

## **GRADIF-K & DETRA AFRICA NRM/AGRICULTURE SUCCESS STORY**

### **Rabbit –rearing is turning a 26 year old man to a millionaire**

Detra Africa and GRADIF –K have for the past 2 years implemented a project “increased citizenry participation in Governance and management of Natural resources in Tharaka Nithi County” a project funded by Embassy of Sweden and UKAid through ACT! The main focus of the project is to build the capacities of small scale farmers in Tharaka Nithi County to increase their produce in the changing environmental conditions, and also their capacity to effectively address key value chain issues like quality production, value addition, marketing and pricing.

With Agriculture being the key source of livelihoods for the entire population in Tharaka Nithi County, farming has been characterized by weak leadership, poor governance, poor returns due to poor marketing systems. The products are marketed in raw form and most often go to waste due to their perishable nature. Small holder farmers incur losses in the farm due to poor post-harvest handling practises in the farm, while on transit and in the store. The farmers lack appropriate know how and facilities to prevent losses. Changes in environment conditions leading to low unreliable rainfall has led to reduced harvest by the farmers.

In order to address these key challenges faced by the farmers, GRADIF K and Detra Africa has been undertaking various capacity building initiatives for farmers through organizing them in groups for maximum impact, reach and sustainability. During the project period, the two organizations (GRADIF- K and Detra Africa) have held various trainings and exchange learning events for the farmers to various places where they learnt modern and sustainable farming methods. Various exchange visits were conducted in Nyeri, Meru and Tharaka Nithi Counties since 2012.

The project has practically and directly engaged farmers through their small groups, by building their knowledge and skills on appropriate practices for food crops production with high market value, and on drought resistant crops that are resilient to changing environmental conditions. The project has also made efforts to build the capacity of groups to address the challenges of marketing and value addition through formation of marketing associations, bulking of produce and access to better farm inputs. The project is also keen to in future build the capacity of the groups to ensure that the gap on access to credit has been addressed. Through the project, 7 farmers’ networks in various zones have been formed, and 2 major umbrella networks have been registered in order to address these challenges.

Jikaze Youth group is among the small scale farmers groups in Tharaka Nithi County that has benefitted from the project. Nimrod Mugeru, 26 years old man of Jikaze Youth Group and the current Chairman of the group that consists of 10 members is married and has one son. He has a farm of 10 points in Jaina, Chuka Igamba Ng’ombe Sub County where he is rearing rabbits.



Pictured above are farmers from Tharaka Nithi, Meru and Nyeri Counties during learning session, being demonstrated on modern ways of rearing rabbits in the month of July 2013 at Kaanwa village in Chuka-Tharaka Nithi County.

Nimrod used to be a mixed farmer rearing local breeds of cattle and goats. He also used to keep local breeds of rabbits. He could not easily clarify the returns he used to get from these local breeds because he was also not aware on how to keep records, but could clarify that he used to make losses. It was not until he attended various trainings organized by GRADIF and DETRA when he discovered how easy and lucrative it was to rear rabbits. He attended this training in the month of July 2013 at Ms Muthoni's farm in Kaanwa in Tharaka-Nithi County. After the trainings, he was amazed on how it was easy to venture and specialize in commercial rabbits rearing. During an interview with our staff, Nimrod had this to say, *“the exchange visits were an eye opener and they taught me about goat rearing, coffee, chicken rearing and rabbit farming. I took a particular interest in rabbit rearing because it is cheap to rear and not demanding, the feed is readily available since rabbits enjoy eating dry grass and green vegetables that can be found easily in our environment. Rabbits do not need much space and since he has a small piece of land, the project was practical. The rabbits also take a short time to mature which is 4-6 months. I also didn't have finances/ capital to build a big structure and so rabbit farming was a good idea for me”*.

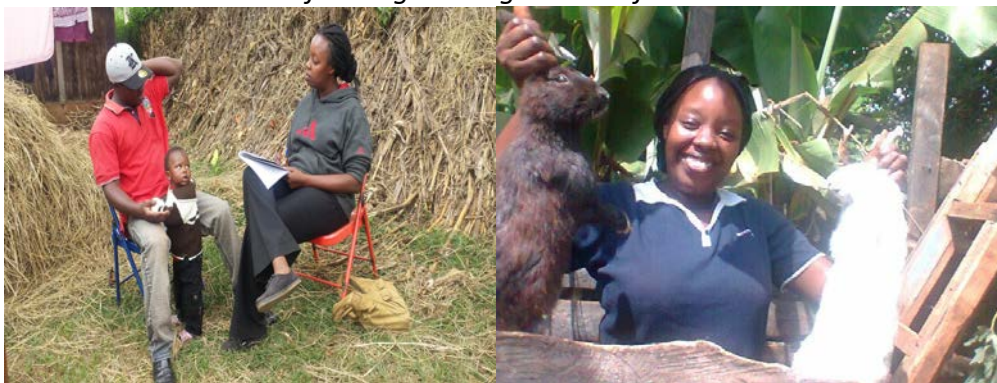


Photo 1-Interview process by project team: Captured in the photo are Mr. Nimrod the beneficiary of the project and DETRA AFRICA volunteer MS. Jessica Micheni. In the second photo is the volunteer holding rabbits from the hutch during the interview process. Behind the scene is a heap of dry grass that he feeds the rabbits with.

*“I started Rabbit rearing exotic breeds of Rabbits in November 2013 after the trainings and till now, I have 39 rabbits in total 14 large and rest small. The main breeds I am rearing are:*

- *California White*

- *Chinchilla Giant*
- *Zebu Giant-Most expensive and matures fast and reaches up to 6kgs on maturity*
- *New Zealand white.*

*The prices for the rabbits range from 750 shillings to 1500 per piece and the demand is growing. I am also admiring the way it's picking up since before Rabbit keeping was culturally known to be the work for young boys and the rabbits used to be sold for as little as 5 shillings. My main market is Chuka University plus the staff, Muthito Butchery and Legacy hotel chuka``.*

*``Through the exchange visits I also learnt to keep accurate records of the rabbits and this has helped me in noticing any anomalies like those that are not good in producing or those that are eating other rabbits. It has also enabled me know when rabbits are mature for selling and the ones to be kept to continue breeding``.*

*From then, I have so far managed to sell 32 mature rabbits which has so far within a period of 6 months after starting the project given me an income of 40,000 after selling each at an average of 1,300 Kshs. He also says that one of the cows that are calving was bought with rabbit income. Nimrod anticipated that by end of this year and with current trend, he will be earning a profit of over 300,000 within the next 6 months when the current rabbits multiplies.*



**Pictured above is Nimrod holding rabbits in front of the rabbit hutch show casing various breeds of rabbits that he is keeping. The second and third photo shows some of the rabbits feeding outside the hutch.**

When asked about the benefits, he said, *``Rabbit .....*

- *The rabbits are easy to rear and maintain and they quickly reproduce and this means that the money he used in the start-up was recovered within six months.*
- *The business has very low operation costs.*
- *The nutritional value, an alternative to chicken since it is white meat.*
- *Rabbits produce very good organic manure which he applies on the water melons, butternut, pili pili hoho and French beans instead of using fertilizer. I also do not have to incur any cost to purchase manure any more*

Nimrod has used his position, as a Chairman in the Jikaze youth Group to mentor other unemployed youth to engage in farming especially on rabbit farming. He has encouraged

the youth to build simple structures and provides the needy youth with young rabbits to kick start this farming venture, for economic empowerment and help them to stop vices of excessive alcohol and Miraa consumption. Every member of the group has now more than 2 rabbits. One of the mentees and youth who has benefited from this mentorship is Morris Murangiri and is a student at Chuka University. So far, Morris is rearing six bucks and one doe. Nimrod has also partnered with Morris (Chuka University student) to deliver the rabbits to Chuka University when there is high demand. Morris is also in the process of securing a loan to build a bigger structure to increase the number of rabbits.

Nimrod's work has not been without challenges. He argues that;

- Insufficient capital for building the modern structure for rabbits- he has the traditional structure and this has hindered keeping the cages clean as the waste remains in the cages. Ideally a modern structure should be raised and constructed with wire mesh and iron sheets to collect the dirt. His structure has led to a lot of dirt accumulation and in turn leading to rabbits contracting disease and so he has to constantly de-worm the rabbits every month which adds an extra cost. Mr Nimrod argues that with sufficient access to capital, he can rear a bigger number to increase the returns.
- Low prices – Nimrod argues that he sells a mature rabbit of 7 kgs at maximum of 1,300 locally. Instead of selling at 1500 because there is no price control. He hopes that the rabbit farmers will one day manage to form a marketing cooperative to help them access external market.
- Capacity building- need to increase number of people to attend exchange visits. Also no Agricultural show in Tharaka Nithi District where farmers can showcase produce and for others to learn on best practices.

In conclusion, rabbit farming has been taken positively by the farmers in Tharaka Nithi County like Nimrod. This is because they require very little capital to start; they consume very little food, very little space, they are not labor intensive and reproduce very fast. The venture is new and the market is ready as long as the farmer produces good quality and enough quantity. This therefore has proved to be a good job creation venture for the jobless youth and low income groups. Well organized groups can concert their efforts to ensure that they can bring their produce together to satisfy the market demand and to negotiate for better market prices and find external market like Jikaze group is targeting after they start producing more rabbits. The group also has a dream of forming a savings scheme and form linkages with local and national credit institutions to help them access credit. Such youth groups are eligible for Youth and Uwezo funds which will help diversify and scale up their businesses.