

EMPOWERMENT OF HIV/AIDS WOMEN GROUP THROUGH MANGULUKENI FISH FARM: A CASE STUDY FROM NAMIBIA

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The Oshikuku Support Group was established in January 2007 in conjunction with St. Martin's Hospital. The group's purpose is to provide a supportive environment for HIV positive and HIV/AIDS affected individuals to share their experiences and counsel them while participating in a group project. After formation, the members decided to begin an income generating project and selected aquaculture as a means to gain income while addressing economic and psychosocial challenges as a group. The project was named 'Mangulukeni Fish Farming Project,' meaning to "be free" in Oshiwambo. This name calls members and the community to *be free* to share their experiences with each other, to *be free* of the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and to *be free* to live a better life.

Project implementation began in 2007, with the technical guidance of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR), Namibia. Before the project began, members visited another aquaculture project and then, when the project began, the MFMR officials met with them to provide advice. Mangulukeni Fish Farm had its first harvest in summer 2008 and its second harvest in September 2009. The project helped to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS in the Omusati region while allowing the members to benefit from the psychosocial, physical and emotional health benefits of a group project. The project was created and run by women, with 10 out of 11 members being female. Additional direct beneficiaries include family members and households, which total 92 people, 46 of whom are children. They also provide a powerful example of the strength and success of women and the opportunities available. The Project provides a wide range of opportunities and benefits, including: 1) income generation, 2) nutrients from the fish, 3) business, management and leadership skills and, 4) a sense of belonging, ownership and accomplishment. The Project aims to continue, setting an example for other aquaculture projects, other support groups, and for women.

On 5 March 2009, the project stocked 4000 tilapia fingerlings from the Onavivi Inland Aquaculture Centre in a manually constructed pond. By 4 September 2009, the women harvested the pond due to a water shortage. Earlier, the pond was partially flooded and some fish lost when catfish entered. At harvest, the average weight of fish was 80 g. Growth and production were not economically viable but the group members each earned N\$200 and took home fish to eat. N\$500 (1 US\$ = 7.1 N\$) was put back into the project. Though not satisfied with this harvest, the group was ready to continue fish farming. During 2010, the group requested and bought catfish fingerlings and the results were monitored by the extension services.

Through this learning process, the group has remained committed to the project and has been working with the MFMR to capture the lessons learned to better inform future activities. Via its TELEFOOD fund, FAO is expected to provide support to acquire land from the local traditional authority and to expand the existing project as a small-scale fish farm and vegetable garden. The project has planned to produce 3 to 4 tons of products in its first year, which will then be increasing each year until the project is self-sustainable in the long-term and profitable as well.

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