

## **Elias Maza's nutrition garden story**

Compiled by Ellen Zimbere

Good nutrition is an important part of leading a healthy lifestyle, and a nutritious diet comes from the gardens and field crops. In order to address food and nutrition security in the community, Welthungerhilfe decided to implement conservation agriculture and organic nutrition gardening across the 14 wards of Gokwe South District in Zimbabwe.

As a result, Njelele 1 (ward 16) is one of the wards being covered by the organization where Mr. Elias Maza of Maza village shown on the picture resides. He originally comes from Nemangwe, an area dominated by the Korekore people who are considered as marginalized as they are a minority group. The family used to have a garden that had just one type of crop throughout the year i.e. a leaf vegetable crop called covo. The husband and wife stay with their two grandchildren (a boy and a girl) who are at primary school level.



**Mrs. Maza explaining the use of repellent plants for pest control**

Mr Maza nicknamed *Yahweh* by the local community which literally means ‘friend’ in the local language and shows how much the community appreciates Mr Maza. The family started partaking in Welthungerhilfe programs in 2010 and by that time they had no idea on how a nutrition garden looked like and the benefits that it may bring to their lives. After attending intensive trainings on nutrition gardening that were conducted by the organization, Mr Maza’s interest was ignited. He registered on the program so that he could get further extension on the establishment of a nutrition garden. The family had a garden but the nutrition component was

missing. They were used to heavy application of inorganic fertilizers and chemicals for the management practices which had some residual effects harmful to their health. Whereas the new approach of gardening called for the use of plant and animal remains without any residual effects leaving a natural taste on the products. Hence Maza and wife liked the idea and started to seriously develop their existing garden into a nutrition harvesting garden. It wasn't easy for the old man to develop the garden as lot of work and planning was required. However, his better half was always there to give him maximum support.

The family was united in its purpose of improving its health and enhance its livelihoods. To speed up the process of having a nutrition garden the family started sharing duties. Thus, the wife sourced out some herb cuttings for propagation which they identified to have the following effects: - food spices like rosemary, acting as pest repellent and medicinal purposes in the treatment of minor ailments.



**Mexican marigold (*Tagetes lucida*) acting as a pest repellent against sap sucking pests**



**Lemon grass and worm wood (*Artemisia absinthium*) for a healthy tea for colds and flu and even cures malaria**





Mr Maza was responsible for planting fruit trees like bananas, pawpaws, avocados and mangoes for the harvesting of vitamin C which is good for their immune system.



The Maza family employed soil improvement techniques like fertility trench beds, double digging and thermal composts. The picture below shows the soil fertility method at Maza garden.

**Some of the fruit trees at Elias Maza's garden**

Even though water was a challenge in the garden, the family managed to divert the stream to the garden which they control for flood irrigation purpose. The family made all these efforts despite a lot of challenges it faced.

Some neighbors were busy discouraging them saying they would age faster due to over working. The family did not give up however, but changed

their time table to early morning before most of the villagers started their garden duties. This was a plan to avoid their neighbors knowing that they were working on their garden. Each time they were seen working they would be tormented by words of discouragement. As time went by, the Maza family was encouraged by its progress and support from the Welthungerhilfe team.

The crops reached the maturity stage and the family began to harvest for consumption. Life became easy for Mrs. Maza on planning nutritious meals for the family since the nutritious ingredients were available in the garden. As if it was not enough cash started to flow in from the



**Thermal compost in the decomposition process**

vegetable sells they made every day from the variety of crops. The family could do no more than smile in happiness as they made money from a simple nutrition garden which had a higher return with less production cost. Mr. Maza went on to take part in the garden ward competitions and came second the first year. He was happy but went on to work for the first position. From 2014 he successfully became the cut above the rest and this has continued up to this season. The family got prizes from both the farmers and the organization for the good work done.

The same people who used to be looked down upon by others in the community now have courage to stand in front of the crowd and share their experiences on gardening.



**Mr. and Mrs. Maza, the happy winners!**



**Question and answer session during the field day**



The sky is now the limit for Mr. Maza he went on to develop his homestead through constructing a toilet which was an important missing structure with the nutrition garden sells money.



**Improved, ventilated latrines, constructed with the proceeds of vegetable sales**

The villagers who used to discourage him are now saying, "*Yahwe wakaoma, vakomana waramba kukundwa!*", (*Hard work pays our friend, he can't be defeated!*).

The family is happy to be working with WHH to improve its nutrition and health. This nutrition garden is marking a significant change in the life of the Maza's family life. Now the family is having peaceful nights as it is happy to have 3 meals a day and together with the Conservation Farming plot food security is assured for the family.

Garden days were successfully conducted throughout the whole district of Gokwe South. This was follow up of nutrition garden training, monitoring and judging. Best gardens were identified through judging using a scoring sheet that was designed incorporating all the structures and production practises that were supposed to be followed by gardeners. Majority of visited gardens has shown that farmers have a better understanding of the nutritional component and it was evidenced by the presence of at least three crop families indigenous and exotic that is root, fruit, leaf, legumes and bulbs, herbs, fruit trees. Farmers were given the platform to share their experiences in gardening with those who attended.



**A well tended Conservation Farming (CF) plot, displaying mulching and agroforestry (*Faidherbia albida* and *Cajanus cajan*). CF promotes three basic principles: minimum soil disturbance, mulching and crop rotation.**