

Planting a Seed in Ghana and Canada

By David Stott

It started innocently enough last November. A woman named Nana-Fosu Randall, originally from Ghana, West Africa, and recently retired from the United Nations, was coming to speak to Victoria Meeting. She spoke movingly about an organisation called Voices of African Mothers (VAM), that she was forming to promote peace and development in Africa. During that meeting, when she found out I was an organic urban agriculturalist with experience working in India and Kenya she asked me to come to Ghana to look at ways of improving the incomes of poor farmers on the outskirts of Ghana's cities.

In Ghana's cities there are growing concerns about how to feed everyone adequately. It seems that the promise of the so-called Green Revolution, with its chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides, is not improving the lot of small farmers. They were finding their production leveling off or declining in fragile soils depleted of nutrients. Furthermore, the cost of these inputs is becoming too expensive for small farmers.

What are the alternatives? I had some ideas. I practice a form of biointensive, organic raised-bed gardening first used in China 4000 years ago and now successfully practiced in North America, Mexico and East Africa, among other

places. Could it work in Ghana? With Nana and Victoria Meeting covering my airfare, accommodation and expenses, I was going to spend a month finding out.

How to get an assessment in such a short time? I decided to offer people the information and seeds from local organic growers in exchange for their seeds and information. Fortunately, the first week I was there I was able to speak with villagers attending VAM's first conference, outside Accra. We arranged a few workshops to exchange information and seeds. Over the next three weeks, I met with people from three villages, exchanging information on their methods and ours.

I was surprised at how interested people were in the new method and the seeds I brought, excited to try their seeds, and impressed by some of the low-input methods they used.

They decided to create demonstration plots in three villages to try this method on their crops and perform seed trials on the seeds I had brought. I was also fortunate in finding an excellent volunteer in one of these villages who offered to do follow-up work in helping

people start their raised beds. By then my time had run out and I had to return to Canada.

Today, a little over two months later, I am happy to report that, from my perspective, sustainable agriculture may have a bright future in Ghana. To date, 45 one-hundred-square-foot raised-bed demonstration plots have been created by 30 farmers in the villages I visited, and they have expressed an interest in starting many more. Meanwhile, on Vancouver Island, organic farmers and gardeners are trying the seeds I was given by the Ghanaians. We are also in the process of forming a Canadian branch of VAM to support our work there. We are working to raise enough funds in Canada to return to Ghana this coming winter with other organic grower volunteers. This trip may include not only Canadians but possibly one or two Kenyan farmer volunteers from a biointensive training program in Kenya. They will bring their knowledge and seeds to exchange and, together, this year, and hopefully for years to come, we will grow many seeds in many villages in Ghana, Kenya, Canada and elsewhere. ♡

David Stott is an Attender of Victoria Monthly Meeting.

For further details, contact David at 2554 Scott Street, Victoria, B.C. V8R 4H7; telephone: 250-598-4664; email: <joyanddavid@shaw.ca>.