

MICHAEL JACKSON'S LEGACY EARTH CHILD ORCHARD JULY 2023 MID REPORT

BACKGROUND

The Michael Jackson's Legacy Earth Child Orchard in Ngolowindo was established to help children at Glad Tidings Orphan Care (GTOC) to supplement nutritional needs for the children at the centre. Furthermore, it was established to help children at the neighbouring Ngolowindo Primary School as a platform to learn and see how things grow and the nutritional values that the fruits provide. Starfish employed a gardener to take care for the orchard and welcome the children and staff. Some fruits in Malawi are seasonal and this makes it difficult for households to buy in the markets, which is reflected in the costs to purchase, and they can become unaffordable for many.

UPDATE ON PROGRESS

Since the inception, the project started with the saplings in the tubes. The trees took their journeys. Some grew to trees that have produced enough fruit while some trees like oranges and lemons have not been doing well.

During the last reporting period, we mentioned about the months February to May when the orchard produced a large number of guavas. In the same period this year, the orchard did not do very well due to extreme rains that affected the guava production. The fruit on the trees was sparse compared to last year. This negatively affected the usual supply of guavas to the nursery schools. To increase the health of trees, the guava section was pruned to promote better fruition. Excess branches were removed in order to allow more sunshine to reach the fruit and to increase the crop.

Both Glad Tidings nursery and Everland school learners receive a daily meal at school, It is essential to add some vegetables as part of the dietary requirement and in order to achieve this vegetables were planted in the orchard which will help to supplement dietary needs for the learners. Currently, vegetables are bought on a daily basis to meet this requirement because the vegetables that we planted are not yet grown. When they are ready for harvesting the cost of buying vegetables will be reduced.

Besides the vegetable section, we have bananas that are slowly multiplying. Bananas do not need much attention once their roots are established in the soil. They are important plants that we hope will multiply in the orchard. Bananas are very beneficial in life - they make one feel full easily and they also help greatly with digestion. They contain important vitamins such as vitamin B6 and vitamin C that are vital to good health. Many rely on bananas that are sold locally in the markets. Bananas are also used to make delicious banana bread.



Banana bunches on the tree

WHAT DIFFERENCE ARE WE MAKING?

McJohnson Chituzu is a teacher at Ngolowindo primary school which uses the Earth Child Orchard for its field lessons.

Recently, we had a meeting with Ngolowindo Primary School mapping the way forward. This followed a period of inactivity due to various challenges that the school had, including that of McJohnson's inability to walk as a result of a road traffic accident. The school is establishing a new set of students that will be benefitting from the use of the M.J.L Orchard as a learning ground.

"We are happy that I am now actively back into teaching, it was very rough going. We are to select a new MJL team that will be learning and help with various projects at the orchard.

Practically, the students learn much faster when they do things with their own hands. Without that it would be difficult to only rely on theory and we are looking forward to a more active group that we can work with in the coming days.

One of the things that they will look into is the orchard in connection to our lives, education as well as to how they might improve certain things in the orchard and contribute their own ideas. One of the ideas that was previously suggested was concerning the vegetables section. We noted that this has now been introduced."

explained Mr Chituzu.

Ngolowindo School is one of the main focus schools for Starfish. Hope Clinic and Ngolowindo School focus much on the health of pupils and the orchard is a benefit for this. Learners have to connect the links between their health, education and fruits. When learners become ill, they are treated at the clinic and are given priority to get medical assistance.

Eating well is another factor that leads to good health. The team at the Primary School have been able to taste some of the fruits they planted and helped to take a good care for them. Fruits add nutritional value to our day-to-day diets. However, not all families can manage to bring this in reality. Some families might not afford to buy fruits on a daily basis. Planting their

own fruit trees will eventually provide a wider range of fruits in different seasons and promotes a balanced diet.

Above all, not only will children be prepared for their lives now - but also for the future, where they will be able to plant for their own families and harvest the produce. The practical knowledge remains with the learners and is something that they will never forget.

CHALLENGES

1. Heavy Rains - Malawi had too much rain in the last rainy season. This affected a number of plants in the orchard. It also affected most of the perimeter fence whose poles and bamboos have rotted. This fence helps in keeping away goats and cattle from encroaching into the orchard.

Due to waterlogging in some parts, some poles like moringa trees rot easily. Once their roots rot, the poles won't stay straight for long. Heavy rains reduced granadilla fruits as they could not endure the waterlogging in the orchard. Granadillas do well in adequate water conditions but too much water causes harm.



Gardener, Richard in the section where granadillas used to be.

1. Recently Ngolowindo School did not conduct field visits at the orchard. This was because, as stated earlier, the teacher in charge of the project was involved in a road traffic accident during the last reporting period. Currently the school is yet to select a new team that will run the affairs of the MJL/ Ngolowindo School club.

Despite the challenges, the orchard still has a good variety of fruit. The MJL project provides not only tasty and healthy fruit and vegetables, but it opens the eyes of the students to the amazing nutritional and medical properties of crops that they have, with their own hands, tended and harvested. For this great experience we give grateful thanks to Michael Jackson's Legacy.