

ORPHANS' GARDEN PROJECT

The incidence of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho is one of the highest in the world, estimated between 20 and 25 percent. In the Malealea valley, as throughout Lesotho, this a serious threat on many levels to the livelihoods and on-going development of rural communities. Many parents die of AIDS and/or associated illnesses such as Tuberculosis, and leave young children without a family, many of whom in a context of poverty, are left to fend for themselves as best they can. There is a steadily increasing number of orphans in the villages of the Malealea valley who are particularly vulnerable people.

The MDT supports orphans in these villages in the Malealea valley as part of its work to mitigate the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We place orphans as far as possible in extended families which are often headed by grandmothers, or with local foster families where it is our hope that the orphans can live as normal a family-centred life as possible. We also hope that in this way they will get the love, care and socialisation that they need. The orphans currently in our care programme are either 'single' (having one living parent) or 'double' orphans (having no living parents) and many of the surviving parents and/or other family members are also HIV+.

Currently, the MDT provides support to 26 orphans through its Social Care Programme. We try to support these children and their foster families/guardians in a number of ways. The most direct way is through financial support where we offer a monthly food stipend and assistance with medical and primary school related costs. Importantly, we also offer social care support and monitoring through regular visits to orphan's homes and schools by our social care worker.

Taking on an orphan child (and possibly more than one child) is a difficult experience for many families, and guardians of many orphans are elderly grandparents and/or ill themselves (often with HIV). It involves extra expenses for the family (food, clothing, school fees, household materials such as an extra bed, etc) as well as making psycho-social demands on the family/guardian which are often complex.

The MDT is also working hard with the orphans' families to support them in trying to maximising the possibilities and opportunities available to the orphans in order to help them grow into responsible and economically active young adults. Currently the food stipend that the MDT is able to offer does not adequately provide for a child's nutritional needs, and many guardians and orphans have difficulty maintaining positive, nurturing relationships.

To address the issue of an inadequate food stipend and with an eye on the future lives of the orphans, we have just launched our Gardens Project. This project has three main objectives:

1. To help the family to supplement the monthly food stipend

2. To involve the orphan more directly in family life, specifically in making a contribution to the household in a direct and concrete way
3. To engage the orphans actively in an activity that will help them develop knowledge and skills that will be useful to them as adults
4. To attempt to support, in a minimal way, more orphans than are currently formally on our programme



The project involves:

- ✓ Providing the orphans' host families with fields, with fertiliser, seeds of two varieties (maize and beans) and pesticides.
- ✓ The expectation that the orphan in the family will partake in the ploughing, planting, maintenance of the fields and the harvest along with the rest of the family, as an integrated member of that family.
- ✓ The orphans are expected to observe every stage of the process, thereby acquiring, over a period of time, simple, basic agricultural skills



- ✓ A small education programme regarding the growing of these particular crops will be implemented in an informal way with the orphans on our monthly Orphan's Day, and children of all ages will be encouraged to participate in whichever way possible in the project in their family's fields. For example really young children will be taught how to recognise weeds and take on the responsibility of regular weeding. Older children will be involved in weeding, watering and harvesting, and the oldest orphans will be involved in the ploughing, planting and harvesting.



The expected outcomes of the garden project are:

1. The crop that is harvested will then go towards supplementing the food stipend with produce



from the family's field.

2. The seeds will be used by the families for the following year's planting season.
3. The family will also be asked to give back to the MDT 25kg of maize and beans from the harvest. This collective portion of the harvest will then be distributed to orphans on the MDT waiting list, and orphans known to the MDT but who have not yet made an application for support. This will be done through the committee that the guardians have just formed.

The role of the MDT in the project is:

1. To provide the start-up seeds and materials necessary for a family to grow a crop, and offer advice and suggestions to each family. In this regard, a local Malealea nurserymen is involved at the beginning stages.
2. To informally educate orphans about food growing
3. To monitor the planting project in each family through regular visits to the fields. The MDT has recruited the assistance of the local Agricultural Extension Officer to participate and assist in this monitoring. The location of the fields is carefully recorded so that this can take place.
4. To monitor the involvement of the orphan in the project as well as the response of the guardians/family to the project, through the usual regular visits of our social care worker.



BUDGET

There are currently 26 orphans supported through our regular programme. Of these, 14 host families have fields that can be planted. The costs are as follows:

ITEM	COST
Maize seeds x 140 kg @R100/ kg	R1400.00
Beans x 55kg @R11/ kg	R605.00
Fertiliser @R28.57/bag	R399.98
Pesticide 1 litre (concentrated) @R85	R85.00
Total for 14 families for one year	R2,489.98

Sponsorship options:

- ✓ Sponsor the cost of seeds for 14 families @R2,005.00

- ✓ Sponsor one or more family fields for a year @ R177.85 per family, 7 families @ R1,244.96

FOR WHATEVER YOU ARE ABLE TO DO TO HELP

THANK YOU!

