

DFW/DIG FINAL PROGRESS REPORT

Batwa Women Breaking the Cycle of Poverty and Food Insecurity

November 2016 - December 2017



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1. Intended Outcomes of Project

Development in Gardening launched the ‘Batwa Women Breaking the Cycle of Poverty and Food Insecurity’ Project in collaboration with women leaders in the Batwa community to provide experiential training in sustainable agriculture, nutrition, improved cooking practices, and business record-keeping.

The project was designed to be centered around three community demonstration gardens, leading to the establishment of *400 women-led home gardens* benefitting over *1,600 Batwa women, girls and families* to break the cycle of poverty and food insecurity.

The *objectives* focused on improving nutrition through increasing the diversity and climate resilience of foods grown and consumed and enhancing the nutritional status of Batwa women, girls, and families. The project intended to improve food security by increasing self-reliance in local food production, improve economic well-being by increasing household income through sales of produce from home gardens and reducing food expenditures, and enhancing planning and management skills of human, economic, and environmental resources. Finally, the project aimed to improve leadership and empowerment by reducing stigmatization and discrimination experienced by the Batwa and providing opportunities for the Batwa to be leaders in their community.

2. Revised Implementation Strategy and Understanding the Community

After getting on the ground in November 2016, DIG spent two months undergoing an intensive site assessment through a baseline study, stakeholder analysis, committee and leadership meetings, crop viability study, building a team, and fine tuning the implementation model.

The baseline study aimed to understand the Batwa’s current status in relation to basic demographics, agriculture, horticulture, food security, nutrition and record keeping knowledge and practices. The baseline study gave us a deeper insight to the real situation on the ground- we discovered that there were only *160 households*, as opposed to the originally stated *400 households*. We also found that the average household was only educated to the equivalent of grade 1. The *stakeholder analysis* informed the project that many actors had been present within the Batwa communities, but not many projects were being retained. *This led to a focus on ensuring that our project incorporated sustainable systems*. The *crop viability study* found that steep graded landscapes, low soil fertility, and water insecurity would pose a challenge and that vegetable variety and sustainable techniques should be carefully chosen.

3. Building our team



Wilber and Lauren working on a home garden

DIG interviewed and hired, Lauren Masey, to be the Batwa Project Coordinator. During site assessment she was able to identify two Batwa members living in one of the communities whose education had been supported through a diploma level. Robert Ngabirano and Wilber Serusiru were then selected to become facilitators, building trust between the community and DIG while counseling with Batwa leadership committee to retain culture and practicality within the project. Both Robert and Wilber underwent a week-long training in basic sustainable agriculture, financial management, nutrition trainings, and gender sensitivity. They were also trained in community facilitation, as well as financial and administrative

systems. Wilber and Robert undergo refresher trainings once per week on technical skills and once per week on soft skills. Additionally, DIG has just hired a women project assistant to expand activities for year two.

4. Designing the program

To date, DIG has engaged farmers in a two-phase field school that incorporated trainings in sustainable agriculture, nutrition, and household financial management centered around demonstration gardens. The 160 households were offered the opportunity to participate in our seasonally-based field schools. Our first field school was termed Mobile Farmer Field School (MFFS), intending to build basic agriculture skills and build trust between DIG and the community. This 17-week training program was focused on growing foods that the Batwa prioritized while including all the food groups.



DIG delivered **5 nutrition & health related trainings** training farmers improved cooking methods, new nutritious foods like sweet potato leaves, beetroot leaves, and beetroot tubers. Trainings also looked at major health concerns within the communities like under five and pregnant mothers diets.

The second phase, Farm, Food, and Finance School (FFFS), aimed to review basic agriculture skills, build the capacity of group leaders to manage their gardens, and ensure techniques were being adopted at a household level. This phase introduced new vegetables and more difficult agricultural concepts to groups. We also were able to focus more on nutrition and financial management.

The third phase, Sustainability School (SS), will begin in January 2018. This has been designed to support groups in becoming completely self-reliant and will focus on market-driven vegetables. This final phase will ensure that project will continue after DIG has left the community.

5. Project Impact

The impact seen at both the community and household levels are numerous. DIG conducted our baseline and invited 100% of the families to participate in the project. We trained over 80% of the households in nutrition, sustainable agriculture or cooking demonstrations and developed home gardens in 105 of the 160 households.



DIG offered **28 sustainable agriculture and climate resiliency trainings** addressing challenges of soil infertility, erosion, unpredictable weather patterns, pest infestation, seed saving and more. Trainings were often repeated and included new strategies to teach this unique group of former hunter-gatherers.

To date, DIG has conducted:

- Over 111 training hours for each farmer,
- 5 nutrition and health-related group trainings,
- 4 financial literacy trainings, and
- 28 sustainable agriculture group trainings.

We have included 15 vegetable varieties within our demonstration gardens, and host 5 locally available organic solutions to pest control and soil erosion.

Over 100 household gardens have been established, and 97% of our farmers have adopted one or more sustainable

agriculture technique at home. Household gardens support over 400 individuals within three communities, showing numerous impacts in health, nutritional and the economic status of families.

Our trainings were held in two phases-Mobile Farmer Field School (MFFS) and Farm, Food, and Finance School (FFFS). Each school hosted eight groups. During our MFFS, 85 farmers graduated, 21 males and 64 females. During our FFFS, 100 farmers graduated, 24 males and 76 females.

The Batwa have seen success in meeting the program objectives:

- *Increased Adoption of Sustainable and Climate Resilient Practices* - 97% Adoption rate of climate resilient practices such as enriched raised beds, companion planting, organic fertilizers, etc seen during large rainfall last month where DIG Batwa Farmers gardens remained intact while neighbors farmers were washed away.
- *Increased Food Security for Household* - Weekly food expenditure reduced and garden diversity increased from 0-3 types to 8-11 types.
- *Improved Nutrition of Families* - Consuming 3 more meals a week from their own gardens
- *Increased Farmer Income* - Income generated from garden produce increased 4 times

The Bawta DIG graduated farmers grow more, consume more, sell more, and save more. This impacts their nutrition and health of vulnerable families but the sustainable practices are also changing the environment and land use in their communities.



DIG provided 4 financial management trainings and developed an all-visual home garden record keeping book tracking home garden consumption, home garden sales, and home garden investment.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation



DIG conducted a baseline with every household. Here is Wilber is meeting with a farmer for the midline.

As DIG's monitoring and evaluation strategy, DIG underwent a *baseline* and a *midline* survey with our participants and anticipate implementing an *endline* to be carried out in July 2018, after Batwa farmers have completed the final phase of the Field School. Supplemental to our surveys, DIG carries out weekly monitoring and evaluation at a household level.

On average, our staff is able to visit 15 farmers per week each, for a total of 30 farmers per week. Each farmer has their own template, in which we can see their progress and garden growth over time. The monitoring tool captures vegetable varieties, quantities where appropriate, sustainable techniques adopted, and challenges faced. The

field facilitators are also trained to capture success stories from farmers using an adapted template from CARE International. These success stories capture more indirect impacts, such as health benefits, community support and inclusion, nutritional benefits, and economic empowerment.

7. Challenges and Successes

The challenges of the project were many, but helped us to create replicable solutions for future projects with this special group. Some challenges were anticipated but others came along during project implementation. Due to DIG's grassroots nature and DFW understanding of development work, we were able to discuss challenges and propose solutions as they came. The major challenges included low literacy levels, steep landscapes, water insecurity, lack of prior project ownership, and isolation of communities.

Low literacy levels posed a challenge when it comes to easy learning and self-reliance of groups. We have since lengthened our program within the communities, as we needed to repeat many trainings ensuring that the farmers are retaining knowledge over the long-term. Because farmers have difficulties understanding simple sustainable agriculture concepts the first time, management of the gardens often were of lower quality. We saw a significant shift in the maintenance and overall quality of the gardens from our first phase, Mobile Farmer Field School to our second phase, Farm, Food, and



The picture on the left is a non-DIG garden that got washed away. The one on the right is one of DIG Batwa farmers practicing irrigation and drainage techniques to mitigate heavy rains.

Finance. We believe that this can be credited to repeat trainings and supplemental household visits, driving home the skills and the knowledge within the curriculum. Further, in order for these groups to become self-reliant beyond the project, it's crucial that they have the ability to perform simple group management tasks. In each group, we've identified and appointed one member of the group who has this ability. We developed three trainings that prepared them for keeping attendance, assigning and tracking tasks and sales, under the team group capacity building.

Steep landscapes, an anticipated challenge, was a learning experience for the project. DIG's Batwa Project Coordinator had little experience managing erosion on these landscapes but reached out to regional experts to

learn techniques that could be used within the communities to mitigate damage. These solutions, called *Fanya chini* and *Fanya juu* in kiSwahili, is an intervention that is most effective if implemented at a landscape level. The owners of the land near to the Batwa are not involved in the project and often travel long distances to farm, so to intervene at a landscape level would have been quite difficult. We used the technique at a field level, and our gardens sustained heavy rains. Many neighboring farms were destroyed having huge economic losses, but because of our interventions, no damage was incurred to DIG gardens. Post-floods, many non-project farmers have begun implementing our *Fanya chini* technique, realizing that it was this intervention that protected the gardens.

Water Insecurity: While numerous aid projects have been initiated with the Batwa, many of those projects failed to find long-term success, and at present, are not visible. We had the original intention of installing community-serving water harvesting systems to provide year-long irrigation to the gardens, but through the practice of deep listening, developed an appropriate alternative. Upon arrival, we found donated tanks to be disregarded and out of use. Although official maintenance committees were established during the time of their installation, they had dissolved once a problem arose. DIG made the decision not to install any additional water systems because of this. Water insecurity, however, became a major hindrance to the quality of the gardens as group members had to

walk distances of up to an hour and a half to irrigate the gardens. Over time, we discovered that rainwater dams would be an affordable and easy to maintain solution for the Batwa. We had the community dig large holes in the ground in which we lined them with black plastic and a tarpaulin. The dams were then fenced for protection. This turned a \$800 solution into a \$30 low technology alternative, providing the groups with a solution that they can self-manage years beyond DIG's intervention.



Water solution for Batwa Gardens

The isolation of communities can make access to inputs and marketing a challenge. Although DIG has been providing communities with the start-up inputs they need by providing group tools and enrolling 100+ farmers in our Farmer Subsidy Program in which they can purchase tools and seeds at low cost, we wanted to provide a continual, sustainable solution for groups. During the second phase of our program, we began buying tins of seeds, repackaging them at affordable costs, and selling them to farmers at cost. This program has taught farmers that self-investment is important and has promoted gardening as a business. It has allowed many farmers to surpass the benefits that DIG-provided seeds offer and has created a system of sustainability within groups. During our third phase for the final DIG-led field school intervention, Sustainability School, we will focus on handing over projects to local institutions and vendors to carry on agriculture services that DIG was providing to farmers.

Lack of Trust: The Ugandan government, Tourism, and other non-profit organizations have exploited the Batwa communities for their own gain. Additionally, many research projects have been conducted and several short-term projects have been implemented with little to no gain for community members. Hiring respected community members, living and working locally everyday has allowed DIG to build respect and trust in the area causing the projects to flourish.

8. Project Benefit and Continuation

Due to the success of the DFW-sponsored project, we have gained credibility as an organization at a global, sub-regional, and national level. This specific project was invited to speak at The East Africa Field School Knowledge Sharing Event in Kigali, Rwanda under the FAO. The Batwa project was showcased as a success story in tailoring the farmer field schools to meet the communities' priority needs. Additionally, we are hosting an experience sharing and Training of Trainers for an anticipated 18 participants from five organizations within the Southwestern region of Uganda. Regional organizations and national donors have become aware of our success and we are working towards establishing partnerships with these organizations to bring holistic development to the Batwa communities expanding the DIG model to a wider community.

DIG will be expanding into an additional 9 groups while sustaining the learning of our current 8 groups. We will be working with 2 disability groups within the region, an Orphan and Vulnerable Children group, an HIV-affected group, and 5 new Batwa communities because of the success of DFW-supported pilot project. DIG has been successful in raising additional funds for a year 2 thanks to the

DFW project with additional support from Presbyterian Hunger Program and Clif Bar Family Foundation.

We are grateful for the DFW sponsorship that has allowed us to create a replicable and scalable program to reach more vulnerable groups within the region that has made a tremendous, lasting impact on this community. From hunter-gatherers with little hope, this group is beginning to reap the benefits of their work, watching their families grow strong and healthy, establishing a better quality of living at a household level, and seeing their communities transform out of discrimination.

9. Success Stories



Meet the Katama's. This Batwa family used to beg for dregs, feeding their 5 children the leftover sorghum from a locally produced drink only once per day. When the couple joined the DIG program, they were skeptical of the outcome as many NGO's had come to their village for projects that were short-term. The Katama's donated the little land they had for the demonstration plot. When they witnessed the benefits the program brought, the couple reclaimed their land and is now growing spinach, cabbage, beetroots, onions, and carrots. "We are now feeding our children two well

balanced meals per day and we've noticed a big change in their appearance and energy." Having farmers witness the health and economic value of food production has caused the farmers to take complete ownership of the project.

DIG Farm Groups have begun collectively marketing their beetroots.

Beetroots are a high nutritional value crop that is not commonly eaten in the area despite its ability to thrive in the climate. "We didn't think we could eat beetroots because of the blood color they produce, but when DIG showed us how to cook them during a demonstration, we thought they were so sweet," said Maria Edrida. Today, Batwa groups bring in their produce, weigh, and sell it at different markets. Individuals and groups have made over three times their average monthly income in just one sale. Through our seed sale initiative, the groups and individuals are able to take a portion of their profit and reinvest in seeds. "People are so surprised when they see a Mutwa (Batwa) selling food. I've gained respect in my community and people are seeing that we are just like them," states Sarah Mwekyeshimana. This project has not only broken the cycle of food insecurity and poverty, but also discrimination.





When DIG launched in November, **Hope** immediately joined the group. Her husband had just been imprisoned for an undetermined amount after selling illegally harvested forest products. Having four mouths to feed at home and only a single parent, Hope knew she had to do something to keep her family going. Hope is now the chairwomen of her group and leads them in managing the gardens throughout the week. Hope maintains the demonstration and tracks attendance. “Many people come to my home and ask me about different techniques. I never thought I’d be an agriculture teacher within my community.” We’re excited to continuously build the capacity of leaders like Hope. The group received a donation of Irish potato seeds from the local church who were impressed with their dedication.