# english black

# Package 90, Script 8

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**Women use ‘hanging gardens’ to grow vegetables and solve land crisis**

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### Notes to broadcaster

In many developing countries, malnutrition, hunger and poverty are common. Kenya is on the brink of being ravaged by these same problems. Citizens remain very vulnerable to hunger. In places where there is little land for agriculture, some farmers have given up farming.

“Hanging gardens” is the name given to crops grown in synthetic or sisal sacks filled with soil. Plants are grown on the sides of the sacks. It’s amusing how plants hang from the sides of the sack gardens! The idea of using hanging gardens to grow food comes at a time when many smallholder farmers are desperate about their future. Food insecurity is one of the consequences of land shortages. Therefore, this innovative way of maximizing land use is of great use to any society faced with a shortage of agricultural land.

This script is based on real characters from the slum area of Kibera. These people give us an insight into the solutions to landlessness in Kenya. Malnutrition amongst poor people in urban centres and villages together with poverty are the major issues addressed in this script. It also addresses the issue of gender imbalance in families. Women with whom the writer spoke confessed that their husbands wanted to stop them from coming up with solutions to malnutrition and poverty. But these women manage to rise above the actions of their husbands and prove their innovativeness.

This script is based on actual interviews. You could use this script as inspiration to research and write a script on a similar topic in your area. Or you might choose to produce this script on your station, using voice actors to represent the speakers. If so, please make sure to tell your audience at the beginning of the program that the voices are those of actors, not the original people involved in the interviews.

*Signature tune*

Presenter: Hello dear listeners, welcome to your favorite program, *Shambani* (*Editor’s note:* Shambani *means “in the garden” in Swahili*). In this program, we look at some of the challenges which smallholder farmers in Kenya face. We also look at ways of tackling them, and present new discoveries and achievements. Today as before, you are with me, Stanley Ongwae.

*Signature tune up and under presenter*

Presenter: Today in our program, I am going to introduce you to a very new farming method. This new method doesn’t require much land to produce vegetables. It originates in the slums of Kibera, on the west side of Nairobi. The new farming concept has helped many residents to improve their diet and earn cash. Stay tuned and learn more about hanging gardens.

*Signature tune up and out*

Presenter: Population pressure on land in many farming communities in Africa continues to increase steadily. As a result of the likely land crisis, there may well be food shortages. People in cities and towns mainly rely on food from up country and are likely to be greatly affected.

According to a report released by the International Food Policy Research Institute on World Food Day in 2009, many people in the developing world are faced with severe famine. If we sit down, worry and don’t do anything about it, the situation is bound to get worse. But there is good news for those without enough farmland. The hanging gardens system of farming is one of the tested solutions to the problem. The method has brought happiness and hope to urban and landless rural farmers. Stay tuned for more about hanging gardens.

*Gospel song with theme of hope for tomorrow*

Presenter: Welcome back. Listeners, do you know the *Swahili* proverb: *akili ni mali,* which means “innovation is wealth”? Can you imagine how innovative it would be if you could harvest bags and bags of *sukuma wiki* (*Editor’s note: local Swahili name for kale*) at your doorstep or on your rooftop? Did you know that you don’t need to own a large piece of land to eat well?

We are talking about hanging gardens.

In slums, there is no land for cultivation. The little space available between houses is very small and usually paved over. Yet people from the slums, the majority of whom are women, have managed to produce enough sukuma wiki for their own consumption and for sale in their neighborhoods.

Hanging gardens grow vegetables in synthetic or sisal sacks filled with soil and organic materials. The sacks stand on the ground. Where the land is sloping, the sacks are supported with stones at their bases so that they can stand firmly on the ground. The larger the sack, the larger the number of sukuma wiki it can grow. Sukuma wiki seedlings are planted in holes drilled in the sides of the sacks. An average sack stands approximately five feet high. To make sure that the soil in the sacks does not dry out, it is recommended that white sacks be used. White sacks reflect the sun’s heat and decrease evaporation.

About fifty sukuma wiki plants can be grown in a single sack.

Our reporter takes us to a group of women from Kibera, west of Nairobi. These women grow sukuma wiki on their doorsteps using the new system christened the Hanging Gardens of Kibera.

Ruth and Kerubo are pioneers of the system. They will share their experiences with our reporter.

*Sounds of strong winds, iron sheets clattering, women murmuring and children playing*

**Reporter:** Ruth, is this magic? Where did you get this great idea to use hanging gardens?

*Voices of women silencing interrupting children*

**Ruth:** *(Giggles)* No magic here. This is our own idea which we invented to deal with poverty and malnutrition in our children. We could not afford a good diet for our children, because of the high cost of food in the city.

**Reporter:** Wow! How long have you been practicing the system?

**Kerubo:** It is about one year since we started. We are really encouraged!

**Ruth:** All these years we never thought crops could thrive here. It’s something new and really inspiring.

**Reporter:** I am seriously thinking of putting up kitchen gardens like yours. What equipment and other things do I need?

**Kerubo:** You will need sacks, organic materials like kitchen waste or compost, and soil.

**Ruth:** You need some seedlings for planting too!

**Reporter:** Oh yes! Does it mean you don’t need seeds?

**Both Ruth and Kerubo:** A farmer can plant his sukuma wiki seeds in a nursery and later transplant the seedlings. But in our case, we planted seedlings from a nursery.

**Reporter:** What about meat balls – will they do well?

*All burst into laughter*

**Ruth:** (*Still laughing*) Hey! Come on! Meat balls will take a whole millennium to grow into an animal!

**Reporter:** (*Still laughing*) I’m just kidding! But did you buy the seedlings?

**Kerubo:** We bought the seedlings from a nearby nursery.

**Reporter:** How about inputs like fertilizer and manure? Did you have to buy them?

**Both Ruth and Kerubo:** Yes.

**Ruth:** But we only bought fertilizer.

**Reporter:** How about manure?

**Kerubo:** We use kitchen wastes as manure, and it gives good results as you can see. We also use kitchen water to nourish the sukuma wiki because fresh and clean water is expensive. And the plants are healthy, as you can see.

*Sound of leaves of sukuma wiki being plucked*

**Reporter:** They look very succulent.

**Kerubo:** They’re very nutritious when cooked.

**Reporter:** Any successful farmer has to take full control of pests and diseases. How do you ensure this?

**Ruth:** We haven’t seen many pests on our crops. Just a few – like white and yellow butterflies and aphids. We spray them with a local mixture of pepper and garlic which keeps them away.

**Kerubo:** I remember my grandmother educated me on how to prepare a local pesticide. I also remember reading in high school that fungal and bacterial diseases on sukuma wiki – such as head rot and downy mildew – can be prevented by allowing good air circulation in the soil.

**Reporter:** How can you get circulation in the soil of hanging gardens?

**Kerubo:** We drill small holes in the sacks to increase air circulation. Also, we stack the soil in the sack loosely. Or, you can insert objects like small wooden sticks which make space for air to circulate. Remember that the objects should be placed so they create space for good soil circulation.

**Reporter:** Initiatives like this bring hope for raising the living standards of people like you. How has this initiative changed your lives?

**Kerubo:** It has really changed our lives. In a good week I can sell up to 500 shillings (*Editor’s note: about 6 ½ US dollars or almost 5 Euros*) worth of sukuma wiki just here in our neighbourhood. I can use the cash to buy other foods like meat and fruit for a perfect diet.

**Reporter:** How about you, Ruth?

**Ruth:** (*Chuckling*) My family’s life has significantly changed because of this project. My children’s health has improved because they eat more green vegetables. I can pay their school fees on time. And they are not sent back home for fees like used to happen before. No doubt I am the happiest mother in all of Kibera.

*They all laugh*

**Reporter:** One last worry I have is about the involvement of your men in these initiatives. How are they involved?

**Ruth:** At first, my husband did not want to see me try these things. But he came to realize how good it was when he first tasted the fresh greens from our garden. He even encouraged me to increase the number of gardens by giving me cash to buy fertilizer and seedlings.

**Reporter:** Why would the husbands not allow you to try these projects?

**Ruth:** They used to say it was a man’s job.

**Kerubo:** I remember quarrelling with my man over the same issue. But he came to like it when he saw my friend appreciate his wife’s project. Nowadays, he sprays and waters the vegetables while I am at the market.

**Reporter:** Thank you, ladies, for finding time to talk to me. Be blessed and keep alive the hope of becoming more successful urban farmers.

*Gospel music about the beauty of Eden*

Presenter: Well, you have heard it from Ruth and Kerubo. Their great determination and willpower to see their families get a better diet and a little cash has borne good and admirable results, thanks to hanging gardens.

You too can benefit from hanging gardens. You can make good use of a small piece of land to grow as many crops as you can. For better results, remember these three important things: first, keep the sacks well-ventilated. Secondly, keep the plants well-watered and sprayed with safe pesticides and fungicides to prevent pests and diseases. Above all, remember that hanging gardens are best suited for crops like sukuma wiki, cowpeas, onions and other crops which do not have extensive root systems or don’t grow to heights greater than three feet.

*Signature up and under*

Presenter: What a great time it was talking about hanging gardens. Well, that is all the time we have today. If you have a question or a comment about today’s program, please feel free to write to this e-mail address: [stan.ongwae@gmail.com](mailto:stan.ongwae@gmail.com). Or you can call direct on +254 720 576113.

Bye till next week same day same time for another exciting episode of your program *Shambani*. From me, Stanley Ongwae, it’s good bye and may you have an innovative day in your *shamba* (*Editor’s note: Swahili word for “farm”*).

*Signature tune up and out*

## Acknowledgements

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## Information sources

* Ruth Singori, Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya.
* Esther Kerubo, Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya

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