

# Okandjira communal garden delivers the goods

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Windhoek-The organic communal garden at Okandjira settlement in Otozondjupa region is producing healthy vegetables for domestic consumption and the surplus is sold, giving members of this garden good income.

Dr Michaela Fink from Pallium, a German non-governmental organization which funded the setting up of the garden, said the project which is built on a 1,140 square meter piece of desert sand – is watered with drip irrigation, does not use chemicals but only organic fertilizers from Okahandja and dried cow and goat manure from Okandjira. She said the garden is producing enough tomatoes, spinach, cabbage, onions, carrots, green pepper, while pumpkins, melons and maize are also cultivated. The villagers who works on the garden, says Fink, is a former farm worker at Midgard farm and has experience in farming.

"The garden now feeds eight households with twenty-five members (44 during school holidays) and some elderly persons from the neighbourhood.

Furthermore, farmers earn increasing income from selling part of the harvest on the local market and at a nearby tourist lodge. Currently the project is being expanded to a size of 2,654 square meter and a pond has been implemented to store additional 120,00 m<sup>3</sup> of

rainwater that will be used during dry seasons," said Fink. The garden is using harvested rain water and the facilities to collect it was constructed by two Kenyans with expertise in rainwater harvesting, Isaac Kariuku and Joseph Macura from OneWorld Consultants. The two constructed two water storage tanks, a greenhouse for growing and shade nets to protect the vegetables from direct sunlight. A team from Pallium was also involved in the construction.

The initiative for setting up a garden at Okandjira was spearheaded by the Director of the Women Solidarity Namibia, Rosa Namises and funded by Pallium. Namises, whose sister is also a member of the garden, said the project has changed life at Okandjira. "I can see hope in people's eyes again," she said.

Fink said after the first harvest, the farmers earned income of N\$23,000 from their sales and with the expansion of the garden and enough water, they expect even more income in the future.

She said despite all these achievements, the garden members have an outstanding wish that has not been fulfilled which is to have a well that could ensure the sustainability of the garden as well as the daily water requirements for all the 26 households at the settlement.

"If enough water is available per year, four periods of cultivation are possible," said Kariuki. Impressed by the success of garden, Fink said Pallium would like to replicate the Okandjira communal garden as a model project also for other vulnerable communities in the country and is now seeking for cooperation in Germany and Namibia. Pallium gives fund aid to research and social projects.