

A NUTRITION PROJECT AT POPONDETTA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

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INTRODUCTION

The main function of the Agricultural Colleges in Papua New Guinea is training students as agriculturalists, but another function is as a technical resource for the community.

Thus, the knowledge and skills of college staff and students, and the college facilities are available to assist in solving the agricultural problems of the community. By working closely with the community we hope to provide a useful service. At the same time the students have an opportunity to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills under supervision, and to gain real field experience. Both the students and the community can benefit greatly from such projects.

FINDING A PROJECT

To find a project suitable for students at Popondetta Agricultural College, I approached the Provincial Nutritionist for Oro Province, Katie Watt. I wanted to know whether any Community schools had contacted her, expressing an interest in a nutrition project.

One thing which is essential to any community project is the interest and enthusiasm of the group involved. Without this, the project has no chance of succeeding.

As the Headmaster of Hanakiro Community School, Leonard Kapun, had not only contacted the nutritionist but had actually started work in the field of nutrition, this school was selected. It was a relatively new school with only grades 1-3 students and a staff of three teachers. There had not been much work done in nutrition previously.

After preliminary visits to the school and from discussions with Mr. Kapun and his staff, it seemed that the project would have two main objectives:

1. To provide P.A.C. students with the opportunity to work in the community and apply their Nutrition and Food Crops theory.
2. To provide the community school with the necessary technical advice and materials to achieve their nutrition objectives.

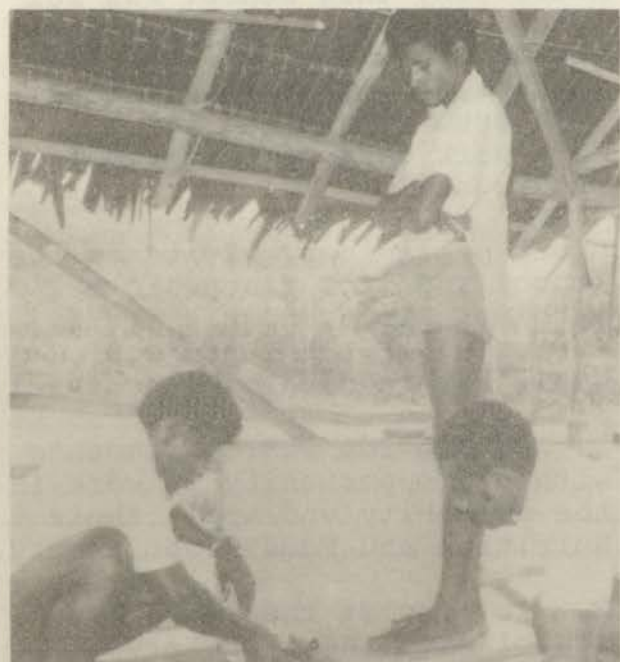
Unfortunately, because of the college timetable and transport problems the college students would have only two visits to the school and follow up would have to be carried out by college and D.P.I. staff.

Carrying out the project

The students working on the project were the 19 members of the Diploma class, so they all had considerable field experience although not necessarily in nutrition.

During their first visit to Hanakiro the college students wanted to do two things - first to determine the nutritional status of the children and second to determine what assistance they could provide to the school.

The first objective was achieved by weighing and measuring each child and completing a nutritional status form. This information was then compared with weight-for-age and height-for-age tables.



Weighing one of the school children during the students' first visit

The results are shown in Table 1 (below).

From the results it is clear that a problem of underweight children does exist in this area. Hence there is a need for an active nutrition programme.

To achieve the second objective of this visit, community school staff and the college students discussed a proposed nutrition garden and school lunch programme. Problems in obtaining gardening tools, seeds and cooking pots were raised and possible sources of these were considered. It was decided that an official request should be made to the college for assistance in establishing the garden and that the Oro Province Nutrition Committee and the Food Action Group be approached for equipment.

During the second visit of the college students, they worked together with the community school staff and students and a few interested parents to establish the nutrition garden. The kunai had already been slashed by the school children and spades and forks were brought from the college to use in cultivation.

Everyone had been assigned to one of the food groups and worked very hard preparing the

TABLE 1. NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF CHILDREN AT HANAKIRO COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Total		Weight			Height		
		Normal	Moderately underweight	Severely underweight	Normal	Moderately stunted	Severely stunted
Boys	21	6	11	4	18	3	-
Girls	28	8	8	12	22	6	-



Everyone helped to clear the garden and prepare the beds for planting



After only a few weeks the nutrition garden was growing well

beds for planting. At each stage in the work the college students would explain to their group what they were doing and why they were doing it.

The college provided seeds, cuttings and fruit trees for the garden and the children also brought some from home. When these had been planted the children were taught how to mulch the garden and care for the plants. A nursery was also established for cabbage and tomato seedlings. Within a few hours, therefore, the nutrition garden became a reality.

FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up by college staff has involved a visit to the school every 4-6 weeks.

On our first visit the progress made in the garden was impressive. Most of the plants were growing well and some were already producing food which could be used in the school lunch programme. Using tools obtained from the Nutrition Committee, the garden had been doubled in size, the seedlings had been planted out and the nursery expanded.

Some additional advice regarding the care of the garden was given and another visit was organized to demonstrate how to cook the foods being grown and how to control insect pests.

During the next visit, therefore, we worked with a group of the older girls preparing their school lunch. While cooking we discussed the nutrient value of different foods and how to conserve these nutrients during cooking.



School lunch is served!

Meanwhile other college staff were demonstrating the use of insecticides to the staff and advising them further about care of the garden. Periodical visits to evaluate the progress being made and help solve new problems which arise continued throughout the year.

CONCLUSIONS

By working closely together on this project, the objectives of both P.A.C. and Hanakiro Community School have been met. The college students have applied their knowledge and skills to help in the community and the community school have a nutrition garden and the necessary knowledge, skills and materials to maintain and expand it.

Despite problems regarding transport, weather, shortage of equipment and shortage of time, this project has begun well. This is because of the co-operation, interest, enthusiasm and hard work of everyone involved. The success of any project will largely depend on these factors, and on funding from Provincial agencies.

A NOTE FROM JOE KOPAPA, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, AGRICULTURE EDUCATION AND TRAINING BRANCH, D.P.I., KONE DOBU.

The Agricultural Colleges are national function institutions. They have well-trained staff in a wide range of fields. There are also good facilities for training. Therefore we welcome any approaches by the Provinces to the Colleges for assistance. However, due to financial constraints, Provinces and Organisations should jointly fund any programmes.