

Biovision

Newsletter March 2015

Women bear brunt of responsibility
Role of women farmers in East Africa



A future for all, naturally

Monica Gatobu
Meru, Kenya



“We are self-sufficient and have enough to eat. No longer do we have to rely on food aid and we can sell our surplus produce.”



Community mapping – reviving traditional knowledge

• **Start Date:** June 2011

Biovision is helping local groups integrate traditional knowledge into the development of new, sustainable solutions.

• **Objectives Project Phase 2015**

- Encourage a further 400 farming families to take up agroforestry and use indigenous seeds
- Develop secure storage facilities and so reduce post-harvest losses by 50 %
- Support local groups of farmers to use sustainable methods of agriculture long term.

• **Budget 2015** CHF 55 000.00

• **Account for donations:** PC 87-193093-4

Success in fight against hunger and poverty

Monica and Joseph Gatobu have done it! The couple, who have a small farm in Meru, no longer rely on food aid. By adopting organic methods of cultivation and finding new niche markets they have found a way out of poverty.

It’s a joy to look around their garden. The trees thriving on their 1.5 hectare plot provide shade, wood and fruit and protect the soil from erosion. Sheltering under the tree canopy are piles of compost and manure neatly covered with dried leaves. The various crops are all neatly planted. “That was not always so,” says Monica Gatobu with a smile. “Often harvests were poor; everything just grew wild and at random and yields were very modest,” she recalls. Normally, they just about had enough food for themselves and their children but sometimes not. “When that happened we had to rely on government food aid,” says Monica. Today, Monica and Josef, their disabled son and the two children of their deceased daughter not only have enough food but they can earn money by selling their surplus produce.

Organic methods and local varieties

Things changed when they attended a course in organic farming run by the Kenya Institute for Culture and Ecology (ICE) and financed by Biovision. ICE is committed to maintaining local traditions, preserving and adapting farming methods and protecting the environment. ICE pays particular attention to

indigenous varieties of vegetables, cereals and fruits. Joseph Gatobu thinks that this approach has many advantages. “Our traditional varieties taste good and are healthy. They are easier and cheaper to grow as we don’t have to add chemicals,” he explains and stresses that farmers can produce their own seeds and seedlings from local varieties. This is not the case with modern hybrids; here they are reliant on seed suppliers. “The indigenous plants also require less water and so are more resistant to droughts and disease,” he says with conviction.

Food security and income

The old varieties are also popular on the market. Monica says that in the past such varieties were both common and popular but with the passage of time many were forgotten as you could only buy the modern varieties in town. Demand continues to rise for these neglected fruits and vegetables thanks to word-of-mouth recommendations. “Customers will even buy their bananas or sweet potatoes direct from the farm,” says Monica with quiet satisfaction. She reckons that she earns about 5000 KSH per month (about CHF 55) from these sales and they also have the income from the sale of milk.

Mrs Gatobu is convinced that the local varieties are right for her family; they have improved its own food security. And she says that the project has another benefit: “It has strengthened solidarity amongst the farmers. We place greater value on exchanging ideas and working together.” | pl

Further information:
www.biovision.ch/knowledge



Monica and Joseph Gatobu have found a way out of poverty: They achieved that by using high-quality compost to improve the soils, adopting the latest techniques in organic farming and cultivating and selling indigenous varieties.

Comment

If women in sub-Saharan Africa had the same access as men to agricultural resources, training and financial services, agricultural production would rise and the whole society would benefit. This statement comes from the FAO report “Women in Agriculture”, published in 2011, and highlights the gender inequality that still prevails in many developing countries. Despite playing a central role, women are less likely to be included in the decision-making process and often do not have the same rights as men. This has a negative impact on the position of women, the food security of their families and so on the resilience of society as a whole.

This is why gender equality is a cross-cutting theme in projects supported by Biovision in East Africa. Our projects consistently include and encourage gender-specific requirements, skills and opportunities. The approach adopted depends upon the project and the context. In Kenya, for example, Biovision is seeking to improve access by women-only cooperatives to the market for camel milk. This is strengthening their socio-economic position in society.

Biovision actively supports equal opportunities for both men and women. Not only is equality of opportunity socially just, it is also good for the wellbeing of the entire society.



Mirjam Moser

Programme Officer for grassroots and information projects in East Africa



Focus on women

Women play a key role in small-scale agriculture in East Africa. Despite this, society continues to discriminate against them, preventing them from fulfilling their potential; empowering these women would not only improve their wellbeing but also provide an enormous boost to the economy.

In East Africa, small-scale farms are heavily reliant on female labour and it was ever so. The traditional division of labour makes women responsible for crop production whereas the men clear the land, prepare the soil and do the ploughing. In livestock farming, it is the women who look after the sheep, goats and hens whereas men mainly tend the larger animals. But these women also have a myriad of other responsibilities, e.g. feeding the family, running the house, collecting firewood and water, health care, looking after the sick, children and elderly as well as buying and selling at market.

Without women nothing happens

Women in East Africa already have a heavy workload. Moreover, the load is increasing as a growing number of small farms are now run entirely by women because their menfolk are living in towns seeking paid work. In addition, many women have to do paid work in order to supplement their meagre income.

Discrimination and challenges

Despite this major contribution, women are still marginalised and experience discrimination, for example in the following areas:

» Land rights and ownership

In Africa, land is firmly in the hands of men. Traditionally, women own little land and so lack the associated rights. In those rare cases where they are the owners, they all too often end up with the poorer land. This discrimination against women is a major obstacle to efforts to increase productivity on small-scale farms.

» Infrastructure

Inadequate infrastructure in rural areas makes it more difficult to improve the incomes of farmers. For example, poor roads, long distances and high transport costs hamper access to agricultural inputs, advice and markets.

In addition, when produce is transported from the farm to the market, it is not unusual for some items to perish, reducing their value and the income generated.

» Money and investment capital

Generally speaking, women farmers do not exercise full control over the income they earn, but are frequently constrained to hand all or part of it to their husbands. Similarly, women rarely have access to loans. Banks are in any case reluctant to offer loans to family farms as they consider the risks too high. Women farmers without land rights and so no collateral have even less chance of a loan. Without access to start-up funding, however, progress and innovation on small farms are unlikely.

» Education and access to information

Although women are extremely skilled in a very wide range of areas, they miss out badly when it comes to education. If money is short, families keep the boys in school, but the girls are taken out early and put to work on the farm. When they are older, this makes it harder for women to run a business, interact with officials, attend training sessions or obtain the latest market data and information on technical innovations.

» Health

Women in Africa have poor access to adequate healthcare and are more likely to be affected by infectious diseases such as cholera, typhoid and HIV. This affects women in two ways: firstly as patients and secondly as those caring for the sick. The result, apart from the considerable suffering, is physical and mental strain together with a significant loss of productivity in agriculture.

Strengthen the pillars of society

Because of the key role played by African women in both the economy and society as a whole, they are often at the centre of project work by organisations such as the Biovision Foundation. Unless women are included and given targeted support at all levels, it will not be possible to improve food security and health, end poverty and encourage sustainable development in rural areas.

Full empowerment of women in East Africa would make a significant contribution to

the economies of these countries. However, deeply entrenched traditional attitudes and policy failures mean that this is likely to be a protracted process.



Dr. Achola O. Pala
is one of the leading women social scientists in Africa



In the rural areas of East Africa, women bear a heavy burden and this burden is increasing. Despite that, their rights remain modest. Ultimately, this hampers economic development in these countries.

Perfect location for farmer advice centre

A new “Biovision Farmer Information Resource Centre” opened at the beginning of February in Murungaru (Kenya). Providing advice for farmers, it has one particular advantage – it was set up in cooperation with the local authorities and is housed in the same building as the office of the village chief. There is direct access to the agricultural information centre from his waiting room. There is already evidence that many visitors waiting to see the local administrator use some of this time to obtain advice from the centre.

Murungaru is one of 11 Biovision information centres in Kenya run under the auspices of the Farmer Communication Programme (FCP). There are also 8 other partnership centres and 2 offices funded by the Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) Initiative.

These centres are staffed by farming experts who also have access to Biovision’s comprehensive database. Staff have downloaded this resource to their laptops and so have immediate access to a wide range of scientifically robust data on sustainable methods of agriculture of relevance to the local area. For example, they can help with the identification of pests by showing farmers photos from the database and can then provide advice on the use of biological techniques to deal with the pests.

www.biovision.ch/outreach-en
www.infonet-biovision.org



Review of project “Changing course in global architecture”

Since 2003, there have been four droughts in Siraro (Ethiopia) and local communities have been reliant on food aid. Biovision is supporting the implementation of sustainable development policies.

In the Siraro District, the effects of climate change are already being felt. Rising temperatures combined with lower rainfall have plagued an area that was already prone to drought. Natural resources continue to deteriorate and so yields from conventional arable and livestock farming are often inadequate. Water, fuel and charcoal are sometimes in short supply: Families don’t have enough to eat and often suffer ill health as well. It is particularly hard on women who are already disadvantaged as a result of local traditions (see Page 4).

Restore natural resources

In recent years, Caritas in Vorarlberg have provided food aid to Siraro and last November, a small delegation from Biovision visited the area to meet with local authorities, Caritas und the Apostolic Vicariate of Meki and discuss how to restore the environmental conditions essential for sustainable agriculture.

The three partners have now started a three-year pilot project to determine the action required to restore natural resources in Siraro. Working with local communities, the project will investigate issues such as erosion control, reforestation, the introduction of fuel-efficient ovens, improving soil fertility and sustainable grazing systems. “In so doing, we want to work with the people and pave the way for a long-term change to sustainable agriculture,” says Dr Samuel Ledermann, Project Coordinator at Biovision. | pl

Women suffer most from the droughts in Siraro (top photo). Anna Schuler and Andreas Sicks (Biovision) visited the area to discuss issues with Abba Temesgen (Vicariate Apostolic) and Harald Grabher (Caritas Vorarlberg (bottom photo from right to left).



Biovision welcomes you to the Umwelt Arena

Several times a year, Biovision offers local people an opportunity to meet the team running Biovision and gain an insight into its projects. In addition to the symposium in November at the Volkshaus in Zurich, it holds member events at different towns and cities in Switzerland. This year, Biovision is making a guest appearance on 27 May at the Umwelt Arena in Spreitenbach. The event will start at 18.00 hours with a guided tour of the Arena, which brings together the themes of environment and sustainability under one roof. The main event starts at 19.30 hours and this will be followed by drinks. Members will be sent a written invitation at the beginning of April. | pl

Registration and more information:
www.biovision.ch/mitgliederanlass-en



Last year at the Pfalz Keller in St. Gallen; in 2015 we are at the Umwelt Arena in Spreitenbach: Make a note of the date – 27 May – in your diary now!

Imprint

Newsletter 34, March 2015 © Biovision Foundation, Zurich

Published by

Biovision, Foundation for ecological development, Heinrichstrasse 147, 8005 Zurich

Editor Peter Lüthi

Text Peter Lüthi (pl), Mirjam Moser, David Fritz (df), Dr. Achola O. Pala

Translations Sue Coles (English), Daniel Wermus (Französisch)

Cover photo Mary Wanjiru from Kigio, Kenya, farmer participating in the project Push Pull Central Kenya; Photo: Peter Lüthi/Biovision

Other photos Main photographer Peter Lüthi/Biovision; Samuel Ledermann and Samuel Trachsel/Biovision, Harald Grabher/Caritas Vorarlberg, Biogarten.ch

Design Binkert Partner, Zürich

Printing Koprnt Alpnach AG, Alpnach

Paper quality Cyclus Offset (100 % Recycling)

The Biovision Newsletter is published 5 times a year and is available on subscription for a minimum donation of CHF 5.00.

Success for “The Clever Farmer”

In 2011, Biovision launched a Swahili version of its Tanzanian magazine for farmers. The title in the local language is “Mkulima Mbunifu”, which in English roughly translates as the “The Clever Farmer”. The growing readership now has direct access to detailed guidance and informative illustrations on sustainable agriculture. It is clearly appreciated as one letter to the editorial team in Arusha from a Mr. Godlisten O. Temu on behalf of his farmer group demonstrates: “Sisi, tunawashukuru sana kwa kututumia mkulima mbunifu kwani yanaboresha maisha yetu kila siku”. (Thank you so much for sending us a copy of Mkulima Mbunifu. Every day, it helps us improve our lives).

The magazine circulation is now 14 000 and in addition to direct dispatch to farmer groups it is also distributed to organisations with similar aims as well as churches, schools and government advice centres for farmers. On average, each copy of the magazine is read by seven people and so the actual readership is some 98 000 people. The magazine is now published monthly, so

doubling the amount of information available to farmers. The editorial team in Arusha also manages the website and Facebook pages, both of which are increasingly used as a portal for information and the exchange of ideas; the team has recorded a gratifying increase in the number of visits. Individual questions from the farming community are answered by text message or phone. | pl

www.biovision.ch/mkulima-en



Each copy of the Biovision farmer magazine published in Tanzania is read by an average of seven people.

Competition: Are you green-fingered?

Could you grow vegetables, harvest a good crop and multiply the seeds? Could you be self-sufficient and so ensure your future? For millions of people in Africa, such skills are vital. Test your talent by growing radishes and taking part in the Biovision competition!

What to do:

1. Sow the radishes in a pot or in the garden; when the radishes are ready, harvest them and take a photo. Publish the photo on the Biovision Facebook Fan Page or send it to Biovision.
2. Collect some seeds and plant them. When the radishes from your seeds are ready, send us another photo.

Prizes:

1 Canon SLR camera from www.brack.ch, 6 months' supply of organic vegetables delivered to your home by www.bio-box.ch and 8 other prizes from Andermatt Biogarten.



For full details of the competition see:
www.biovision.ch/radish



A story from the life of Mary Kathini

I had nothing to lose

The dominant colours are orange and ochre; the colours of the barren soil blown away by the wind when it's dry and washed into the fast-flowing streams when wet. Without vegetation, the soil becomes heavily furrowed or rutted. Fortunately,

the grass, thorn bushes and trees are able to defy the creeping erosion. People too are planting the green

shoots of hope. People like Mary Kathini, a 35-year old small farmer and mother of two. She is worried about changes to the environment. "For me, the environment is very important," she says, highlighting the fact that as farmer she is directly dependent upon nature. "For that reason alone, I must and want to do something to conserve it." When Mary Kathini heard about the course

"I want to be independent as a farmer and have enough to eat."

in sustainable methods of agriculture and environmental protection being run by the Kenyan Institute for Culture and Ecology (ICE) und Biovision (see Page 2), she did not hesitate and signed up immediately.

After the training, she took the plunge and switched from conventional farming to organic farming. "I had nothing to lose because previous harvests had been poor and so I did not see it as a particular risk," she declares. John, her seemingly more progressive husband – a teacher at a nearby school – treated this innovation with some suspicion. When he strongly urged his wife to switch back to conventional methods. "But in the end, my

yields were higher than his," smiles Mary with a sense of satisfaction. "That convinced him and he switched as well".

Not content with this, Mary Kathini is already thinking ahead. She has four wishes for the future: "The first relates to the environment. We must conserve it; it is the resource by which we live," she says. "Secondly, I don't want to depend on a single crop. I want to diversify. I hope we can achieve that". Her third wish is for the soil: "It is the basis of agriculture and so we must retain and protect it." Mary Kathini's final wish is a personal one: "I want to be independent as a farmer and have enough to eat. I don't want to borrow from the bank. I want to create my own opportunities and use my own resources to progress." | pl

Other pictures:
www.biovision.ch/tharaka-en

