

A success story of WAMIUKA Farmer's Network in Tharaka South Sub County that has transformed the lives of its members drastically.

Introduction

Detra- Africa and GRADIF-Kenya have been implementing projects in the area of sustainable agriculture and climate change in Tharaka-Nithi County for 2 and half years. One of the key activities was to facilitate the formation and capacity strengthening manageable small scale farmers' groups and networks in Tharaka Nithi county as a key strategy to strengthen advocacy voice in accessing appropriate services from the county and national government, improved marketing of their produce, provision of improved services to community members, enhance citizens participation in the management of natural resources at the county level. This is one of the project's activities funded by the Embassy of Sweden and Ukaid channeled through ACT! grant making organization. This case study aims at analyzing the strategies that have been used by Wamiuka farmers' network from Tharaka South Sub County as contribution to the realization of the goals set by DETRA &GRADIF-K.

Environment Context /Problem statement:

Large parts of Tharaka Nithi County fall in the semi arid region that comprises of large sections of the lower Eastern Region of Kenya. Every year the county experiences persistent drought with resultant famine which makes it one of the areas identified by both the national and county Governments for support with relief foods. Households in Tharaka district predominantly rely on pastoralism and farming as the main source of livelihoods, with a small section depending on the sale of handicrafts & non-wood forest products, and casual labour wages. Farmers reduce risk of crop failure due to erratic rainfall by planting more than one drought resistant crops in addition to keeping livestock. A few engage in off-farm activities to earn extra income in times of extreme weather events. Support programs for enhancing community's adaptive capacity are water harvesting and installation of irrigation equipment in some areas. Despite these initiatives, individual households' efforts have been lacking sound backing from institutional, political and economic systems. This is demonstrated by the limited use of sustainable methods of farming ,climate forecast information. ``...previously, we were not using crop rotation, farm yard manure or fertilizer, neither did we observe proper spacing and correct tillage, in turn crop yields were very low....." Says Telesia; a member of Wamiuka farmers network based in Tharaka. The specific crops cultivated in Tharaka district are maize, millet, sorghum, cowpeas, pigeon peas

and beans. A comparison of the acreage for these crops by seasons shows that Millet and green grams are the most cultivated crops.

Initiative

“ After being visited by DETRA and GRADIF-Kenya things have changed”, says Telesia. GRADIF-Kenya and DETRA-Africa has helped us strengthen our network through capacity building trainings and field mentorship through the financial support from ACT! Kenya. The two organizations have been supporting the implementation of community based projects in the area of natural resource management, sustainable agriculture and climate change in Tharaka-Nithi County for the past 2 and half years now. One of the key approaches that have been applied is that of organizing small-scale farmers’ to form groups and networks, Sacco’s or cooperatives. DETRA & GRADIF have managed to facilitate formation of 7 farmers’ networks which are fully functional and recognized by the county leadership. One of the most successful networks is known as WAMIUKA based in Tharaka South Sub County. Telesia and Salome; both members of WAMUIKA farmers network had this to say “Wamiuka started in the year 2010 as a self-help group of 15 members. The aim was to grow green grams, cowpeas which we were selling to the brokers. After sometime, an organization from Meru County came seeking for partnership to grow gaddam sorghum variety. This attracted more groups to join us and we became a total of 6 groups. However, things did not work for us because the partner pulled out and did not give us a way forward. Some of the member groups also pulled out. Until the year 2012 when Detra & GRADIF-K came in, the group had lost hope. We feel indebted to them because they have helped us revive the group and elevated it to a network with a membership of 36 groups of between 15-50 members each”. DETRA & GRADIF-K have previously been involving the farmer’s networks in our project activities where wamiuka has always registered a high level of commitment. Telesia tells the story “it all started with meetings and network formation; from there we attended farmers exchange visits where we learnt best practices from our fellow farmers. These helped us improve our farms a lot but this has been made better by the various trainings organized by GRADIF-K & DETRA that we have attended. After the trainings, we also train members of the network, and after the community seeing the improvement in our farms they also come seeking knowledge from us. Being trained as TOTs, we disseminate information to all”. When asked the various initiatives they have undertaken, they said, ‘the marketing information we receive has helped us to select the what to plant and where to sell our products,

the training have helped us to embrace modern farming techniques; for instance, we are now doing farming on smaller pieces of land and getting more yields, with the use of fertilizers, soil analysis, crop rotation and intercropping among other farm management practices that we learnt during the trainings. We can also proudly say that through the organization capacity training we were able to develop a good group constitution and registration is at the final stage. We are also participating in establishment of a demo farm where members of the community will learn from and in value addition of our products for better incomes.



WAMIUKA Network Members meeting with GRADIF-K, AGRA Foundation staff and Tharaka Nithi County leaders showing some of their value added juice products on sale.

Key Network's Results/Accomplishments:

Through network initiatives, the WAMIUKA Network has achieved the following:

- Wamiuka has revived the communal farm to plant sorghum which individuals are also doing, this time to enhance food security.
- They are undertaking the bulking of cowpeas and found better markets instead of brokers.
- Undertaking value-addition of green germs through sorting, packaging and branding. They are also making juice from local special medicinal herbs which they are selling to local traders and also targeting other counties.
- Established linkages:

- The area agricultural officer has selected them to pilot growing of Merica Rice variety that requires little water
 - It is one of the major groups which is being supported by GRADIF-K&DETRA Africa to set up a big demo farm with sorghum, millet, green grams, pigeon peas and coupeas; which is a unique activity in the area.
 - They are implementing the table banking concept and merry go round which they use to advance small loans to participating members to finance farm inputs and related operations.
 - GRADIF-K&DETRA are making effort to introduce/link up the network with other development agencies, private sector and the county government for advanced support in their initiatives.
- The network is in the process of forming a Cooperative Society to better serve its members.
 - The Meru herbs is partnering with them in juice making enterprise.
 - WAMIUKA network is recognized by the county leadership and have attended many public forums focusing on agriculture and community development in general.
 - Wamiuka members have diversified crop varieties and are practicing horticultural farming. For instance: Purity has over 100 stems of yellow and purple passion fruits earning 30,000 per month, 130 stems of export pawpaw, and 230 water melons, around 2000 stems of cabbage and kales which are grown organically.

It is hoped that intensified support for such networks' initiatives are the way to go and bear better fruits in the entire county.