

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, August 16, 2012 10:03 AM
To: H
Subject: FW: not exactly the farming we were going for

This is great traffic – despite the sad topic.

It shows your impact.

Matt was original architect on team of drafting the food security strategy we announced in UNGA 2009 (he is now in Nigeria working).

Cindy is our cindy who replaced him on that project and how has gone to CSO

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From: Huang, Cindy Y
Sent: Thursday, August 16, 2012 9:36 AM
To: Matthew Stremiau; Toiv, Nora F
Cc: Mills, Cheryl D
Subject: RE: not exactly the farming we were going for

Matt, I am going to Lagos and Port Harcourt next week to scope conflict prevention/mitigation activities ... any thoughts on who I should talk to beside the usual NGOs etc? We'd also like to talk to the best think tanks.
 Thanks! Cindy

From: Matthew Stremiau [mailto:]
Sent: Thursday, August 16, 2012 9:33 AM
To: Toiv, Nora F
Cc: Mills, Cheryl D; Huang, Cindy Y
Subject: Re: not exactly the farming we were going for

I know...it's heartbreaking...there are lots of people growing marijuana in southern Nigeria around where I've been working. There's also a lot of trafficking. There's a guy who shows up every week at the hotel where I stay who has BOLIVA spelled out on his license plates. Unfortunately, it's a rapidly escalating problem in West Africa. Matt

On Wed, Aug 15, 2012 at 10:49 AM, Toiv, Nora F <ToivNF@state.gov> wrote:

The New York Times

August 14, 2012

Grandmas Grow Gold in Swaziland

By LYDIA POLGREEN

PIGGS PEAK, Swaziland — After her daughters died, Khathazile took in her 11 orphaned grandchildren without hesitation. It is what a gogo, or grandmother, does in a country where the world's highest H.I.V. infection rate has left a sea of motherless children.

“God will help us,” she said.

Perhaps. But Khathazile has some insurance in case divine intervention fails: Swazi Gold, a highly potent and valuable strain of marijuana that is sought after in the thriving drug market of next-door South Africa. In a field deep in the forest, atop a distant hill in this arid corner of tiny Swaziland, Khathazile grows Swazi Gold to keep her growing brood of grandchildren fed, clothed and in school.

“Without weed, we would be starving,” explained Khathazile, who asked that only her middle name be used.

Khathazile is one of thousands of peasants eking out a meager living in the rural areas of this kingdom at Africa's southern tip by growing marijuana, according to relief workers, embracing it as a much-needed income boost that is relatively hardy and easy to grow.

She does not think of herself as part of a vast global chain of drug cultivation that includes poppy farmers in Afghanistan or coca growers in Latin America. She simply has her grandchildren to consider and says she started growing it when her attempts at other crops failed.

“If you grow corn or cabbages, the baboons steal them,” Khathazile said.

Swaziland, Africa's last absolute monarchy, is officially a middle-income country. But deep poverty remains the rule here in the rural hinterlands around Piggs Peak, a dusty town in the country's mountainous northwest. Not much grows in its rocky soil, and jobs are tough to find. Many young people flee to Swaziland's two big cities, Mbabane and Manzini, or to neighboring South Africa to look for work.

That leaves behind a lot of old women and children. Aggressive rollout of antiretroviral therapy has helped curb the country's AIDS death rate, but the disease has hollowed out virtually every family in one way or another, leaving older siblings caring for younger ones and frail grandparents struggling to raise small children once again.

It is the story of Khathazile's family. In 2007, her daughter Tensile died at the age of 24, she said, leaving behind four orphaned children to take in. A couple of years later another daughter, Spiwe, died, leaving three more mouths to feed. They, too, came to live with their gogo. Then in July, her daughter Nomsa died, leaving behind four more children. There was nothing to be done but move them into her one-room hut as well.

“I cannot abandon these kids,” Khathazile said.

Such families struggle to make ends meet. “Most people are farming in a way that depends on rain,” said Tshepiso Mthimkhulu, an official at Swaziland's Red Cross, based in Piggs Peak. “There are many orphans and widows who have difficulty surviving.”

There is certainly a market for their alternative source of income. According to the United Nations, South Africa has reported rising marijuana use, and Swaziland appears to be an eager supplier. The country, a tiny nation of about 1.4 million people, was reported to have more acreage under marijuana cultivation in 2010 than India, a nation more than 180 times its geographic size.

Sibongile Nkosi, 70, said she started growing marijuana even before her daughter died and left her with two orphans to feed. She had heard from other women in her village, which sits on a hilltop on the outskirts of Piggs Peak, that the plant could earn a decent return.

"I put the seeds in the ground, watered them, and it grew," she said of her first crop. "I was able to feed my children."

Marijuana cultivation may provide a safety net, but the grandmothers of Piggs Peak are hardly drug kingpins. They must find a secret field to plant, often one deep in the forest, which they reach by walking for hours. Clearing a patch is tough work, even for women long accustomed to hard labor. They have to buy seeds, if they are new at planting, as well as manure. Not enough manure and the crop fetches a lower price. It must be carefully pruned to produce the right kind of flowers. And they have to watch out for weeds.

"Weeds are very bad for weed," Ms. Nkosi said.

Then there are the police. They often search for marijuana fields in March and April, just before the harvest, and burn them to the ground, leaving the women with nothing to show for their hard work.

A good harvest can yield as much as 25 pounds of marijuana. But they sell to middlemen who come through the villages at harvest time, and have little bargaining power. Most make less than \$400 per crop.

"The men come from South Africa to buy, but they cheat us," Ms. Nkosi said. "What can we do? If you sit with it the police can come and arrest you."

Enterprising growers bury part of their harvest in watertight barrels deep in the woods, saving them until December when the supply dries up and prices rise. But most of the grandmothers need the money last week, not six months from now.

Ms. Nkosi said she had never been tempted to sample her crop.

"It makes you drunk," she exclaimed when asked if she had ever smoked marijuana. "If I try it I will fall on the ground!"

Marijuana had provided her family with enough to survive, but she wondered if it was really worth it.

"I don't want to grow it anymore," Ms. Nkosi said. "The money is too little."

But as this year's planting season began, she was gearing up for another crop. School fees for her two remaining grandchildren at home would be nearly \$400 next school year, she said, and she had no other way to earn the money.

"When you are in poverty you must do whatever you can to live," she said. "If I earn a little something my heart will be content."

Mukelwa Hlatshwayo contributed reporting.

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Matthew Strelau
The Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard University
52 Oxford Street
Room 468
Cambridge, MA 02138

email:

phone:

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