

# IGAMBANG'OMBE MULTIPURPOSE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY (IMCOS)

By Caroline Wambui

For years Tharaka Constituency in Tharaka Nithi County has been faced with numerous challenges ranging from: desertic rocky vegetation, inadequate rains and drying crops forcing the surrounding community to rely on relief food.



*A section of a farm depicting some drying food crops in Tharaka Constituency*

Tired of playing desperate and with a need to transform the dry dusty region into a habitable environment farmers at Kajuki Igambang'ombe Constituency came together to form a self help group: Kajuki traders self help group in 1998.

Their move; a calculative one that would see them access credit via group guarantee mechanism and alleviate poverty by ensuring a food secure region seemed to bear fruits as within a year transformations were evident in terms of bountiful harvests a thing that attracted an increased membership necessitating transformations in the group into a co-operative society.





*A farmer attending to a well tendered farm*

The formation of a co-operative came in handy with increased benefits as farmers were not only able to access credit facilities, but were also in a position to access trainings from different nongovernmental organizations a thing that enabled them have quality produce with the required tonnage to secure stable markets.

“As farmers we were faced with numerous challenges that included poverty, poor soils, ignorance from some farmers who were quite adamant to change. The farmers were neither ready to risk signing a contract to access credit facilities nor were they ready to listen to anyone’s advice on fertilizer use despite the dry desertic climatic conditions in the region,” Patrick Kirema the chair Igambang’ombe Multipurpose Co-operative Society attests.

Upon accessing credit, and consulting widely, sorghum was first considered as its one cereal that can be grown in a wide range of soils and climatic conditions especially the arid regions where other cereals cannot make it without substantial irrigation. Agnes Mugendi a member of the



group adds that, “The other reason that sorghum was considered and was highly welcome was that it could be used both as a grain and forage for the animals,” she attests.

By the year 2005, the group had managed to diversify to other cereals such as pigeon peas and green grams and had managed to attract funds from the government through the constituency development fund (C.D.F.) to establish a warehouse for proper storage where the co-operative could collect produce from farmers easily, add value and sell at a profit. At the same year, the co-operative managed to approach a brewing company: East African Breweries Limited (E.A.B.L.) and secured a contract to supply sorghum thus gaining a steady income and a market assurance for their produce. This meant development and enhanced livelihood as the members were not only in a position of comfortably providing for their families but also educating their children and improving their living structures.



*A section depicting a well tendered farm amidst a dry region*

Out of their great efforts, the co-operative was able to attract different government sectors and nongovernmental organizations among them GRADIF-K a nongovernmental organization that aims at alleviating poverty at the grass root level for support. The co-operative attributes much of its success to GRADIF-K saying that it was the only N.G.O. that was able to walk with them since identifying them in 2014 by mobilizing more members for them to join the co-operative,

supplying farmers with certified seeds from cowpeas, sorghum, green grams among others. The NGO also provided them with a computer last year 2015 to enhance efficiency when it comes to keying in raw data.



*IMCOS staff member distributing seeds donated by GRADIF-K to a member at the office.*

To ensure proper co-ordination in the group GRADIF-K offered training to the co-operative members, the officials and the leaders where some became the T.O.T's – trainers of trainers such that any new member of the group is trained on various leadership issues, latest farming, harvesting and value addition techniques and how to prepare a business plan.





*IMCOS staff members receiving a computer from GRADIF-K*

To date the co-operative confesses of being well equipped in terms of knowledge in managing a group, the best farming techniques to curb climate change effects and the best ways to handle produce during harvest, after harvest and how to aggregate their different produce to secure a stable sustainable market for their produce. To date the co-operative society is still supplying to the brewery a thing that has not only transformed the region in terms of food security but has also created employment in the region.

The current evident transformation that the members of the co-operative are attesting to is on how they have managed to fight food insecurity in a region that previously over relied on relief food and barely being able to produce a bag per acreage where now the farmers faces beam with joy as they can manage an average of 300 kg on green grams and 450kgs of sorghum per acre per farmer. “For the last season, we managed to sell at least 21tonnes of sorghum to E.A.B.L. and planning to improve on the same next season,” attests Kirema.

To still transform the entire region, the co-operative aims at increasing the membership further and utilize any available opportunity in the county government to enhance capacity building by influencing the farmers who have remained adamant, still relying on the traditional methods of farming and who have big chunks of land change their farming techniques and stop relying on natural nutrients and failing to use fertilizers and certified seeds. The co-operative still aims at continuing working with the county government and the nongovernmental organizations to support them in aggregating their produce and securing better markets in and outside the county.