SCHOOL FARMS 2021 Project

SEEDS CHALLENGE 2020

Battle Horticultural Society generously donated £200 for schools in Hastings, Sierra Leone, to grow vegetables. Following the visit by HSLFL Trustees and Teachers in February 2020 twenty-four local schools received 108,000 Le (equivalent to £9) in order to create school gardens.

Seeds were sown by teachers and pupils at the beginning of the rainy season

Schools grew a range of staple vegetables (including cassava leaves, corn, crain crain, garden eggs, green leaves, ginger, groundnuts, okra, onions, potatoes, sorrel, tomatoes).

Throughout the growing season HSLFL received photographs/videos of verdant gardens of lush green vegetation tended by energetic pupils and their teachers.

Crops were harvested later in the rainy season. Some schools stored seeds for sowing the following year.

Vegetables were cooked to provide meals for pupils, teachers or parents.

Income from any sale of produce was generally spent to benefit the school.

At the end of the growing season a Questionnaire was sent to all schools participating in SEEDS CHALLENGE 2020 in order to receive their feedback and to gauge the level of interest for continuing the project in the future.

Responses were unanimously positive and schools requested further development of this successful project.

SCHOOL FARMS 2021

The SCHOOL FARMS 2021 project builds on the success of the SEEDS CHALLENGE 2020.

The project’s long-term objectives are focussed on creating opportunities for employment through learnt skills and the involvement of local communities.

Participating schools agreed to work in a more structured project with more help and more accountability.

Local supervision of the project is carried out by the Project Manager, Mrs Jeitta Kannah, with support from Francis Mason, HSLFL Schools Coordinator in Sierra Leone. Jeitta is a retired Head Teacher, well known and respected in the Hasting’s educational community.

Jeitta, Francis, Isabel, Roger and David form the SF Committee, meeting regularly and interacting with HSLFL Trustees.

A workshop to introduce Head Teachers to the SCHOOL FARMS 2021 project was facilitated by Jeitta, and held at Francis’s Conforti compound in March.

Twenty-four Head Teachers attending the workshop agreed to the aims and objectives of the project,and accepted the responsibilities and accountability associated with their involvement.

Schools that signed up for SCHOOL FARMS 2021 received 260,000 Le (equivalent to £20) in order to buy materials to grow their crops (seeds, fertiliser, tools etc.). A breakdown of this expenditure to be provided to the Project Manager.

Current aims and objectives of the School Farms 2021 project are :-

To develop annual planting and harvesting

To become self-sustaining

To build skills in agriculture

To Involve the local community in work on the farm

To create an awareness of opportunities for employment in the agricultural industry.

Commitments by participant schools were:-

Attend the Introductory Workshop

Maintain regular contact and receive visits from the Project Manager, provide progress updates as required

Provide details of crops grown, including photographs/videos to Whats App group (SL and UK)

Ensure that students are involved in all aspects of work on the farm

Keep a note of crops harvested and what you do with them

Give harvested vegetables to those in need in the school (maybe as meals) or to the community

Use income received from the sale of vegetables to benefit the school or local community or to buy gardening materials for the following year.

Keep a breakdown of money earned and how it has been (or will be) spent

Attend a second workshop at the end of the growing season to share experiences and learnings, and discuss ideas for any future improvements.

During the growing season Jeitta has made several visits to all of the 24 schools. Encouraging and advising both teachers and pupils, monitoring progress, often taking photos/videos herself and regularly reporting back to the SF Committee.

Individual schools have also been exemplary in recording the development of their farms. Sharing their experiences and achievements in sowing, fertilising, weeding, harvesting and clearing growing plots with other schools and HSLFL.

The SF Committee has been meeting regularly to receive status updates and record progress against objectives and commitments.

Results have been spectacular. Farms are extensive and proudly maintained with enthusiasm and energy by both school staff and pupils. Some have involved local community members, particularly to help with heavier work and recently during school holidays.

Students are now learning agricultural skills and have practical experience to supplement the theoretical knowledge of previous curriculum studies. This has also sharpened their focus on the importance of Agriculture to the economy of Sierra Leone.

Schools have mainly cultivated staple vegetables and many have harvested second crops. Some have created a plant nursery for seedlings and others have set up irrigation systems to enable growth during the dry season

A further initiative by individual schools has involved growing rice and rearing pigs!

The SF Committee are currently planning the End of Season Workshop which is likely to be held towards the end of November.

At the Workshop schools will share experiences and learnings, discussing what went well and any potential improvements.

Achievements against aims/objectives, commitments and expected outcomes will also be discussed.

Future plans made will embody the project long-term objectives which are:-

Sustainability

To continue teaching Practical Agriculture in schools

To develop school farms so that students gain further agricultural skills

To work together with local communities to develop Community Farms

To create more livelihoods in Agriculture and Farming.

David Lewis

21/10/2021