

If poverty is the big question, then farming is the great answer

Khulumani Support Group

By Caroline Rathokolo and Nelson Thaba

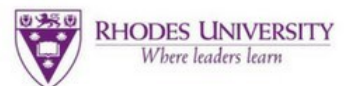


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If poverty is the big question, then farming is the great answer
A case study developed through the *Changing Practice: Olifants* project.

July 2018

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1.

Introduction

About KHULUMANI

Khulumani Support Group is a membership-based organisation of more than 100 000 victims and survivors of apartheid-related gross human rights violations in South Africa. Started by survivors testifying at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Khulumani has become a globally recognised movement spear-heading healing and memory, the struggle for reparations, and active citizenship in countries transitioning out of conflict.

In the past two decades we have worked alongside each other as we journey towards facing truth, memory and healing. We have sought justice against multi-national corporations that profited from aiding and abetting the apartheid regime. We have rebuilt our lives through agriculture and entrepreneurial projects. We have worked towards public accountability. And above all, we have sought justice and reparations for our members who experienced the harshest brutalities of the apartheid system.

About our Change Project

Our Change Project focusses on two community hubs in two areas: a centre for orphans and vulnerable children in Ga-Botha called Phuthanang Drop In Centre and Jack Morare Primary School in Ga Kopa, Tafelkop, in rural Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.

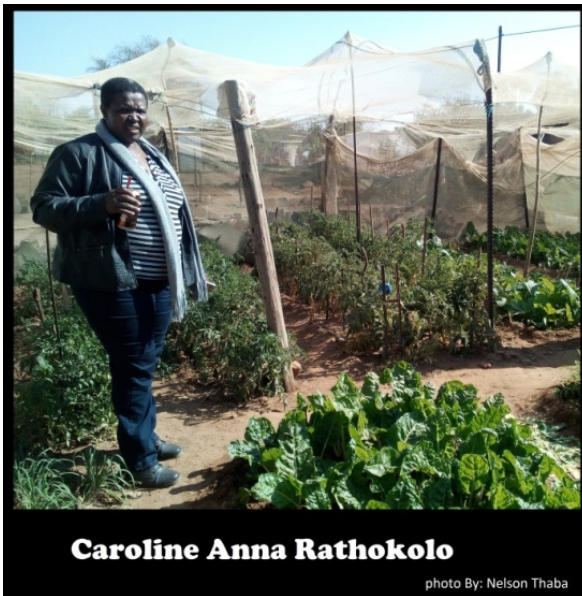
We are trying to encourage and support the development of food gardens at schools and in people's own yards, and to connect the orphanage and feeding centres to wider networks of government and business to enable them to receive greater support. They have experienced first-hand that sufficient nutritious food and clean water is the first step towards alleviating poverty. It allows children to concentrate at school and helps to keep them healthy and strong mentally and physically.

As Changing Practice participants we are also using our growing confidence and networking skills to build important relationships between the orphan centre and officials in the Department of Social Development. We are exploring the connections between poverty, nutrition, water security and community development and we are acting as dynamic agents of change in less advantaged communities, by bringing our own understanding of how to organise and network effectively, as well as our personal talents such as creative design.

“We are exploring the connections between poverty, nutrition, water security and community development and we are acting as dynamic agents of change”

Who are we, and why are we driven to be activists?

Caroline Rathokolo



My name is Caroline Anna Rathokolo; I am 47 years of age and married with four children. I grew up in a very disadvantaged family whereby I was raised by a single parent. My father passed away when I was five years old and my mother was not working. My brother was twelve years at higher primary school. My mother got a job at the nearest shop in our village and she was earning a small salary which was not enough to provide for us. She made a point that we attended school

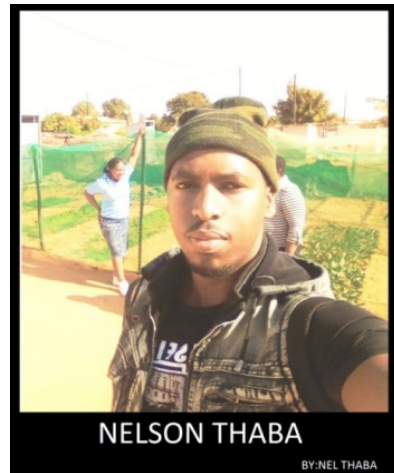
regardless of the difficulties we encountered.

Due to lack of finance I never had a chance to go to a tertiary institution after completing my matric. This did not demotivate me as I told myself that I needed to change the situation that I was in, and had to create positive ways of living. Hope was the only thing that shaped me to be the person I am today. I joined Khulumani Support Group in 1997 where I met Dr. Marjorie Jobson the director. My mother-in-law was an activist in the apartheid era whereby they were forcefully removed by the chief and police force.

My mother-in-law gave me all the documents she was submitting regarding land claims and political arson committed against her when her house was burnt to ashes. I became an activist through Khulumani as it is the watchdog for victims of apartheid and gross violations of human rights. Marjorie Jobson motivated me and also gave me the chance to attend workshops and the Training for Transformation School; those learning curves shaped me to be selfless and stay committed to my mission as a community worker.

Nelson Thaba

I, Milton Nelson Thaba was born on the 22nd of November 1988 in Limpopo, where I grew up in a family of four sisters and two brothers. I grew up like any other kid in a very loving and happy family which made a point that we go to school. I went to primary school at Shopiane Primary; that's where my interest in art started. I later went on to attend high school in 2002 at Kgahlanong Secondary where I met one of the teachers who carved and moulded me into the versatile artist I am today. I completed my matric in 2006, where I earned a trophy for best pupil in Technical Drawing in the district, awarded by the Department of Education.



After matriculation I took a year's break from school and went to work in the mines for a year raising money for my tuition. In 2008 I quit my job and went to Pretoria where I enrolled in Fine and Applied Arts at the Tshwane University of Technology. I completed my Diploma in Fine Art in 2010 specialising in Painting and Sculpting, and I participated in a number of group exhibitions in Pretoria and Johannesburg. I have been a finalist in PPC Young Concrete Sculptors Awards where I was awarded a Certificate of Recognition (2009, 2011). In 2016 I applied to work at Jack Morare Primary School as an art teacher. I got the job and worked there for about 5 months when my contract ended. I then went on to study PGCE with the University of South Africa because working at the school made me fall in love with the kids and the environment of Ga-Kopa. Bringing about change in that area has been something I wanted to do since I first set my foot there as a teacher. By that time I knew nothing about activism. It was after my father told me about Khulumani in December 2016 that I started asking more and more questions about Khulumani and what they really stood for. We ended up leading a Khulumani project installing computers at my former school Shopiane Primary in early 2017. I was introduced to Dr Marjorie Jobson, the director of Khulumani, who later introduced me to sister Caroline, the Khulumani co-ordinator in the Limpopo region. I then found out that I would be partnered with Caroline in the forthcoming Change Project which was to start later in the year of 2017. And that's how the love of activism came to exist in me.

Even though I have other commitments, I really try with all my being to balance my responsibilities and to execute every task assigned earnestly and with total dedication. I am currently working as Training Manager at Matlolobe Security Services based in Pretoria and I am a part time portraiture artist, sculptor, house planner and a photographer.

2.

Our Change Project



Khulumani: Caroline and Nelson

Our project is called Megoma (a tool used in ploughing) and it comprises of two activists from Khulumani Support Group named Caroline Rathokolo and Nelson Thaba who are studying the Changing Practice course programme being offered through AWARD (Association for Water And Rural Development) accredited by Rhodes University and facilitated by EMG.

Megoma's initial plan was to introduce crop farming in the village of Ga-Kopa as a way of minimising, if not eradicating, poverty in the village. In the Changing Practice course, we as activists have been given a platform to perform and be a mouthpiece and avant-gardes of

change in bringing about justice and a voice to the communities aligned with the great Olifants River popularly known as Lepelle or Obalule. So we perceived Ga-Kopa village in Tafelkop as the ideal community to benefit best from a project such as this.

But a challenge was locating a suitable piece of land that would favour Megoma in putting into action all the ideas we had. That was until we approached a school right in the belly of the Ga-Kopa village known as Jack Morare Primary School. The school had enough space with accessible ground water to benefit not only our Change Project but the school as well. With the garden implemented, learners would not only learn agriculture in practical form but they would also acquire skills which they could later on expand into catering for their own communities with assistance from Megoma in partnership with Jack Morare Primary School. We later decided to extend our Changing Practice project to offer our support to an Orphanage Centre in Ga-Botha, where a group of ladies wanted to start a garden to supply fresh vegetables to the children in the orphanage.

As the old saying goes; charity begins at home. It was only logical for Megoma to identify a place in our own community to cater change to. But we would like to add our own two cents to that old saying; charity stays where it is appreciated. This is not an individual's Change Project, but the community's project and the sustainability, longevity and success in the selected community would depend on all of the stake holders.

3.

Jack Morare School, Ga-Kopa Village

What we are seeing

Socio-economically disadvantaged communities faced with challenges of accessibility to cleaner water; children going to school on empty stomachs and families surviving on pensioners' and child grants due to lack of employment in the Groblersdal area. The above mentioned issues are just few of the prominent challenges the villagers in Ga-Kopa, Tafelkop are confronted with each and every day of their waking lives.

It was on the 17th of May 2017 after a long conversation over the phone between Caroline and Nelson, that Megoma decided to visit an area in Limpopo known as Tafelkop, a section that Megoma's Change Project would be focusing on. It's a small chiefdom called Ga-Kopa. The Kopa village comprises of about 700 homesteads, a few big homes but most of them small and built from mud which becomes a problem during rainy seasons.



fig:6 one of the mud houses that collapsed due to rain.



fig:7 one of the families who received RDP house

photo by Nelson

Even though the unemployment rate is a very complex issue to address, we saw it fit for us to implement a small scale garden at Jack Morare Primary School, where kids will be taught practically about crop farming for subsistence, whereby learners will be required to extend the acquired knowledge to their homes. The vegetable garden was at one point active at the school but due to lack of resources it never lasted long as the livestock from around the community would find their way into the school premises and destroy the crops.



First meeting at Jack Morare Primary School, taking soil samples with (L-R) Ms. Mohlala (Sepedi teacher), Nelson Thaba, Mr. Magoma (Maths teacher) and Mr. Ntuli (Head of Department)

Before starting with the vegetable garden this time around, we worked on proper fencing. It was around mid-August 2017 and we had a meeting scheduled for the 18th of September 2017 and on that date we donated seedlings to the school. The fencing was bought from the budget from the Lotto funding; we took R500 from our own budget for the seedlings. The handyman at the school and the principal Mr. Thomas Mabelane put up the fence.

Megoma was so concerned with the high rate of poverty in Tafelkop area and how it came to be. The question which constantly crossed our minds was: how have people been surviving throughout, and still striving in poverty stricken place like that, with lack of employment? We have noticed that there were lots of vendors around the area. During our observation we managed to interview one lady who was selling some goodies to school kids and she told us that they were not making enough profit. But the little that they were making was enough to keep their households running.



Children get their lunch at breaktime at Jack Morare School, September 2017

We noticed learners queuing up for teachers to dish up food for them. Most learners go to school on an empty stomach. One of the teachers told us the National School Nutrition Program has made a positive impact on the lives of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Not only have the children benefited from the NSN Program but also four women who are employed as cooks at Jack Morare Primary School have had their lives changed for the better.

Why is this happening?

We as Megoma believe that this village is in this predicament due to lack of academic education, because tertiary education becomes a challenge for most potential students. As a result they end up settling for jobs that cannot sustain their families. Tafelkop is a poverty stricken area and the people of Ga-Kopa are struggling. Most of their homes are headed by grandparents who are pensioners. They are custodians of their grandchildren and it is so because the parents are in Gauteng and other neighbouring provinces searching for greener pastures.

One of the Jack Morare Primary School staff members believes the situation is so because of lack of job opportunities around the Groblersdal area and that has led to young parents neglecting their children as they do not visit home regularly due to odd jobs and long hours they work in Gauteng. That is the common factor we were able to gather from most of the grandparents we have interviewed. These grandparents take care of their family using grant and pension funds. It has come to our attention that one of the factors contributing to poverty

is the lack of proper jobs at Ga-Kopa, the only jobs available are farm jobs and working at retail stores.



Caroline Rathokolo talking to one of the junior phase teachers Mrs Rachabane

How do we know this is true?

We have done our contextual background research as Megoma on the village, and Nelson previously worked at the school in Ga-Kopa for 5 months. Nelson confirms that in the past he noticed and got to witness water shortages, learners complaining about hunger, young and old villagers trying to make a living from selling goods on the streets and grandparents taking custody of their grandchildren.

But we as Megoma decided to visit Tafelkop for further research. And during our journey to Ga-Kopa on the 19th May we came across four donkeys pulling a cart full of ten 25-liter water buckets. We then stopped the driver to ask him about the livelihood of the residents in the area and what the buckets were for. The young man explained that he is unemployed and since the community had to travel long distance to get water, he leads the donkeys and transports the water and delivers it to the villagers' doorsteps at a reasonable price.

While walking around the village we noticed a few mud houses that had collapsed and we were told by a passer-by that this usually occurs due to stormy weather. However there are a few RDP houses that have been built for the poorest homesteads. The unemployment rate is high and the only source of income for most families is government grants.

As far as the Department of Education is concerned, the place has more than enough schools and caters for every child from different villages with regards to free learning and the right to

food. Below is Caroline watching the kids during lunch time while we waited to meet with the school staff members.



Learners eat their lunch at Jack Morare at breaktime, 18 September 2017

The final destination for the day was Jack Morare Primary School which we saw as a fitting place to work with for the next 8 months on our Change Project. We arrived at the school around break time. Upon arrival at the gate we noticed hawkers selling sandwiches, atchaar, sweets and snacks.

What do we want to see?

We would like to work as a collective unit not only at Jack Morare School but even in the homes to help one another with applying indigenous knowledge of how to run a garden successfully so that the involved community members can start feeding from the garden as well. We would like to see a community in which its children's right to food is realised.

How are we changing things?

Megoma is making a difference at Jack Morare Primary School. Since the beginning of the Change Project, different structures were designed by Megoma for protecting vegetable gardens from animals and the weather until we arrived at the less costly structure illustrated in figure 2 below.

An affordable effective structure was designed for the school. The fence has been erected at the school by Megoma with the help of hands from the school's handy man Mr Mogodi and the principal. However, the shade netting was not erected because the school ran out of budget.

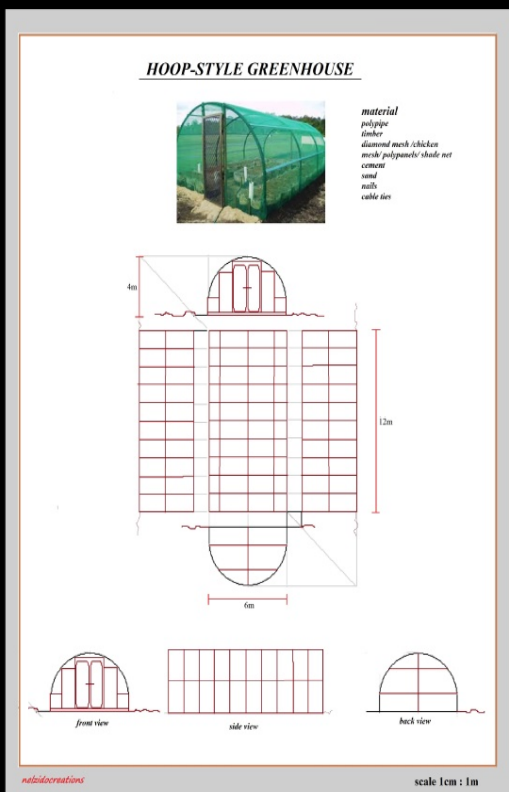


fig:1

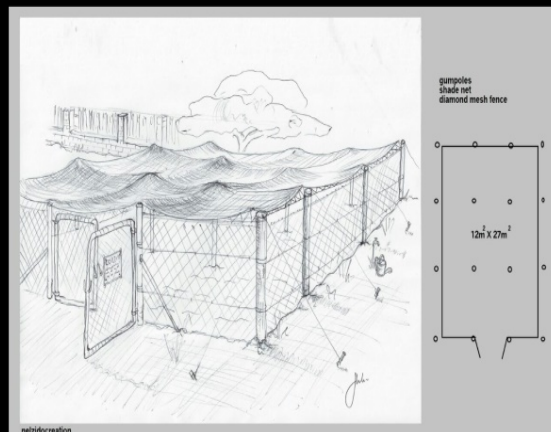


fig:2

The two green house designs we did for jack Morare Primary school. They liked the 1st one but it was too costly so we had to come up with a less costly structure and thats how we arrived at the structure on fig:2 which they agreed on.

4. Phutanang Orphanage Drop-In Centre, Ga-Botha Village

WHAT ARE WE SEEING?

Ga-Botha is a village situated about 76km south of Groblersdal. The Orphanage centre in Ga-Botha accommodates about 66 Orphans from around the village of Ga-Botha.

After Megoma's meeting in Tafelkop we had another meeting scheduled to take place in Ga-Botha, where we arranged to meet with ladies who, one ordinary day while sitting together and just having a normal talk, thought of planting a vegetable garden that could help orphans and kids from disadvantaged backgrounds. They have since walked the talk and started the vegetable garden. Their vegetable garden has already started feeding a few families. They even have a drop-in centre where orphans and the kids in need can come and collect food which was prepared using the vegetables from the vegetable garden. Things have not been smooth sailing though.



The ladies from the drop-in centre in Ga-Botha with Caroline (19/9/17)

While this may seem like a great idea and truly is, these ladies face a few challenges. One of the challenges they face is finding water to sustain this garden, and accessing the materials and support to build fencing and shelter for the garden.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

We realised that there is a truck from which they actually buy water, just to be able to water the garden. The nearest borehole is about 500 meters away and they can only manage to collect water from it one bucket at a time. Each street has only one tap as their only supply of water so it becomes a daily struggle to get water. You have to stand in the queue for hours, sometimes for the whole day just to get a bucket of water. It is often crowded by community members who are also looking for water for their own personal needs. Some of the people prefer to buy the water as long as they can afford it, as opposed to standing in the queue all day.

We then went to Mama Masimini's yard. She showed us her garden and water that she collects and uses to water her garden. It then became clear that the biggest challenge these ladies face is finding water to sustain the vegetable garden because the water tank at the orphanage centre was empty. Without enough water, the garden cannot grow and in turn, will not be able to feed more families who depend on it.



During our meeting the councillor was with us but when we interviewed the ladies and noticed the water problem, he had already left. We managed to set up another date with the councillor and asked him when he plans to assist these ladies with the water crisis, to which he responded positively by organising a water truck which filled up the empty tank at the centre. Since January 2018 the water tank has not run short of water, thanks to Megoma's intervention.

Another challenge for the ladies is having a proper structure to protect their garden. When we arrived at their vegetable garden we found birds feeding on some of the vegetables in the garden. We then saw that it was indeed clear that the shelter is really needed to protect the garden from harmful forces from outside. Something like a greenhouse that is used in most nurseries could do well for the garden. The greenhouse will be able to protect the garden from being damaged by the birds, straying animals, heavy storms etc.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO SEE?

These ladies in Ga-Botha are the heart of their community, and they are doing everything they can to make life better for the children at the orphanage centre. We want to see them being supported and recognised, and for their visions to become reality.

HOW ARE WE CHANGING THINGS?

During our initial meeting in Ga-Botha we were with the councillor but when we interviewed the ladies and noticed the water problem, he had already left. We managed to set up another date with the councillor and asked him when he plans to assist these ladies with the water

crisis, to which he responded positively by organising a water truck which filled up the empty tank at the centre. Since January 2018 the water tank has not run short of water, thanks to Megoma's intervention.

We identified fencing that was left over from fencing of the graveyard. We tried to talk to the councillor to get permission to use this fencing for the orphanage's vegetable garden. Even though we called him repeatedly, he did not answer his phone. We were very disappointed, but the labourers gave it to us anyway. We find temporary solutions while we work on long term goals.

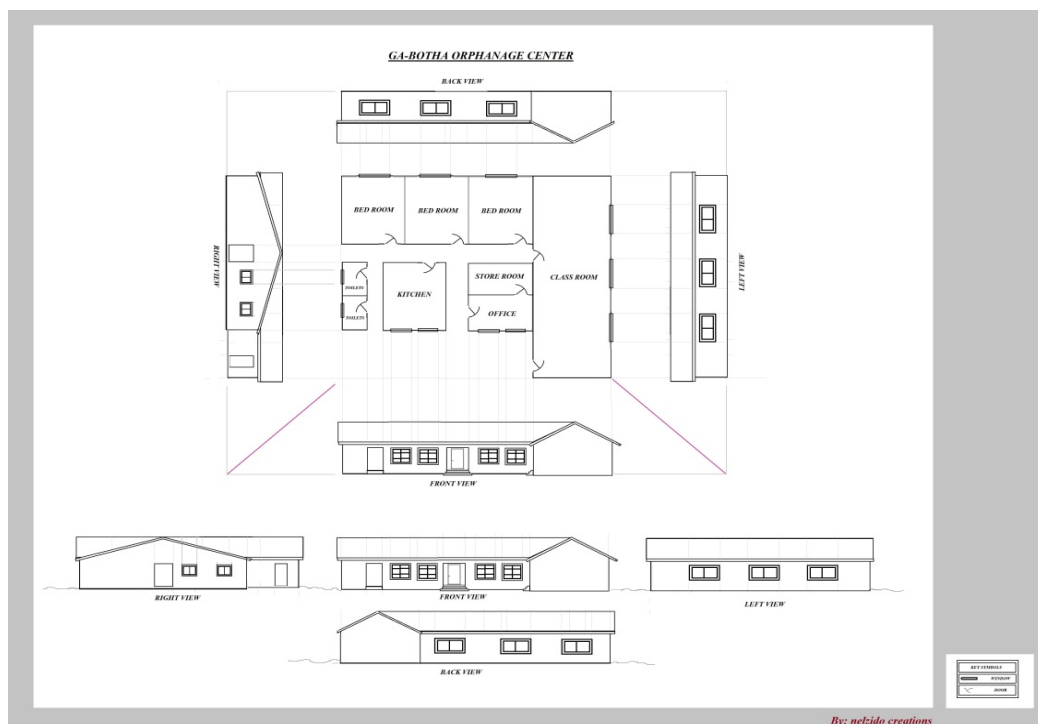
Even though the kids had a place to sleep and something to eat they still needed essential goods like clothing. We approached various potential sponsors who could donate a few necessities to the ladies. We managed to meet with one of the sponsors in person by the name of Gomatos Mokoatedi and took him to meet the ladies in Ga-Botha. They took him through the drop-in centre, the vegetable garden and informed him of the challenges they faced. He was very touched and said he could try to donate a few necessities to help the ladies out. After a few weeks he contacted us regarding the promise that he made. He went to Ga-Botha with us and donated sanitary pads, school shoes and groceries to last at least three months, as well as school stationary. The kids were so happy and the women were so grateful for the donations.



While being the heroines of their community, these ladies still face challenges of their own in their everyday lives. One of the ladies has a child who has matriculated but cannot study further due to lack of funds and no knowledge of bursaries and student loans such as NSFAS. We promised to assist her with application forms so that she can apply for funding to study in

2018. Who knows, after studying she might follow in her mom's footsteps and give back and uplift the community?

Earlier this year we talked to the orphan centre ladies and they told us their next move. They aim at build a proper centre for the orphans. And their wish is for the new structure to have a big class room, three bedrooms, toilets and a kitchen. They initially had a house planner design the centre for them but he charged them R8 000 which became a problem to them as they never anticipated it would cost that much. We designed one for them for no cost.



5.

Conclusion

Even though the climate in Groblersdal can be very difficult for the crops at different seasons, we are grateful that issues relating to climate change are being addressed worldwide and people are being made aware of the negative impacts they contribute towards the change of climate. These ultimate changes in the climate are so because of us human beings, the ultimate sources of and causes of environmental crises. We contaminate water; we pollute it. Air is also affected. Therefore, climate has become a political issue and has been debated extensively to save the environment and surroundings in which we live. The unjust practices can be seen in the unequal distribution of power and resources. We can try to improve people's

healthcare and assist to reduce energy consumption by organising awareness campaigns so that people become aware of the importance of using resources. The right time to work on leaving a better future for our children is now.

This whole experience has taught us that we should not sit and wait for the government to feed and create jobs for us, we can do it ourselves. We have realised the importance of agriculture, it can feed a whole community without having to dig deep into our pockets. It is amazing how we, through supporting local change makers, are tackling poverty one garden at a time. Through agriculture we can all be the hearts of our own communities.

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