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 tomato 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 anymore 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 Mwanga,
District FFS Coordinator. Mwingi
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.

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 grevilla 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.
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 kujitayarishia kuwa
tayari kwa mazoe. 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,
Mmomonjoko minzuzile, kwa kupanda miti,
Haja zangu mnishimizie, la sivyo mtaumia,
Unitunze vizuri nami nitakutunza,

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

Poem by Ngiito FFS, Mulot Division, Narok

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Farmer! Innovate and Discover to be an Expert

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