



QSA Notes

people, places & projects

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Photo Left: Spirulina tanks belonging to the Keseva Nayakkau Palayam Village group, photo credit QSA

Photo Below Students visiting Nadukuppam Forest to learn about their environment and the medical plants collection, photo credit Pitchandikulam Forest



When you hear the word education does your mind immediately go to a classroom you remember? QSA would like to tell you of a different interpretation of education and share with you some of the practical applications responding to the needs of the project participants. Most of the “classrooms” used by QSA project partners are in fact outside – in the field as people learn about growing crops or how to get a better yield, or what’s a good crop to grow to feed to cattle (answer: azolla, an aquatic plant grown in Tamil Nadu, south India and

part of the training given by Vasandham Society), or outside in the forest where students visiting Pitchandikulam Forest in Tamil Nadu learn which indigenous plants are in fact medicinal and therefore useful plants.

Sometimes the education is more basic – literacy and numeracy skills for example, to enable the women who operate a milk group to keep accurate records of how much milk has been collected by each of the members with their small herd of cows, so that at the end of the month the profits can be allocated proportionally. For women who at the start of the project possibly could not write their own name, the notion of keeping these records is such a matter of pride for them now, and all in the group take a turn in record keeping so that everyone can be sure it is accurate. It sounds a small thing, but to the women themselves, it’s a huge leap forward, as often their

schooling was limited due to being required to help in the fields during planting or harvest time, or child-minding if there were younger siblings to care for while parents were hard at work. Also in Tamil Nadu, the women in the Keseva Nayakkau Palayam Village group needed specific training to enable them to grow spirulina successfully. Because spirulina is an alga, the chemical composition of the water in which it is grown must be carefully and regularly monitored. The impact of amount of the sunshine affecting evaporation rates, and rainfall diluting the concentrate means measurements need to be taken regularly and compensating chemicals applied. Mathematical skills are important or the whole crop will be less productive, which affects everyone’s income so the pressure is on everyone in the group. One of the jobs of monitoring a project is to look at the records being taken in the field, and



Students in Uganda working in the school's food gardens, photo credit QSA

the women were so enthusiastic to show me their record books because they were so proud that they can keep these records for themselves.

In Uganda, one of QSA's project partners is St Jude Family Projects, and over the past few years with funding support also from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, agricultural support and training for food security has been given to groups of rural women. Now in addition, it has extended the training to children in over 30 schools. One class per school, with two teachers, learn from the St Jude trainers how to make their school grounds more productive with vegetables which are harvested to supplement the midday meal. This gives an opportunity to teach maths, geography and

meteorology, biology and new topics such as organic pest management, water storage and distribution methods. This is a classroom topic which is having huge impacts at home as the students try to encourage their parents to grow vegetables in land around the house. Frequently the home food garden only consisted of some banana trees whereas now the student can teach their parents how to grow other crops beneath the banana trees. And another strong result from this project, which came as a surprise to Josephine Kizza, the director of St Jude Family Projects, was the way agriculture is now being viewed by the community. "Previously a form of punishment in schools was to be given a spade and told to dig the ground, now

everyone can see the value in making the ground productive and it is not a punishment, they are so eager to be allowed to work in the gardens."

So no, QSA does not undertake projects which provide classrooms, desks, books and equipment, but it certainly supports the notion of teaching and training. A well-known often quoted proverb says "give people a fish and you feed them for a day; teach them to fish and you feed them for a lifetime". This is certainly along the lines of what QSA tries to do in its development and training with communities in need in projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development, and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The Purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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