

BasicNeeds Promoting Gardening for Improved Mental Health, Food and Income Security



A Livelihoods Project Funded by Johnson&Johnson Company Limited



Appreciation

BasicNeeds-Ghana expresses profound appreciation to the Johnson & Johnson Company Limited under whose sponsorship all project activities were carried out.



*Designed by:
Fred Nantogmah*

Implementation Partners



Gub-Katimali Society



Centre for People's Empowerment and Rights Initiatives

Foreword

BasicNeeds-Ghana is privileged to showcase some beneficiaries of its livelihood empowerment project titled ***“BasicNeeds promoting gardening for improved mental health food and income security”***. This was a project implemented with funds from Johnson and Johnson Company Limited.

The project was intended ***“to enhance secure livelihoods and reduce vulnerabilities of women, men and youth with mental illness or epilepsy through enabling people with mental illness or epilepsy to take up vegetable gardening as a trade”***. It was implemented in three (3) districts namely Kumbungu District in the Northern Region, Talensi District in the Upper East Region and Nadowli District in the Upper West Region. In total, ninety-five (95) people with psychosocial needs, fifty-four (54) of whom are female, were supported to engage in all-year vegetable cultivation.

The level of vulnerability people with mental illness or epilepsy and their primary care-givers suffer inevitably affects their ability to work and earn an income. This inability to earn an income directly affects their ability to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter and health. As such, they face the real risk of not being able to enjoy their rights under law and this is likely to affect their dignity as human beings.

BasicNeeds-Ghana, therefore, attaches great importance to ensuring that people with mental illness or epilepsy are able to access treatment and become sufficiently well to take advantage of the opportunities present in their communities and elsewhere.

Admittedly, there have been significant improvements in the lives of poor and vulnerable people with mental illness or epilepsy and their primary carers as a result of BasicNeeds-Ghana's work over the years. Many people with psychosocial needs have been supported to access treatment services within proximate distances from their homes. BasicNeeds-Ghana and other stakeholders have also expended great efforts in engaging policy makers on behalf of people with mental illness and epilepsy to advocate for policies that promote their rights and inclusion in decision making. They have also been engaged in livelihood enhancing interventions as a means of ensuring that they become productive members of society.

However, many poor people with epilepsy and mental disorders still lack access to essential medicines and care. They are still subject to abuse and stigma and most are unable to claim their fundamental

human rights. This is why it is important that mental health issues become a matter of priority for Government and other duty-bearers.

The ability of people with mental illness and epilepsy to engage in productive work is, however, evidenced by their involvement in this project. The project builds on BasicNeeds-Ghana's existing interventions in enhancing inclusion and the ability of the poorest and most vulnerable members of society to take advantage of livelihood opportunities

The project has contributed to the organisation's mission of ensuring that people with mental illness are able to live and work successfully in their communities. It has shown that by deliberately including people with mental illness or epilepsy in decision making processes and livelihood opportunities, we promote sustainable strategies in reducing the general level of poverty and improve the lives of all involved



Badimah Peter Yaro,

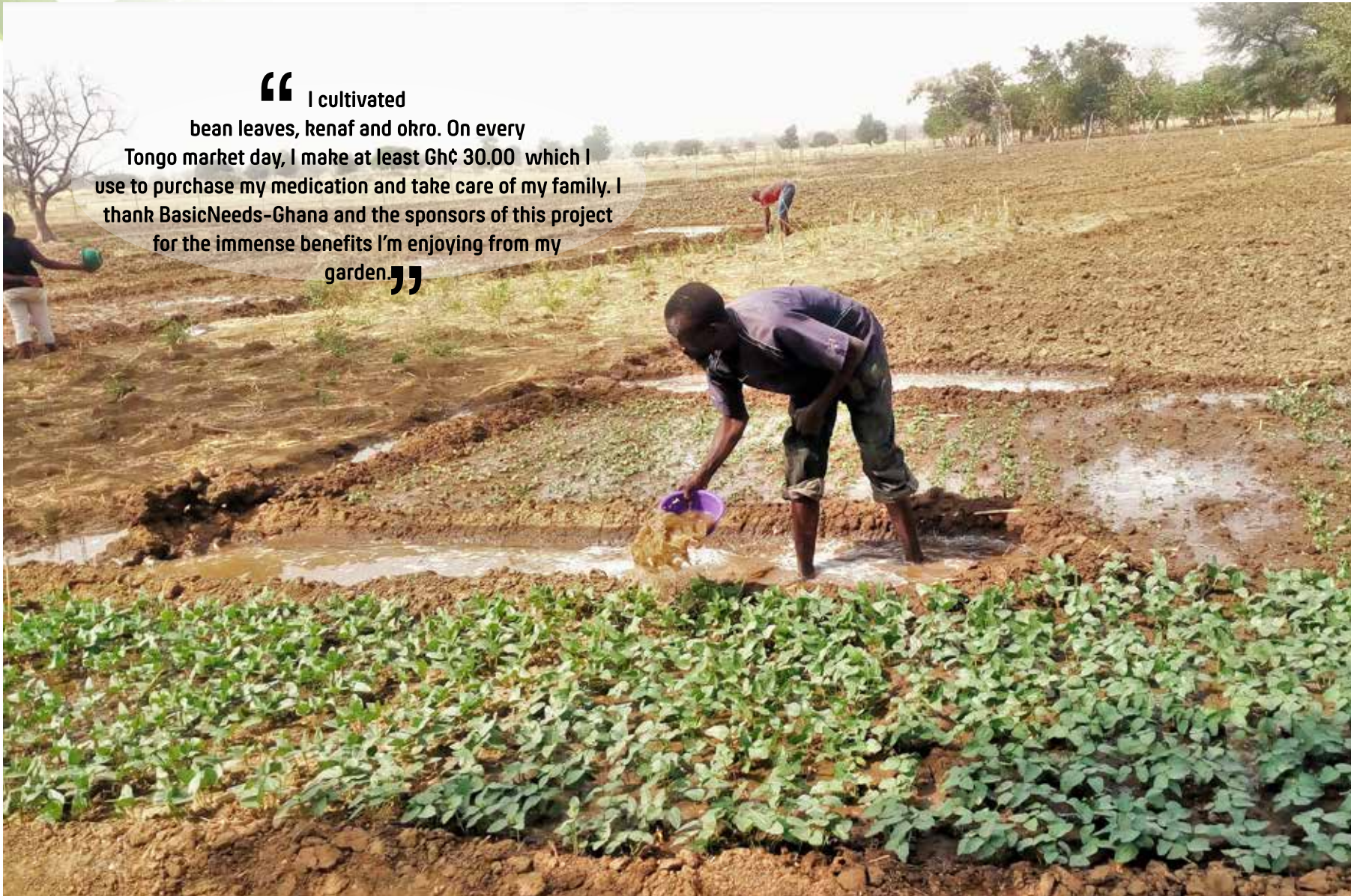
Executive Director, BasicNeeds-Ghana



“ We initially had nothing doing to earn income during dry season except rainy season we could farm. We were helpless during dry season until your support to us. When I harvested the vegetables I made some sales, which I have used the money for our family upkeeps. I have also used some of the produce to prepare food for my father and my husband’s families.”

Aisha Abdulai is 20 years old lady and comes from Voggu in the Kumbungu District. Aisha and her step-mother/carer Sanatu joined Voggu Self Help Group of people with mental illness or epilepsy after several failed attempts by traditional and spiritual healers. Upon the advice of the group Aisha visited the Kumbungu health facility in 2014 where she was diagnosed with epilepsy. After her condition stabilised, she was given vegetable seeds, watering cans and other gardening tools to engage in gardening.

**“ I cultivated
bean leaves, kenaf and okro. On every
Tongo market day, I make at least Gh¢ 30.00 which I
use to purchase my medication and take care of my family. I
thank BasicNeeds-Ghana and the sponsors of this project
for the immense benefits I’m enjoying from my
garden.”**



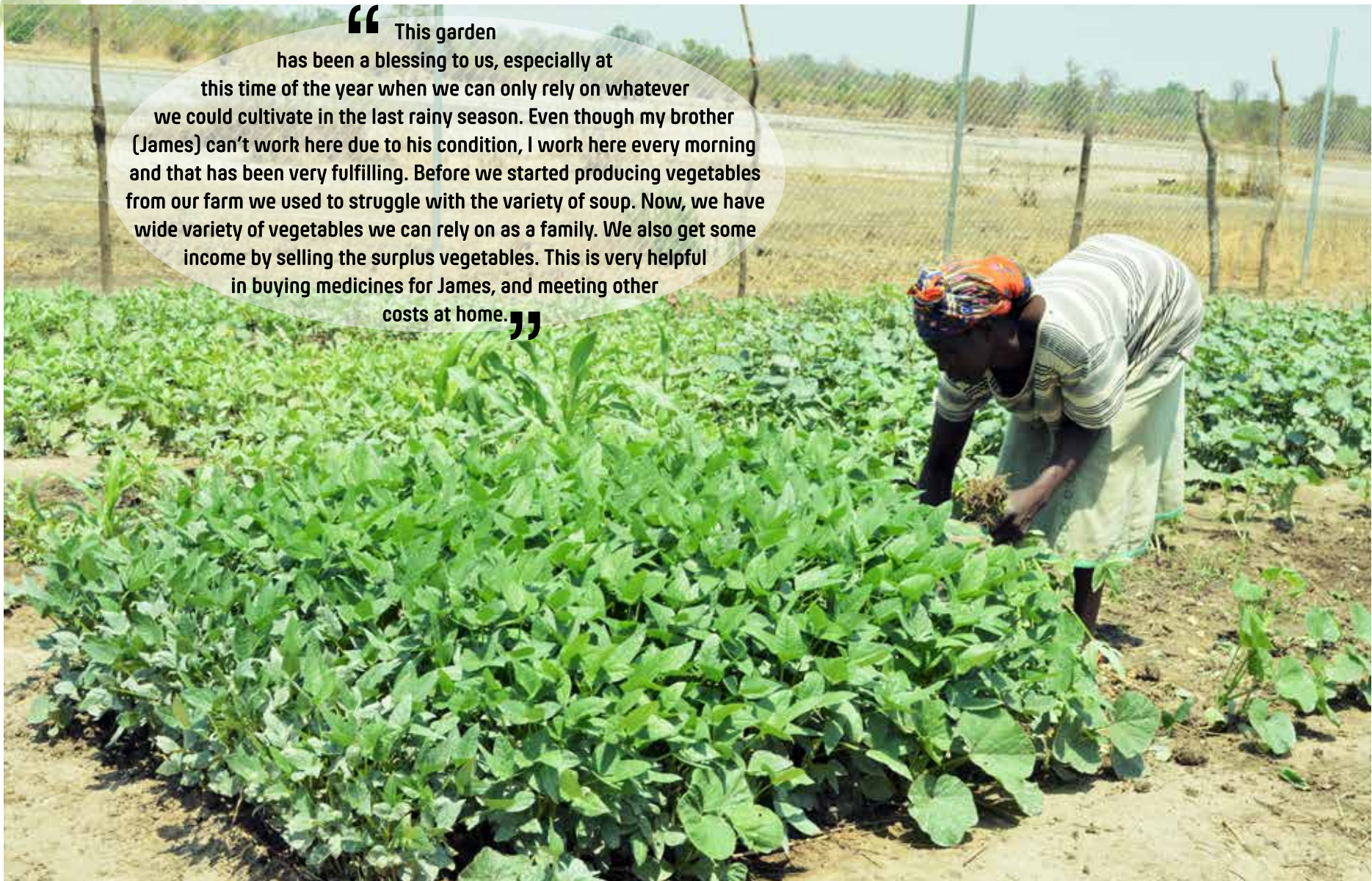
Stephen Kunyamba, 48, resides in Gbeogo, a community located in the Talensi District. He was diagnosed with Schizophrenia in 2010. BasicNeeds-Ghana facilitated his treatment at the Tongo Health Centre and his condition has now stabilised. Stephen is married with four (4) children. He is also a member of the Gbeogo Self-Help Group.



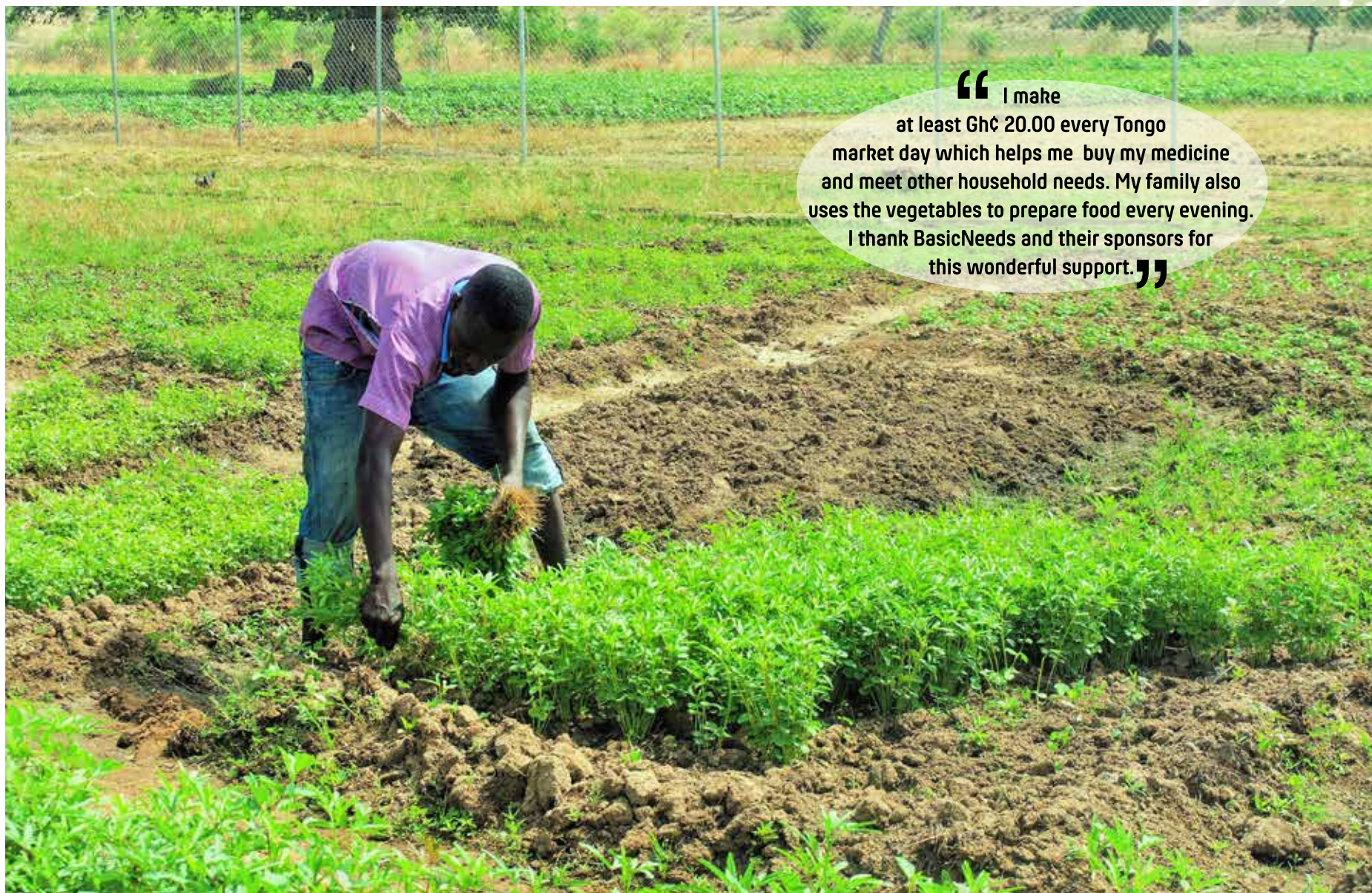
“ I cannot measure how much your support to us through this group has been since we joined as members. Not only have my son been supported with treatment, but you have brought this dry season vegetable farming to us. We didn't have to buy vegetables and through sales of proceeds from the garden, I could afford to buy other ingredients for soup and some medicines when the clinic runs short. I pray God continue to bless your work ”

Martha Banzie is the mother of Paulinus Banzie, a 24 year old man living with epilepsy in Nanvili in the Nadowli District. Paulinus was diagnosed with epilepsy in 2015. Both mother and son are members of the Sungbaala Self-Help Group.

“ This garden has been a blessing to us, especially at this time of the year when we can only rely on whatever we could cultivate in the last rainy season. Even though my brother (James) can't work here due to his condition, I work here every morning and that has been very fulfilling. Before we started producing vegetables from our farm we used to struggle with the variety of soup. Now, we have wide variety of vegetables we can rely on as a family. We also get some income by selling the surplus vegetables. This is very helpful in buying medicines for James, and meeting other costs at home.”



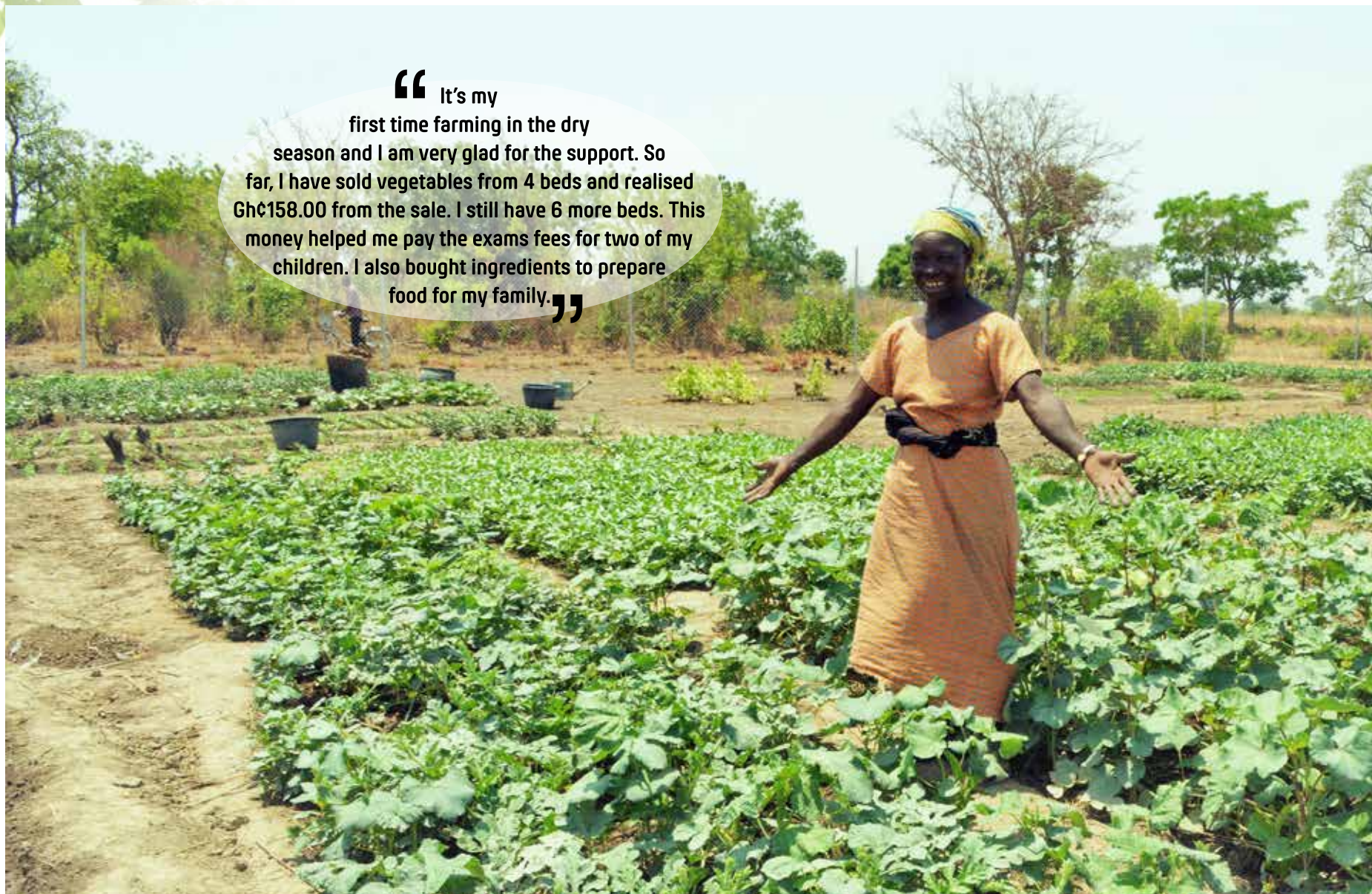
Martha Zienaah is sister and carer to 24 year old James Zienaah. Both of them live in in Nanvilli in the Nadowli District. James has suffered from epilepsy since infancy. His family relied solely on herbal treatment until he started exhibiting signs of psychosis. James was clinically diagnosed during a BasicNeeds-Ghana specialist outreach in 2014 with epilepsy and psychosis. He was placed on medication and his condition has improved. Both Martha and James are members of the Sungbaala Self-Help Group.



“ I make
at least Gh¢ 20.00 every Tongo
market day which helps me buy my medicine
and meet other household needs. My family also
uses the vegetables to prepare food every evening.
I thank BasicNeeds and their sponsors for
this wonderful support.”

Tegelik Ononguob, 43 years and from the Gbeogo community, was diagnosed with epilepsy in 2009. He has been supported by BasicNeeds-Ghana to access regular medication from the Tongo Hospital. Tegelik, whose condition is stable, was supported to undertake dry season gardening in the Gbeogo community.


“ It’s my first time farming in the dry season and I am very glad for the support. So far, I have sold vegetables from 4 beds and realised Gh¢158.00 from the sale. I still have 6 more beds. This money helped me pay the exams fees for two of my children. I also bought ingredients to prepare food for my family.”



Rose Daanaah is the wife of Matthew Daanaah. They have 4 children. Matthew started showing signs of mental illness in 2010 while working in the Brong-Ahafo Region. This caused him to move his family back to their hometown, Nanvilli in the Nadowli District. Matthew was diagnosed with psychosis in 2014 and he is currently being supported with treatment. Rose Daanaah has been the breadwinner of the family ever since. She was supported to get access to farmland to use for her vegetable garden. She was also given garden tools and seeds to begin dry season vegetable gardening.



Yinbil Dorg, 55, was diagnosed with epilepsy in 2011 during a BasicNeeds-Ghana organised Specialist outreach clinic. He later joined the Gbeogo self-help group. She is now very stable and, thanks to the intervention of the Johnson and Johnson funded project, Yinbil is now self-reliant and makes at least Gh¢ 30.00 every Tongo market day which she uses for her medication and other needs.



“ I
have also harvested and
sold some of the vegetables to
earn income to cater for Iddi Joseph
educational needs and the upkeep
of the entire family.”

Iddi Joseph is five year old boy from Voggu, a community under Kumbungu District in Northern Region of Ghana. He was born to Iddi as the father and Zuwera as the mother. He attends Voggu Roman Catholic Primary School. Iddi Joseph and the carer are members of Voggu Self Help Group of people with mental illness or epilepsy and their primary carers since 2014. This group were supported by BasicNeeds-Ghana with Funding from JJC to construct a vegetable gardening in their community in which Joseph is a beneficiary of the project.



“ We have produced kenaf, beans, okro and water melon for consumption. What we are not able to consume at home, we sell to take care of my son’s needs.”

Abukari Sualey (left) and his mother (right) are from Voggu, a community in the Kumbungu District. Sualey’s condition was first thought to be measles. It affected his one side, both leg and hand. Upon several attempts by the traditional healers to treat him, his condition got worsens until they visited Tamale Teaching Hospital where he was diagnosed of epilepsy. Sualey has being a member of Voggu Self Help Group of people with mental illness or epilepsy and their primary carers 2014. They are beneficiaries of Johnson&Johnson Company funded garden project.



“ We were given seeds, fencing materials, gardening tools and tools such as garden forks, watering cans and Wellington boots that made our work easy. After harvesting I sold my vegetables and made Gh100.00 aside what we have consumed at home.”

Issahaku Memunatu lives in Voggu, a community in the Kumbungu District. She is a carer to Zeinab who was diagnosed of epilepsy in 2015. Both mother and daughter were assessed are beneficiaries of Johnson&Johnson Company Limited funded garden project at Voggu.

Key Lessons From The Project

The livelihoods project, titled *“BasicNeeds promoting gardening for improved mental health, food and income security”* is one of the interventions implemented by BasicNeeds-Ghana to enhance the economic and general well-being of people with mental illness or epilepsy and their carers. It was funded by the Johnson and Johnson Company Limited.

Working together with community volunteers and partners, the project team embarked on a needs assessment of potential beneficiaries, most of whom were members of self-help groups of people with mental illness and/or epilepsy. In the end, ninety-five (95) people, made up of forty-eight (48) stabilised mental health service users and forty-five (47) carers, were supported to establish vegetable gardens that would enable them become productive in the community. This served to reinforce the notion that proper targeting was key to ensuring that interventions benefited the right people.

Among the key lessons learnt is that when people with mental illness and/or epilepsy are supported to undertake livelihood activities, they are more inclined to reduce their dependency on others and continue their treatment even if they have to pay for it themselves. This was particularly evidenced by the testimonies of beneficiaries. Tegelik Ononguob, a 43 year old beneficiary from Gbeogo in the Talensi District said “I make at least Gh¢ 20.00 every Tongo market day which helps me buy my medicine and meet other household needs. My family also uses the vegetables to prepare food every evening.”

Extensive engagements with stakeholders to

solicit their support for projects can ensure adequate local resources are made available for use. This was the lesson learnt following engagements with community landowners, traditional authorities, key opinion leaders and officials from the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA). Arable lands located near reliable sources of water were released by these stakeholders for gardening. Extension Officers from MOFA also provided technical support to the beneficiaries.

Evidence was also produced to buttress the fact that people with mental illness or epilepsy could be productive when they receive support and the right resources. Apart from enhancing their self-confidence, the project has improved public attitudes towards people with psychosocial needs, reduced stigma and discrimination against them and given them a means of earning income. Zalia, a carer who hails from Takorayiri in West Mamprusi District said “People initially thought my child was useless and could not contribute anything meaningfully and economically to my family but she has proved them wrong.”

Apart from being able to meet their nutritional needs from consuming the fresh vegetables they produce, project beneficiaries can now gain some income from selling their surplus produce. According to some beneficiaries, the income they realise from selling their produce is used to support their families, pay



A beneficiary sells her surplus vegetables to earn income

school fees of their wards and buy medicine. Iddi, a resident of Voggu in the Kumbungu District and carer to 5-year old Joseph, said “I have harvested and sold some of the vegetables to earn income to cater for my son’s educational needs and the upkeep of the entire family.” This shows that the burdens families bear in taking care of their relatives who are diagnosed with mental illness or epilepsy can be alleviated if such carers are supported to undertake livelihood activities in a sustainable manner.

In summary, this project amply demonstrates that people with mental illness or epilepsy and their carers can function as productive members of society if they receive the right treatment and support to engage in productive activities.

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