

## A Tale of Two Gardens

From rural Tanzania to urban Senegal, diverse locally adapted models of nutrition-sensitive agriculture can help empower women, engage men, and improve health and nutrition outcomes for entire families



Laurencia seeds (Credit: Alessandra Silver)

"The neighbors all look at our garden when they pass by the road," Olivia Ladislaus says with pride. "They're surprised, and I encourage them to start their own gardens." Marie Odile Diouf had a similar experience: "When the people living next door see me watering [my garden], they are eager to have one at their house, too. They all call out to me, asking me to help them start their own gardens!"

Olivia and Marie Odile have both had their skills as gardeners grown through the CHANGE project, a nutrition-sensitive agriculture initiative led by Helen Keller International (HKI) with support from Global Affairs Canada. Both women benefitted from seeds of locally adapted, nutrient-rich crop varieties, plus training on optimal techniques for growing them. They also received chickens and were trained on how to best raise them to produce eggs and meat for their families. Simultaneously, the two women learned

about best practices for improving their families' nutrition, including how to transform their garden and poultry products into nutritious meals for young children, how to avoid disease through good hygiene, and how to feed children who are recovering from illness. Over the three years (2013-2016) of the project, the two women watched as their production and children grew – and as others in their neighborhoods began to catch on.

Olivia and Marie Odile are not neighbors, however – indeed, far from it: Olivia lives in a rural village in Tanzania's Lake District, whereas Marie Odile lives in a crowded urban neighborhood of Dakar, Senegal. That two women in such different settings can benefit equally from the same project is testimony to the wide adaptability of HKI's enhanced homestead food production approach.

Olivia, a 29-year-old mother of three on Ukerewe Island, faced a struggle to feed her family before the project. Her island is densely populated, and fishing is the most common local livelihood, including for her husband. Due to overfishing, however, fish stocks in the lake have decreased drastically, making it difficult to earn a living from fishing. After receiving training from CHANGE, Olivia established a vegetable garden next to her house, from which she could harvest enough to feed her family on a daily basis. She even produced a surplus to sell at the market, carefully saving the profits to buy a goat, which cost her about 35,000 Tanzanian shillings (roughly \$17.00), three young chickens, and seeds to expand her garden. She was soon a budding entrepreneur, raising goats and chickens and producing eggs to both sell and eat at home; her youngest child particularly appreciated eating fresh eggs regularly! Indeed, it's likely that Olivia's children (and those of several thousand other Tanzanian women who participated in CHANGE) will benefit considerably from her greater financial empowerment, as an increase in a woman's income has a greater positive effect on children's nutrition and health than a similar increase in a man's income.<sup>1</sup>

Marie Odile, in contrast, was surrounded by opportunities for buying food—but found the daily expenses to be a burden. She felt she had gardening in her blood, as her mother came from a farming village

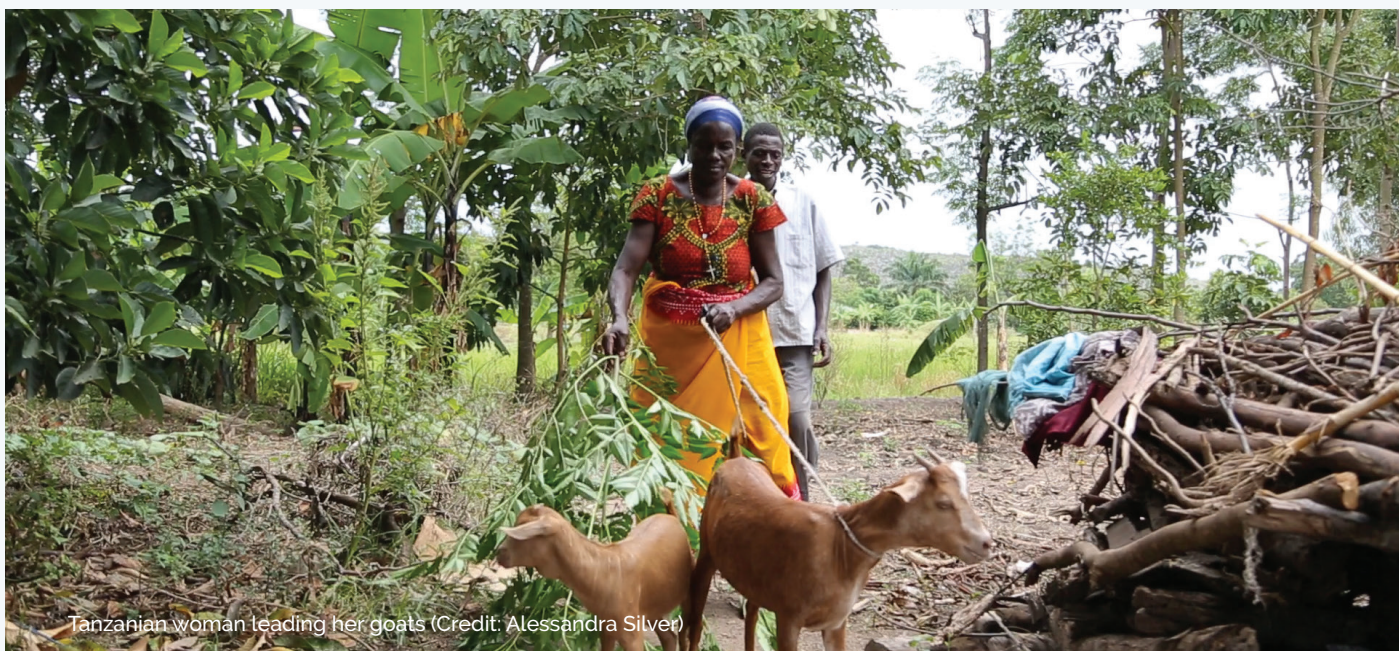
in Senegal's lush southern region of Casamance—but how could one garden in a tightly populated urban neighborhood with no backyard? The answer came when Marie Odile was selected to be a community outreach worker for CHANGE. She received three locally made micro-garden tables, one square-meter apiece, and was taught how to use them to grow fresh vegetables in a compact space as well as how to repair them if needed and where to buy or how to make any inputs needed for gardening. She also received a compact urban-adapted henhouse, plus three laying hens, a rooster, and training on how to best care for them. Marie Odile then became a resource for her neighbors, helping them learn to garden using their own micro-garden tables and to care for their chickens. She also counselled them on nutrition and hygiene topics, through group meetings and home visits. In all, about 1300 women in the neighborhood began growing table gardens and participated in the other activities.

Soon she was harvesting lettuce, hibiscus leaves, okra, tomatoes, orange sweet potatoes, and even cucumbers, all of which she no longer had to buy. She taught her daughter to garden and invited other women to keep tables at her place, so they could care for them together. She even began recycling bottles to transform into planters to expand her garden. Soon she had a surplus that she could sell in the market and began growing market-oriented plants, like parsley. Though the revenues were not large, they helped her meet household expenses and had a personal significance, as she felt the money was 'blessed', coming from her own garden.

Marie Odile's gardening did not end with the project—over 18 months later, she could still be found on her terrace, surrounded by the verdant leaves of hibiscus. "As long as I have strength and health," she avowed, "I will continue to invest in my micro-garden because it contributes to our wellbeing. It gives us the opportunity to eat high-quality



<sup>1</sup> FAO. 'The Female Face of Farming.' <http://www.fao.org/gender/infographic/en/>



Tanzanian woman leading her goats (Credit: Alessandra Silver)

“Micro gardening is an integral part of me now. It's like a medicine that I cannot do without. Just contemplating the greenery, after the sprouts grow and reach a certain height, gives you satisfaction and motivates you more.”

– Marie Odile Diouf, CHANGE Community Outreach Worker, Senegal

products, to consume organic vegetables. Both I and my family benefit.” Marie Odile's neighbor, Mame Djimi Hadj, also continued, driven by a passion for making things grow: “I'd never had an experience like this [gardening] before, but I was amazed the day that I saw the first plants that I had planted pushing out of the soil. It was like I was on another continent, it was so beautiful to see!”

Another similarity that Marie Odile and Olivia share is that their gardening was not a solo activity: they both benefitted from their husbands' support. Marie Odile's husband helped repair her tables when needed and to carry the water for them. Olivia's husband started regularly helping her in the garden during CHANGE, and her neighbor, Esteria Silas, had a similar story. Esteria's husband did not normally help in the garden, as it was viewed as 'women's work.'

Once CHANGE came, however, he participated in trainings, became interested in gardening, and began helping out—allowing the couple to earn about TZS 24,000 (\$12.00) profit per month from selling surplus vegetables, whereas in the past they barely produced enough vegetables to meet the family's needs.

Indeed, this is another way in which CHANGE sought to improve health and wellbeing: engaging men as partners in household nutrition while supporting the empowerment of women. While women were the main targets of some activities, project messages clearly emphasized the importance of gardening (and livestock rearing) for the whole family and that men played an essential role in ensuring proper household nutrition. Marie Odile and her husband even took part in an interactive curriculum meant to encourage

communication and workload sharing within the household, and Esteria's husband began encouraging other men in the area to start supporting their wives in gardening activities, becoming a true champion for equitable household workloads and joint decision making.

CHANGE thus planted the seeds for not only more agricultural production and better nutrition but also greater gender equity, from the lush coasts of Tanzania's lakes to the dusty streets of urban Dakar—and from the arid plains of eastern Burkina Faso to the scrubby forests of northern Cote d'Ivoire, the other two project sites. In so doing, the project demonstrated that well-designed and locally adapted approaches to agriculture that are sensitive to nutrition and gender equity can benefit people as diverse as the agro-ecologies of Africa.



Tanzanian women cooking garden produce (Credit: Alessandra Silver)

## What is Enhanced Homestead Food Production?

- Participants (mostly women) learn improved practices for growing vegetables, either through village-based communal gardens and home gardens or, in urban areas, in table gardens.
- They also receive training in animal husbandry tailored to their context, such as techniques for intensive urban poultry rearing.
- Participatory education improves their understanding of the causes of malnutrition, including low dietary diversity, and potential ways to avoid it.
- Trained neighborhood resource people provide follow-up training and support to raise poultry and grow vegetables, as well as reinforcing best practices for nutrition and hygiene.
- Women's empowerment activities support more equitable intra-household decision-making and workload and resource sharing.
- With novel or more varied home food production, potentially greater earnings from selling the surplus, and new knowledge, participants are better able to feed their families diverse diets rich in micronutrients, combatting malnutrition and improving child health and growth.

## FIGHTING MALNUTRITION AT ITS ROOTS.

The CHANGE Project was supported by:



Global Affairs  
Canada