challenges such as high food prices, accommodation, user fees for water and electricity, and associated debt. The situation is compounded by high unemployment and low economic activity. Poverty is widespread in Warren Park urban and the area is fast becoming increasingly worse off. Indeed, the Poverty Assessment Survey Study (PASS) revealed that between 1995 and 2003 both general and food poverty in urban areas increased at a faster rate than in rural areas (GoZ, 2006). It is unfortunate that in most cases the residents do not seek permission from the local authority before utilization council land resulting in acrimony between the local authorities and the residents.

2. The motivation for and design of the work

Urban gardens have attracted considerable academic attention in recent years. Several studies have, in fact, emphasized their positive contribution in terms of social integration, community health, urban regeneration, and food security, and explored individual gardeners' motivations behind these practices. The results suggest the great importance of the social and environmental aspect of urban gardens, and an interest in reconnecting with food practices even when food access is not a priority which is evidenced by the Warren Park two Herbal nutrition garden.

The idea of approaching the local authority emanated from the fact that the project leaders had managed to create a huge demand for hot Chili in the area. The two used to give it out for free chili at the local beer drinking places in Warren Park two. The hot chilies were produced by the project leader in his home garden, between 2005 – 2007.

When the demand for chili was high in the area, they resorted to sourcing the chili from Indian run shops in the City center for resale in Warren Park two, before deciding to approach Harare City Council for land to grow their own chili. The two friends approached the local authority with their request for land to start a herbal and nutrition garden in 2007. The local authority responded positively and allocated land to the project managers on the wetlands in Warren Park two area of Harare, but without a lease agreement during the same year.

The initiative also had a component of vegetable production and fish farming, thus creating a good source of healthy food and income. The fingerlings for fish breeding were purchased from the National Parks department in Lake Chivero, to kick-start fish breeding on site. Three fish ponds were developed as a collective initiative.

More so Community gardens have become an effective tool able to aid in community building, increase neighborhood interaction and cohesion, reduce crime, establish neighborhood pride, and enhance neighborhood beautification. Previous community garden experiments in Warren Park two specifically have shown several positive outcomes. For example, The Warren Park Two Herbal nutrient garden has grown to become an alternate for vegetable area and provides access to fresh produce at affordable prices. These projects show that community gardens are assets to their communities.

The overall objective of the initiative was to promote sustainable environmental management system in Warren Park two area of Harare through the promotion and production of herbs, use of herbs, and educating the community on the benefits of herbs, fish farming and vegetable production for household consumption and to sale at commercial level. The action aimed at harnessing local resources, create local employment, and to promote vegetable and herbal production and uptake at a commercial level. The Theory of change was that; the neighboring communities and schools would benefit from the herbal and nutrition garden initiative which started as an initiative of two households. Additionally, the community would enjoy improved living standards and well-being through increased income from herbs and the availability of balanced and nutritious food. The initiative also aimed at creating community social cohesion.

It can be argued that community gardens can mitigate some of the problems that plague urban areas such as urban poverty, malnutrition and unemployment. They can be a beneficial addition to many communities by increasing the availability of nutritious foods, strengthening community ties, reducing environmental hazards, reducing food miles and creating a more sustainable system (Toriro et al.,2005)

On the other hand, community gardening offers a unique avenue to well-being through engagement in activities and responsibilities that encourage social cohesion, skills acquisition, and personal growth. The importance of well-being has been identified in occupational therapy and occupational science, but its conceptualization has been problematic (Mbiaba, 1995).

It can be argued that community gardens are one way that residents can mobilise themselves to beautify urban neighborhoods, improve access to fresh produce, and engage youth and adults in productive activities that can generate income for them. Furthermore, community gardening initiatives can provide opportunities for constructive activities, contribute to community development, relationship building and interpersonal skill development, improve social networking, exploring cognitive and behavioral competence, and improved nutrition (Ndiripo, 1999).

Purnomohadi (2000) noted that urban agriculture, including herbal and nutrition gardening, was being conducted for household food security, income generation, employment, and to make use of readily available resources. It can be argued that urban agriculture requires a complete council permission as well as training and extension services. Urban agriculture involves crop and herbal planting on-plot or off-plot throughout the year, and there is no security of produce making it a very risky business for any one venture into (Conyers, 2002). Urban agriculture can contribute in increased access to affordable and nutritious food; local ecosystem, air quality and public health improvements; urban island effect reductions; healthy eating lifestyle awareness raising; and strengthened community ties and social cohesion (Veenhuizen, 2006), this is evidenced by the Warren Park Two Herbal nutrition garden which managed to train ten schools which include mbare, warren park, kambuzuma among others on traditional herbs which helps to treat diseases such as Blood pressure (BP), diabetes, asthma, arthritis and STIs

3. The implementation of the initiative

The initiative involved re – visioning from the individual perspective to a collective and shared understanding resulting in the formation of a Warren Park two Herbal and Nutrition Garden with over 30 households in 2009. The membership was open to all ages and membership was free. A management committee was put in place to facilitate the application for land from the local authority. The committee was comprised of 10 people which included the youth, elderly and female members. Initially, the project managers were working from the Herbal and Nutrition Garden site with the approval of Harare City Council, but with no formal agreement/ lease, making it difficult to receive funding from donors.

In response, the local authority allocated two hectares of land for the initiative on a five-year lease agreement, with a renewable option after every 60 months. The lease agreement, between the project leader and the local authority has to date been renewed for the third time since the start of the initiative. The initiative attracted donor funding

resulting in the formation of a community herbal and nutrition garden group with well over 30 community members, which included 19 women and 11 men. It is generally held that women predominate in urban agriculture because they bear responsibility for household sustenance. They also tend to have lower educational levels than men and therefore have more difficulty finding formal employment (Hovorka 2001). The involvement of men and women in urban farming can also depend on the production system. For instance, the Warren Park two Herbal traditional garden is dominated by women and they also play an important role in marketing their produce.

During the 2007 period, they were donors who supported different projects and these donors have their agents on the ground. These donors had a political agenda. The Warren Park two Herbal and Nutrition Garden was approached by an agent of the donor, and to get funding, the community was urged to be a group of above twenty. These donors included the Swedish donor among others. The funding conditions forced the project managers to invite other community members to join them so they could qualify for funding and technical support. Over 30 households joined the Warren Park two Herbal and Garden initiative intending to learn herbal production skills so that they could earn a living from selling herbs. A committee was set by the project leader, although it was not that effective. The project had no timeframe period as it was an on-going thing and everyone benefited with knowledge, skills and some allowances which were given by the donors which were in the form of money or food. The project had no proper constitution as it was registered in the name of the project leader the member who started with the initiative. Meetings were only held when having workshops and were spearheaded by the donors. The group was registered through the city of Harare.

Having secured a lease agreement with the City of Harare, the initiative attracted donor funding, herbal seed and vegetable seeds and the big work started by clearing of the land. Each member was allocated a portion of land for a nutritional garden. Three fish ponds were developed and fingerlings were purchased from the National Parks in Lake Chivero. The group worked on the herbal and fish ponds projects collectively. The initiative had the potential to transform the lives of the founding members as well as those of the community had it been well planned, coordinated and implemented.

The garden flourished during the period of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in Zimbabwe (2009 – 2013), as during that period community projects used to attract huge funding. This however later dried up soon after the (GNU) ended in 2009. It can be argued that internal and external factors influenced the design and implementation of the initiative. Environmental factors that influence the extent of the initiative include terrain, climate, soil properties, and soil water. It is the combination of these four factors that allow specific crops to be grown in certain areas. Internal factors, such as attitudes, values and beliefs, also have an important impact.

Each member of the group was allocated a portion of land for nutrition gardening. These members included men, women and youth. The herbal portion was a collective responsibility and each group member would contribute labour whenever the need arose. The same approach was applied to the three fish ponds.

The initiative attracted external support with donations of different varieties of herbs, vegetable seeds and fingerlings were purchased from the National Parks in Lake Chivero to facilitate fish breeding on site. Three fish ponds were developed and fish breeding commenced. The group members provided free labour in the development of the three fish ponds. The community herbal and nutrition group received training in 2007 on environmental management, herbal production and processing and marketing skills. The training was conducted by various funding partners including the local Roman Catholic Church and Africa University among others.

The initiative was donor-supported in the areas of capacity building in herbal production and processing, nutrition gardening and fish farming. Collaboration was initiated with institutions in USA, Germany, Sweden and Africa University with interest in herbs, and collaborators used to come from these countries and institutions to support the initiative. Local collaboration was also created with ten schools that benefited by receiving skills, free herbal seeds and the establishment of herbal gardens. The local community and people from other parts of Harare would purchase herbs for treating various health challenges such as Hypertension, diabetes mellitus, sexually transmitted infection (STI) and other ailments. These services are still been offered at the center. Unfortunately, many herbs as well as fish were looted during the COVID19 first lockdown as the communities, who were desperate for survival looted the project's produce. This is because the project area is poorly secured.

The leadership of Warren Park two herbal and nutrition initiative connected with the local schools and managed to influence and facilitate the establishment of herbal and nutrition gardens in ten schools in Harare. Free herbal seeds were donated to ten schools by **Warren Park two Herbal and Nutrition Garden** to kick start the herbal garden initiative. Resources for travelling to various schools for the schools' herbal and nutrition gardens initiative were provided by donors. Which include the Sida and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Europe Aid



The herbal garden targeted both the young and elderly to receive knowledge and skills on herbal production and use, now and in the future. “In other words, these projects thrive to establish an information and counselling centre on a broad scale,” One of the founding members, indicated that

“We are cognisant of the fact that the youths should be informed and taught the intricacies of herbs and herbal treatment. We feel it is our cultural duty and we also embrace the broader collective responsibility to bring these young people on board to our social and cultural setting. This is a legacy which we thrive to leave behind, to let pass from generation to generation,”

4. Enablers and challenges

A combination of factors contributed positively to the initial success of the initiative and these factors include but are not limited to; availability of land and lease agreement, willing funding partners to support the initiative and residents’ willingness to offer free labour.

Given the foregoing, lack of community group cohesion and donor dependence prevented the continuation of the initiative beyond the donor funding period. This aspect needs to be managed in future initiative as it will take the communities back into poverty circles again, despite the prosperity opportunities that will have been created. It therefore demands the need for the development of strong local institutions to drive local initiatives in a sustainable manner. If the element of strong local institutional development is not addressed, the future is not bright. Deliberate efforts should be made to empower local

communities including unlocking their capabilities to drive their own development, based on cultural norms and values of the communities.

As further challenges, the Warren Park two herbal and nutrition initiative is ongoing but under a different circumstances as the 2009 community group disintegrated soon after the donor funding dried up in 2013. The initiative is now being driven/ spearheaded by the two founding members of the initiative. The other reason that forced the 30 plus members of the group to withdraw and leave was the issue of making contributions for the payment of outstanding leasing fees for the land to Harare City Council. Over the years, collective accumulated a debt due to non-payment of fees to the city resulting in the matter being referred to debt collectors for non-payment. A payment arrangement was however agreed upon between the local authority and the project originators thus preventing the cancelation of the lease agreement and allowing the project to carry on. The founder of the project has remained a pillar of strength for the initiative. Thirty elderly community members have been invited to undertake nutrition gardening on an unused section of the leased land.



The above developments that have happened following the disintegration of the original Warren Park two herbal nutrition community garden group in 2013. Due to the lack funds which saw the collapse of the project resulting in a good Samaritan in which someone cheapened in to help and saving the initiative from litigation as a result of the group's debt. It is alleged that there is a verbal and mutual agreement between the three principals and the 30 plus elderly community members to use the land temporally till such a time the principles would want to utilise the portion of land currently allocated to the 30 plus elderly people.



The community hall and cultural center under construction on site

5. The outcomes and learning from the initiative

The two founding members of the initiative are still active on the ground because of their passion, determination and vision. Furthermore, the initiative is providing herbs for the treatment of common health challenges in the community. Following the looting that occurred during the first COVID-19 lockdown, efforts are underway to rejuvenate the initiative.

Households that practice urban agriculture including herbal and nutrition gardening are also more likely to have access to a wider variety of nutritious foods such as vegetables and animal products. Urban agriculture allows for the development of a variety of environmental, economic, and social benefits to the surrounding communities. Urban farming can reduce transportation costs, help reduce runoff associated with heavy rainfall, and lead to better air quality (Ottawa, 2006). Due to growing concern over deteriorating environmental conditions, legal systems around the country should increasingly recognize the interests of future generations

The initiative benefited the local schools, community and former members of the group as they acquired skills in herbal production and use. The current 30 plus elderly citizens working on the site are also benefiting through nutrition gardening. The two founding members of the initiative are benefiting by selling herbs to the general public and getting an income.

Citizens need to work with the planning authority to avoid acrimony, as this will enable community initiatives to be implemented smoothly with the full support of authorities. The co-operation between the City of Harare and the Warren Park two Herbal and Nutrition Garden demonstrated urban development best practices in terms of partnership between a local authority and community group, resulting also in ten schools benefiting from the initiative. Lack of group cohesion becomes a huge barrier to the continuation of the initiative beyond the donor funding period. It suffices to say that the two founding members of the initiative are still working on the ground in pursuing their objectives and vision. It can be argued that the project will grow in the long run if the leaders take lessons/learnt from what happened in the first phase. In the future, urban initiatives should involve people who have mutual understanding and respect for the founding principles. It would also be necessary to have an agreed constitution to guide the operations of the initiative and clearly outlines the roles, responsibilities, rights and obligations of all involved.

There was also learning from the negative outcome. It was assumed that the initiative would continue to flourish beyond the funding circle of the donors, and to become self-sustaining and to support its members financially. Unfortunately, this did not happen due to a lack of group cohesion, and shared vision and proper planning.

The initiative managed to generate learning on the need to have committed people to initiate and participate in community-based initiatives, and not just coming together because of the availability of donor funding. The funding partners should also learn to support ongoing best practice initiatives in communities and be sensitive to community knowledge systems even as they introduce new ideas and ways of doing things. The Warren Park two community group initiative collapsed as soon the donor funding dried up. The other reason for the disintegration of the group is that it was not the original idea of the project leaders to form a collective but the idea was imposed on them, and at that time, they had no choice but to accept it as it was a condition-precedent for them to receive donor funding.

The disintegration of the Warren Park two Community Herbal and Nutrition group, brings to the fore, the problem of donor dependency and sustainability of community projects when donor funding dries up. It is thus important that such community initiatives incorporate sustainability mechanisms in their design. Sustainability of community initiatives demands both Vertical and horizontal accountability which seems to have lacked in the Warren Park two Community Herbal and Nutrition garden. It suffices to say that the herbal and nutrition initiative was a very good initiative that suffered political interference and destruction. This phenomenon has become a common occurrence affecting similar, community-led initiatives in most developing countries. This “donor dependency syndrome” has led to the collapse of many initiatives by communities. This was an unfortunate development for the Warren Park community and offers valuable learning for any future initiatives.

The initiative has also shown the issue of weak local institutionalization which saw the collapse of warren park garden. Training is a part of institutional support but cannot be identified with it exclusively. Institutional and organizational support should be understood as a complex set of different activities, including the provision of incentives, equipment, infrastructure and training, and also the implementation of policy-dialogue activities aimed at promoting an enabling environment for broader institutional innovations and organizational expansion to facilitate scaling up. Training and more innovative types of capacity-building are essential in equipping communities with the functional, administrative, technical and social skills necessary to manage their groups and investments, develop their products, and participate in planning and decision-making, among other activities.

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