

# Sauti Nyajani

## Voices of the Field



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Promoting Farmer Innovation in Farmer Field School (PFI-FFS) is a UNDP-funded initiative operating in 7 districts in Kenya; Narok, Nakuru, Bomet, Mwingi, Kitui, Taita-Taveta and Kilifi. The objective of the program is to increase farmer innovation and experimentation at community level for food production, natural resource management and income generation. Main activities include promoting the role of indigenous knowledge through farmer to farmer extension, and supporting field-based farmer-driven learning and experimentation through the Farmer Field School approach. During 2003 approximately 15 000 farmers are involved in PFI-FFS activities in Kenya.



**FFS graduates in Nakuru receive their certificates of learning from Dr. Abate, FAO during a festive graduation ceremony at Nakuru showground.**

Of the 126 groups which were initiated in 2001, 122 successfully completed their season long experimentation, and graduated by the end of 2002. The graduation ceremonies proved to be a good forum for the farmers to display and present what they had learned during the season to other farmers who came to attend the celebrations.

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## From my heart

### ENOUGH FOOD ON THE PLATE

Food security affects the lives of every citizen in any country. Farmers, the majority of the population in Kenya thereby serve a crucial role in national life as the backbone to food security. Unfortunately, efforts by farmers to provide more food on their plates have long been hampered by constraints such as; limited access to technologies, poor capital base for investments and purchase of inputs, pests and diseases, unfavourable weather conditions etc.



However, farmers in the PFI-FFS program have proved in their respective villages that food sufficiency and security is achievable, when all key players in the agricultural sector work hand in hand with the farmers to address these issues. The Farmers Field Schools in the Coastal Region have shown that a dramatic increase in maize production is possible. Figures of yield increases from 5 bags to 19 bags per acre have been recorded. The successes documented in these FFS is as a result of team work and trust developed between facilitators (extension staff) and the farmers.

Farmer empowerment is a key outcome of the FFS approach and farmers are now demonstrating this by forming networks at local and district levels to address issues such as marketing and micro-credit access. Farmers should have the same rights and opportunities as other citizens guaranteed by the state which in the view of farmers translates to the right to; land, Government services, good prices for produce, a reliable market, information, a healthy environment, adequate water resources, and enough food on their plates. The farmers' voice has been heard through the FFS, their potential discovered and the lessons learnt should now be scaled up in the country.

*Benjamin Mweri,  
Regional FFS coordinator Coast*

## EMPOWERMENT TAKES UNPREDICTABLE PATHS

### Kayaba FFS - Nakuru District

The members of Kayaba Farmer Field School, Njoro Division, Nakuru, have learnt to stand united to accomplish what ever they want. Not only have they succeeded in growing and selling tomatoes, but they have also started literacy education for adults in their village.

One of the oldest members in the Kayaba FFS, Bilha Wanjine Ndegwa, was the first to bring the issue of alphabetisation on the agenda. "I never went to school, but when we started the FFS and did the weekly field analysis (AESA) we were asked to take notes in our notebooks, and I was very embarrassed when I couldn't do it. It even came to a point where I thought of abandoning the FFS", she says.

At first, she thought she was the only one in the group that was illiterate, but later she realised that they were many. "We found that most of our members could not read or write. From that moment we got the idea of starting adult literacy classes", Bilha Wanjine Ndegwa recalls. The FFS and the literacy school are working close together and have many members in common. Jointly, they have initiated a tree nursery that both the FFS and the literacy school will benefit from.



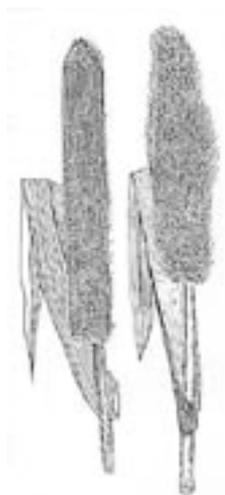
Bilha Ndegwa showing visitors to Kayaba FFS that she can now write her name.

Kayaba FFS experimented on tomatoe production and last season earned as much as 89.000 KSh from their hired field plot. They also tried out three different varieties of onions and have now decided to start growing the best variety commercially. The vegetables that the group planted last season were unfortunately attacked by dry season insects. But also failure leads to knowledge and now the Kayaba FFS has learnt to use *wadudu marafiki* (friendly insects) to eliminate harmful pests. Learning and gaining experience is an on-going process in Kayaba FFS and the hope for a brighter future is strong. "We have now become farmer experts in our villages and can teach others. But although we have learnt a lot, we can still go further", stresses one of the former illiterate members of Kayaba FFS, while Bilha Ndegwa states "Before, if I wanted to withdraw 10,000 shillings, the bank man might write 20,000 and I would be fooled. Now this won't happen any more since I can write my name and understand figures."

*Åsa Forsman,  
Drylands Development Centre*

## THE DILEMMA OF CHOOSING A MILLET VARIETY

### Muliluni FFS - Mwingi District



When Muliluni FFS was established in August 2001 the 32 members identified inappropriate crop varieties and low rainfall as major farming constraints. This led to the decision by the group to choose bulrush millet production as their main study focus in the FFS. Millet is a popular crop in the area, fairly drought tolerant and has a high nutritional value but the farmers felt that their knowledge was poor when it came to deciding which variety to plant.

At the onset of the season on-farm trials were established to test four bulrush millet varieties; KPM1, KPM2, KPM3 (KARI-Katumani) and a local variety. The varieties were planted in plots of 10x10 meters. All plots were given the same treatments, such as date

of planting, fertilizer application, weeding etc. The rainfall during the season was adequate in quantity but was poorly distributed with a dry spell of 2 week at a crucial stage of crop development.

The Muliluni farmers nicknamed KPM2 "Kasuruali" meaning short trousers due to its short stature. KPM3 was nicknamed "Kasati" meaning a shirt, for which no clear explanation was given. The farmers concluded that KPM3 was superior compared to other varieties. It gave the highest yield, matured quickly, had the biggest grains and was more tolerant to bird damage. However, the farmers kept in mind that if rainfall patterns had been more favourable KPM1 and the local variety might have given higher yields. All in all the Muliluni farmers thereby concluded that "We are going to plant more of the KPM3 variety in the future, but to spread the risk we will also plant a bit of other varieties. If the rains are short we are sure to harvest something from KPM2, and if rains are long, though that is rare here, we might harvest well from KPM1 and the local variety.

*D.K Mwangi,  
District FFS Coordinator. Mwingi*

## TOMATOES, THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

### Kiriba FFS - Nakuru District

Coming to Kiriba Farmer Field School in Rongai Division means to be welcomed by only women. For in this village, it was the women who started the FFS and succeeded in earning big money on their common plot, parallel to the on-farm training. The reputation of Kiriba FFS as a vigorous and committed group is true both in regards to their results and to the cohesiveness of the group.

Of the one acre made available by the host farmer, Kiriba FFS in its first year used half for experimentation and half for commercial use. Onions were planted as a study crop with the purpose of examining which varieties grew best and whether fertilisers or manure should be used. The conclusion was that manure worked better than fertilizer but some compost could be added if manure did not provide enough nutrients for the plants.

On the commercial plot tomatoes, beans and courgettes have flourished. Kiriba FFS did not only thrive in cultivating vegetables; they did also choose the right moment for selling them. By timing the market, they earned a big amount from a small plot. From tomatoes only, that gave the highest income to the group, they earned 102,000 KSh.

The members in the group are very happy with what they have learned in the field school. "We understand farming better, but also economical issues have become clearer", says one of the women. Of the money earned, the group have decided

to give each of the members 1.000 KSh. The rest of the sum will be used for investments in their common plot. Kiriba FFS will continue to grow tomatoes and in addition they will also cultivate onions and beans for commercial purpose. "If we continue like this, we will end up very well", concludes one of the members in Kiriba FFS.



The women of Kiriba Farmer Field School proudly showing their freshly picked tomatoes.

*Åsa Forsman,  
Drylands Development Centre*



**Murwa FFS, Central division, Narok performing a drama, during a farmers field day.** The drama addresses the need for farmers to work hard on their farms and stay away from alcohol abuse in order to fight hunger and poverty in the village.

Traditional forms of entertainment such as songs, dances and plays have proved to be effective means of disseminating information at community level. No modern technology is required and these media are especially useful when illiteracy levels are high. In FFS, traditional media are widely used during farmers field days by the FFS groups to communicate different aspects of farming, livelihood or survival to other members of the community. Plays have proved especially effective in addressing sensitive issues such as HIV/AIDS, alcohol abuse and domestic violence.



**Mrs. Gertrude Katana Masha, a farmer innovator in Kilifi District has found a solution to termite destruction of young trees.** In order to protect young coconut seedling from termites she plants Kyatha, seedling (*Synadenium compactum*, other local names are Chatsa or Watha) beside the young coconut plant. The poisonous roots of the Kyatha acts as a repellent against termites and the plant is left to grow alongside the coconut tree until the tree is big enough to withstand termite attacks (usually after 2 years). This method also works to protect other trees such as grevillia and cashew nut which are highly susceptible to termites. Maize crops can be protected by preparing a concoction made by boiling the leaves of the Kyatha together with cowpea roots and then apply the solution around the growing maize plants. Mrs Masha is also the secretary of Simba FFS and has shared her knowledge with the other members of the group.



A guide to Maize marketing, FAO 1999

### Plot ya idiwuke

Shule hii inaitwa Bolenyi FFS ikiwa iko Dembwa. Shule hii imenifunza mambo mengi ya ukulima bora kama vile, kutayarisha shamba kwa kuchimbua na kuweka mbolea kwa mimea. Na kuweka madawa kwa mimea kama vile dawa ya kuwauwa wadudu na dawa ya kuboresha mimea. Na kuweka maji kwa mimea. Na kushikana kuwa kitu kimoja kwa upendo.

### Somo la soko

Somo la soko limenifundisha mambo ya kujitayarisha kuwa tayari kwa mauzo. Kuchunguza kama watu watanunua bidhaa zangu. Na kuamua jinzi ya kuendesha biashara. Kupanga hesabu ya gharama ya biashara. Kupanga hesabu ya mapato. Mambo ya faida na hasara. Na kuchunguza soko.

Victoria Kileta, Bolenyi FFS

### MIMI NI UDONGO NA LALAMIKA

*I am the soil and I am complaining*

Mini ni udongo, mimi nalalamika,  
Wewe unanilima, kwa manufaa yako binafsi,  
Jua kali na mvua kubwa, hao wote ni adui zangu,  
Unitunze vizuri nami nitakutunza,

Wewe unanikanyaga, kutwa kucha,  
Unanifugisha wanyana wengi, wote wasiohesabika,  
Mimi, naunia, lakini hamunioni,  
Unitunze vizuri nami nitakutunza,

Uniweke mbolea, soi haba wala nyingi,  
Mmomonyoko mnizuilie, kwa kupanda miti,  
Haja zangu mnitimizie, la sivyo mtaumia,  
Unitunze vizuri nami nitakutunza,

Wadudu marafiki, mimi ninawalinda,  
Una kuja kwa hasira, dawa unawanyunyizia,  
Wewe, ni katili, kwa kutojali maislahi yangu,  
Unitunze vizuri, nami nitakutunza.

Poem by Ngiito FFS, Mulot Division, Narok

Farmers, this newsletter is YOURS, please send your contributions of articles, photos and dynamics to us.

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**Farmer! Innovate and Discover to be an Expert**