

Global Service Corps: Promoting Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa

Hunger and food insecurity have become as normal in Africa as beautiful sunsets. This is especially discouraging given the fact that for millennia many African hunter-gatherers never knew what it meant to be hungry. Among aid and development professionals, new concepts and vocabulary are constantly arising in the food dialogue. “Food sovereignty,” for example, is the right of people to determine their own diet and sources of food. “Famine” is not just a question of food availability, but of entitlements. Traditional cultures have their own definitions. The Hadsabe, a hunter-gatherer group in East Africa, have no word for “hunger” because they always know where to find edible roots. To them, “food security” means access to traditional lands — lands which unfortunately over the past 50 years have been reduced by 90 percent. Among the Maasai pastoralists, food security is more complex, and means access to pasture where rains have fallen and access to water sources that increasingly are encroached upon by agriculturalists. For the Maasai, food security can also involve control of livestock free of disease, livestock markets for selling cattle to earn hard cash, and finding equilibrium between wildlife and their herds. African agriculturalists’

idea of food security is more complex still, and can encompass the challenges of diseases and pests, declining land productivity, and competition with low-cost food imports.

At Global Service Corps, we are committed to a flexible definition of food security that meets the needs of the various communities we serve. We know there is no one-size-fits-all explanation. For us, food security includes everything from advocacy to zebra quotas that promote sustainable hunting in controlled areas.

Global Service Corps-Tanzania (GSC-TZ) provides opportunities for adults from the US to work on community service projects in northeast Tanzania. GSC-TZ volunteers and local staff promote food security by educating small farmer groups about bio-intensive agricultural, which decreases dependence on chemicals and pesticides and increases crop yields on small plots. We also help coordinate programs to enhance local health. Since 2001, GSC-TZ volunteers have worked on community and school-based training projects in villages in the Arusha area. Local participants in the programs become community trainers on HIV/AIDS prevention, life skills, nutrition, and sustainable agriculture. An annual three-week HIV/AIDS prevention day camp every June mobilizes 300 secondary school students as peer educators.

Our latest endeavor is a USDA-funded program to increase household income, food security, and sustainable energy generation by integrating *Jatropha curcas* into local farming. *Jatropha* is a plant that can grow in dry, worn-out soils and whose oil-rich seeds can be used as a biofuel. Working in collaboration with a US NGO, Partners for Development, GSC-TZ is targeting communities in the arid regions of Ar-

usha, Manyara, Kilimanjaro, and Singida in northeastern Tanzania. We will be enhancing nutrition through kitchen garden installations, pilot water harvesting and appropriate irrigation systems, vegetable cooking and preservation demonstrations, and the introduction of improved poultry raising techniques. One key activity will be the introduction of Newcastle Disease vaccination to control a scourge that kills up to 70 percent of household poultry flocks annually. We plan on training community vaccinators who will perform routine vaccinations as a small enterprise.

Whether we are working on food or health issues, we always collaborate with partner organizations to ensure that projects continue after volunteers leave. We work with the Tanzanian Ministry of Agriculture staff at the district level, such as trainers from the LITI-Tengeru Agricultural College, and our projects are led by Tanzanian professionals. At the same time, we are partnering with Voluntary Service Abroad — a New Zealand agency — which will provide two volunteers for two years each. We are hoping to recruit several “fellows” from Tanzanian agricultural NGOs and recent graduates from US agricultural colleges. While such long-term staffing is crucial for follow-through and ultimate success, the short-term volunteers we place also play an important role. When they travel to remote communities to assist with training activities, their mere presence often generates curiosity and excitement, enhancing the turnout at rural trainings.

Our commitment to cooperation is sowing the seeds of success so that someday, we hope, we won’t have a use for the words “famine,” “sickness,” or “poverty.” ■

— ERWIN KINSEY

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