

SGG PROGRESS REPORT FOR BUSIA

INTRODUCTION

The “Support for 500 Orphans &/or Vulnerable Children [OVCs] in Busia County, West Kenya” is Sustainable Global Gardens [SGG] longest, continually active project. This community development programme in support of OVCs consists of four main strands i.e.

- a feeding programme with a weekly communal meal at each of the 11 OVC groups. This was started in 2007 when the locality was in the grip of an HIV crisis and there were many young children who were clearly undernourished,
- a tree-planting scheme started in 2008 to help guardians of the OVCs improve environmental conditions & food production on their small-scale farms and also help pay school fees. This was started as a ‘trees for school fees’ scheme,
- table-banking was started in 2009 to enable OVC guardians to increase household revenue,
- this portfolio of development projects was completed in 2014 with the promotion of horticulture and ‘kitchen gardens’ to improve child nutrition.

For many years this project was the main focus of SGG’s attention, involving hundreds of small-scale farm households and absorbing most of our budget. Yet in 2025 there was no monitoring visit to Kenya, and this year the visit to Busia was no more than one week. The brevity of this year’s visit is a reflection of the fact that our Busia friends are now largely self-sufficient. They initiate & implement development schemes, so SGG’s role is now mainly the securing of funding and providing reports to project donors. We rejoice that our Busia partners are moving closer to self-sufficiency and are less dependent on SGG’s help. This is progress.

OVC FEEDING PROGRAMME

The weekly communal meal remains a core part of SGG support for these orphans. We now have 11 OVC groups in total, 9 having the full complement of 50 children while 2 serve food officially to only 25 hungry children.



Here [see above left] are some of the boys from the Tumaini Women’s group enjoying a large jackfruit for lunch. The younger girls are all sitting in the shade of the neighbouring tree. Here [see above right] children at Upendo Women’s group queue for their weekly communal meal, which consists of maize, beans and a lot of greens.

This feeding programme has now been running for nineteen years, and during that time there have been considerable organizational changes. The original idea for the support of 500 orphans/vulnerable children in Busia County was to provide one nutritious communal meal per week to reduce child hunger & malnutrition. Actions within this scheme are now more varied than that. Seven out of eleven OVC groups still follow that customary pattern of a weekly communal meal. However, four of the eleven groups now maintain primary schools or ECDC's [i.e. early child development centres] – a local equivalent to our kindergartens/ nurseries. These often provide daily meals, especially as food is a common attraction to bring poor children into school. One group uses part of their feeding money to pay for OVC fees at schools where daily food is provided.



Here [see above left] is one of the classes at Siguli Orphans Centre, while [see above right] is a classroom at Starlight Academy. Both of these ECDCs were established well before SGG's feeding programme began. Both now have good gardens supplying food, so school meals happen more than once a week.

This [see left] is a much newer facility where New Hope Emaseno provides nursery experience for the OVCs who live at Gladys Ochieng's home.

The feeding programme has always taken the lion's share of the budget available for OVCs in Busia, However, we have noticed that some of the OVC groups have more than the agreed number of 50 OVCs at a meal while others have consistently less than the agreed number. Thus we have come to ask whether this present format where £7,920 is spent on feeding is the best use of SGG's limited resources. As the original undernourished OVCs have long since moved on to be adults and the present cohorts of children look much better fed and clothed, we have asked some of these OVC group if they would prefer the feeding programme to be replaced with greater funding for the table-banking income-generation schemes. This is a matter of discussion throughout the coming year with each group likely to choose according to their particular needs. It should be said here that SGG sees great value in each group of women guardians meeting on a regular basis and that we shall continue to make any adjustments according to the wishes of each group.

TABLE-BANKING



Above are two typical table-banking scenes with some of the Mukwano group [see above left] under a tree at the chairlady's home. It is a similar situation [see above right] when Nyusa Farmers meet. At these gatherings the OVC group needs to produce a report on their previous table-banking scheme if they have not done so already. They also must produce a proposal with a budget for their next scheme with their 70% local contribution. There may be some advice given and some minor adjustments to the budget, but usually SGG accepts the OVC group proposal. One important advantage of this table-banking is that an informal business arrangement is made. Thus, the OVC groups see themselves, not as poor dependants in need of SGG funds, but as business partners with both responsibility for their own development and a sense of self dignity. That is progress!

I suggest that you browse the appendix 'Table Banking April 2025' to get a good idea of the success of this particular action. For the last few years SGG has been training our Kenya partners in Busia to record details of their development schemes. In this appendix, which SGG received in March from one of our Busia coordinators, there are details of how some of the OVC groups used their table-banking funds. It should be noted that:

- this refers to funds disbursed to OVC groups in April 2025, and reports written in early 2026
- the format is that each group provides 65-70% of the required budget, while SGG contributes the remaining 30% if the income generation scheme is considered viable. This is their income-generation scheme: they make the plan, and success depends on how well they implement that plan,
- schemes vary. Mukwano invested in poultry, which is probably the best way for a group with very limited capital to safely invest. CIF and Upendo both invested in pigs, while Siritanyi usually focus on small business enterprises,
- profits vary considerably. Mukwano made a total profit of £175, which is little more than £10 per member. CIF's total profit was £314, so closer to £20 per member, with much of that money being used for education costs. Upendo recorded an income of £897, which converts to an average profit for each member of about £23. For Siritanyi the average profit is £42 per capita,
- there are many variables to consider, but the above data suggests that poultry schemes are an easy way to start income generation among poor, inexperienced groups. Schemes with larger livestock [pigs & goats] require more attention but bring greater profits. Siritanyi are the only group where income comes from individual business enterprises [eg. cereal, fish, or secondhand clothes sales], which can bring much greater profit,
- for all of these groups revenue is close to double the initial investment in less than a year. These projects are excellent for making money at grassroots level.

TREE PROJECTS

Agroforestry planting and forest restoration are both major activities in the SGG project portfolio. Furthermore, the Busia landscape has been transformed in terms of tree cover, partly by SGG's efforts to promote agroforestry as a crucial strategy to improve production on small-scale farms.



The CIF group are based near Sioport, near Lake Victoria but with the lowest rainfall in Busia. In 2014 when CIF had just started tree-planting there were large patches of bare ground with occasional patches of unproductive bush scrub [see above left]. By 2026 many CIF members had turned their farms into agroforestry units [see above right]. Some CIF farmers have tried new tree species. Here [see below left] *Sesbania sesban* is grown next to bananas. These trees act as a 'soil improver' by nitrogen fixation. They can also provide firewood, but their main value is as a fodder crop for the farmer's goats. In the areas of Busia with higher rainfall SGG has funded both agroforestry planting and woodlots. Here [see below right] there is a woodlot with more than 500 *Grevillea robusta* planted in 2015 on a previously unproductive maize field. Some trees are now ready for sale, so that the sales revenue can be used as capital for investment in a nia project



Despite the importance of tree-planting, very limited attention was paid to this aspect of the project during our field visit. Consequently, we are anticipating that tree counts and payments will be the major activity during the next visit. We do not know exactly how many trees have been planted since 2024 by SGG's partners around Busia, but I expect a figure of more than 20,000 new trees & around £5,000 in agreed payments.

KITCHEN GARDENS

For the last few years SGG has been funding horticultural plots, or kitchen gardens, for each of the 11 OVC groups. Their reports indicate that such kitchen gardens produce at least two types of greens, with sukumawiki/kales being by far the most common. The harvested crops are used for both consumption by the OVCs during their communal meals and also commercial sales. This has resulted in improvements in child nutrition as well as additional revenue for each group.



Sukumawiki or 'kale' is usually the dominant crop in most communal gardens. Here [see above left] members of Nyusa Farmers are harvesting some of their crop. Nyusa Farmers recorded their costs as £80, with the estimated value of greens eaten by OVCs being £110 together with sales of £46. In addition they recorded a value of £194 as payment for labour in the form of harvested vegetables. This system of payment in kind for volunteer work is quite common in these schemes. Upendo Women grew a combination of kales, amaranth and cowpeas on this plot [see above right] as well as yams being grown nearby. They estimated costs of £69 but an overall revenue of £183 for OVC meals & sales.

When all the OVC groups are considered the salient features are as follows:

- total profits were £1,487 with most groups making a profit between £90 and £120
- some groups were significantly higher than this average. Focussa had the advantages of its leader having already been trained in permaculture, the associated school having compost toilets, and there being a water pump on site. Siguli Orphans made use of a kickstart footpump and a perennial stream. Macbeth & Leonida had their own water tank. The benefit of a reliable water supply needs to be considered by other groups
- such 'profits' consist of value of commercial sales and an estimate of the value of vegetables eaten by OVCs. The values given for OVC consumption are very variable, from less than £57 to over £457. These variations depend on how many OVCs are being fed, but especially on how many days/week there is feeding.
- these values are no more than estimates. They should be treated with caution, especially as some of those providing the raw data have had very limited schooling. Nevertheless, these figures indicate significant horticultural progress.

Of much greater significance is the impact of these communal gardens on children's nutrition. We do not have irrefutable evidence of this, but SGG is regularly told that more greens & fruit in children's diets has resulted in improved health and lower medical costs.

With communal kitchen gardens established for the various OVC groups SGG is now planning to promote kitchen gardens on the small-scale farms of individual members. We already have a very successful pilot scheme for this. Macbeth Odera [*see right on previous page in white spotted dress*] and her mother-in-law Leonida share their own individual plot. They recorded in January 2026 costs of £11 but an overall profit of £145 after strong local demand for their crop of sweet potatoes. Thus, SGG's plan is to focus on the promotion of similar individual plots as we see this as the best strategy for raising nutritional standards in the locality. This promotion involves two stages. This year SGG invested in a permaculture training course, which was run by John Macharia of SCOPE Kenya and which took place at the end of March 2026. The NGO SCOPE are specialists in transforming barren school grounds into productive land based on intensive horticulture. Their aim is to make schools & other institutions self-sufficient in food. For more details see <https://www.scopekenya.net>. John's report on this training is attached.

Of particular importance here is that 3 of the trainees were SGG's coordinators in Busia and 11 delegates from the OVC groups. This will allow us to pass to stage two when any members of the 11 OVC groups can be trained in permaculture & other horticultural innovations. We look forward to monitoring this progress during SGG's next field visit.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Although SGG fieldworkers were present in Busia for only one week in February 2026, this was sufficient to convince us that good progress is being made in all four aspects of this project to support 500 OVCs and the households where they live. There is still much to do, especially with the next stage of kitchen garden promotion and the long-delayed agroforestry tree count, but we are optimistic that previous donors will continue their support of a project where the objective is poverty & hunger alleviation to assist more than 1,000 beneficiaries in small-scale farmer households. Thank you to all who have given assistance so far.

Paul Keeley
SGG Managing Director

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