

My last update highlighted the inspiring growth of the Tloma Primary School Environmental Club's produce garden from a struggling patch to a glorious acre of healthy plants. But their other accomplishments are even more impressive.



The idea started with planting a few banana shoots harvested from the base of a neighbor's existing banana trees. It takes three years for shoots to produce fruit. This year it happened!



### Bananas for Breakfast.



As bunches ripen, some enrich the younger children's breakfast porridge, and some are distributed to older students as an after-lunch treat.



There are now about 70 banana trees in different stages and of different varieties (plantain for cooking, others for fresh consumption) in the garden and around campus. Students often request and receive one of the multiple shoots of the maturing trees to plant at home for fruit for their families. As harvests increase, the fruit will be added to the produce sold to provide income for school needs.

But - that is just the beginning.

### Developing a Commercial Fruit Orchard

There were a few established fruit trees on campus, but three years ago, agriculture enthusiast and dedicated school garden volunteer and instructor, Daudi Tahhani, contributed coffee seedlings for students to plant around their new garden. The coffee trees now produce good quantities of coffee berries.

Encouraged by the successful coffee and banana tree production, the Environmental Club members wanted to do even more.



## Grafting for Hass Avocados

A local Hass avocado export producer is supporting the orchard project by providing free clippings from his avocado trees. Local avocados are fairly accessible in Tloma. They are not the best tasting nor are they of much commercial value, but they grow rapidly. It takes less than three months for a local seed to grow tall enough to graft in a Hass clipping to jumpstart the Hass orchard. Daudi agreed to help students learn the grafting process, and staff and students began to gather seeds from local trees.

Club participants let the seeds dry while they ordered small containers and prepared ingredients for a potting mix. Then Daudi began instructing them in the process of growing and grafting.



The Club had collected over 200 local seeds and students began taking turns planting, watering and transplanting them in an area designated for the orchard. Grafting is expected to begin in October to have plants ready for the November rains. This will be a significant orchard when developed and should provide equally significant income for the school.

As wonderful as all of this is, I think the greatest benefit isn't the produce and fruit. I believe it is the opportunity for these students to learn how to conceive, plan, and carry out new ideas. You might wonder why I think that is so important. Let me share some of what I have learned.

Tloma is a very poor community. Students' homes are often rentals or on a parcel of land too small to grow the traditional maize that is the source for 80% of their diet. It is not unusual for a mother - or grandmother - to share a 9'x12' space with two beds, perhaps a chair, maybe a small table, with two to five or more children. The beds may have only a thin mat over some wood slats (or perhaps small tree branches) and a few blankets. No stove for chilly nights; no water; no toilet; no electricity; only a few pots and utensils to cook over a fire outside (when food is available), and a few clothes. No toys. No books. Not a 'home' like you and I might picture. The availability of experiential and instructional learning is severely limited by the economics of their daily lives ....and the overcrowded classrooms where they spend the majority of their childhood.

But Club members elect officers for various periods during the year who have the responsibility to coordinate efforts between school leaders and the Club to ensure successful outcomes for Club projects. Current officers are pictured to the right: Richard, Robert, and Godlizen. Others will get those opportunities.



Each Club member can be involved in each step of each project, learning and practicing the skills necessary to achieve the Club goals. Club goals are not just about growing food they can eat. Their goals are more far-reaching and may take longer than some members will be at Tloma.

Here are the Environmental Club's short- and long-range goals:

- 1) introduce students to a greater variety of healthy food
- 2) learn how to grow a variety of healthy food
- 3) provide nutritious breakfast and lunch for all of Tloma's students
- 4) create income to help with school needs, and
- 5) create income to hire exceptional teachers to reduce class sizes from 85-125 to 45 students.

So, I believe the greatest thing about this Club is the potentially life-altering experiences and knowledge students gain from participation. This was creative genius from Teacher Sulle.

If the efforts of the Environmental Club and other school projects inspire you (there are some good ones in development), I hope you will consider making a PayPal contribution on our web page. Or contact me for other options.

What a wonder way to watch your gifts grow!

Winona - President, Tloma Giving

If you have any questions - [TlomaGivingInfo@gmail.com](mailto:TlomaGivingInfo@gmail.com)

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