



Gardens background Setting the scene



In all the African countries that Send a Cow works in, whether we give cows, goats or beehives, people are shown how to get the most from their land or animals, using low-cost sustainable techniques. This often means using manure and compost on the soil, making organic pesticides, using 'grey water' (used household water) and using simple gardening techniques – like bag and keyhole gardens.

Eighty per cent of people who live south of the Sahara Desert in Africa grow their own food, mainly on small plots of land. So, the training that Send a Cow gives is vitally important for many people. Especially as climate change, local difficulties, disease and the effects of war makes growing food a real challenge.

Send a Cow's African staff help families make a difference to their lives, partly through teaching them natural gardening techniques. This helps children get the food they need to grow up healthy. As well as working with 'traditional' families, we work with children who have lost their parents as a result of wars or disease, and with them, knowledge that would have been handed down. The children often have to fend for themselves, not knowing basic ways of keeping alive and healthy - children as young as 10 can also be left with the responsibility to care for several younger siblings. This can be a real struggle, as the oldest child takes on the role of a parent, often for eight or more brothers and sisters. Even if one parent is still alive, they might be away from home trying to earn money, leaving the children to look after the household and grow food. And, with soils in Africa becoming less and less fertile, they struggle to grow much more than a basic crop of beans from their small plots of land.

By working with families like this and showing people how to make their own natural compost, insecticides and build bag and keyhole gardens, they can now grow their own fruit and vegetables and feed their children. Many of them have never seen cabbages and carrots before – but with training and thanks to some compost, manure and several bag and keyhole gardens, they now grow enough food for 2 or 3 healthy meals a day!

There's also often enough left over to sell in the local market or share with neighbours. Making money from their garden means these children can pay for medicines and are able to go to school* and study subjects like English and Maths - just like children in the UK. And many families share what they have been taught with other households – so bag gardens and healthy vegetables crop up all over the place!

* Although many African countries provide free primary school education, children are often not able to attend if they are not wearing uniform, have no books or pencils or if they are busy working at home.