

# Food and farming

MRDF partners changing lives



Methodist Relief &  
Development Fund

## Cameroon: Young gardeners

Bateh Gregory Eyong is 13 years old and already well on the way to becoming an experienced gardener. He helps his parents water and look after their fruit trees and, with the rest of his class at school in Limbe, Cameroon, receives hands-on training in growing vegetables and planting trees. However, gardening isn't just a hobby; it could help provide for his future.

Unemployment and a lack of suitable jobs are a serious problem in Cameroon. Many young people abandon agriculture and, as a result, struggle to cultivate food to feed themselves later in life. Even those who get other jobs still have farms or gardens to grow their own food and supplement their salaries.

MRDF partner, Youth Development Centre (YDC) provides agricultural and environmental education in schools. Through songs, games and by using quick-growing vegetables, YDC is making learning fun. The land near Bateh's school is rich and fertile, but it's vital that the students learn how to farm it carefully in order to preserve it for future use.



School children working on their vegetable plot

A well-tended vegetable plot provides a host of benefits. It helps keep the soil healthy, provides opportunities to earn a living by selling the produce and improves people's health and nutrition. By training teenagers, like Bateh, in vegetable growing and by providing the tools and seeds they need to get started YDC is investing in the whole community.

## Sustainable agriculture

There is nothing more basic than the need for food. Most of the world's poorest people depend on growing crops and raising livestock to provide the food they need to eat or sell. Small-scale farmers are in a very vulnerable position. One drought or bad harvest can leave them with nothing to fall back on and no seeds for the next year. Teaching farmers new skills, such as marketing, water conservation or how to use organic methods instead of expensive chemicals, enables them to face adverse conditions with greater confidence.

**“72% of people in least developed countries live in rural areas.”** (UN)

Sustainable farming techniques result in higher yields and ensure that farmland is not over-used in the process. All MRDF's agricultural partners are committed to conserving natural resources, which allows future generations also to benefit from them. As well as growing food to eat or sell, trees prevent soil erosion and help preserve the land in the long term. Some trees also fix nitrogen in the soil, which helps increase its fertility, and others have leaves which can be used for fertiliser, medicine or animal food. This is why tree-planting is such an important part of sustainable agriculture.

### What is sustainable agriculture?

**Sustainable agriculture** is a method of farming which provides for human needs, such as food or fuel, whilst preserving natural resources. It combines traditional knowledge and modern science. Sustainable agriculture practices include composting, natural pesticides and tree-planting.

**Permaculture** is a lifestyle-centred form of sustainable agriculture that works with, rather than against, nature. Its aim is to create self-maintaining and productive agricultural ecosystems that have the diversity, stability and resilience of natural ecosystems.

## Nepal: Seeing green

Guela Rawat's village is situated high up in Nepal's mountains. The views are incredible but the rocky terrain, high altitude and freezing weather provide a challenge for even the most industrious of farmers. Guela and her neighbours are usually only able to grow enough food to survive for half the year. The rest of the time, they have to rely on hand-outs.

However, Guela is learning to work in harmony with the land. By making better use of natural resources, she can now grow food all year round.



Guela Rawat by her new greenhouse

MRDF partner, Himalayan Permaculture Group (HPG) provides training and support for farmers like Guela. It runs a working farm where farmers' groups and women's groups can come for advice and to share ideas. Guela chairs her group and, with the other members, has built poly-tunnels and a large plastic greenhouse that harnesses the winter sunshine to grow vegetables such as carrots and cabbages.

Although the idea and materials came from HPG, the women are proud to have built it themselves and are already feeling the benefits. Winter vegetables can fetch a good price and some groups are using their profits to buy trees and seeds for replanting.

**“Normally, all you'd see here in winter is white snow. So to see the green is something new and very special, a big improvement, because before there were no green vegetables from November to April. It is good for our health and strength ... and better for our income too.”** (Guela Rawat)



Vegetables growing in a poly-tunnel

All photos © Isabelle Carboni/MRDF

## How can we help?

Fundraise or give regularly for MRDF sustainable agriculture projects:

**£15** buys a set of gardening tools.

**£66** buys 20 bags of seeds for vegetable and tree planting.

**£245** provides training in sustainable agriculture for 20 farmers, who will then teach what they have learnt to other farmers.

MRDF supporters can also take part in the campaign for trade justice. The Trade Justice Movement is calling for poor countries to be allowed to support and protect small-scale farmers and for an end to the 'dumping' of food products which drives down the prices that poor farmers can get for their produce.

**Thank you for supporting MRDF's work on sustainable agriculture.**

### To send donations or request further resources, please contact:

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Please make cheques payable to MRDF. Charity no. 291691



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Donations for YDC and HPG can be received up to 31 August 2006.

Gifts received after this date may be allocated to a similar project. If, due to the generosity of MRDF supporters, more donations are received than these partners currently need, the excess will also be reallocated to similar projects.