You will never know the riches that lie hidden in the soil until you quench its thirst with some water. Our agriculture projects in Isiolo and Mwingi counties have seen women living in poverty and exclusion propel themselves out of poverty though innovative agricultural trainings as well as the provision of piped water. These women who used to rely on relief food can now feed their families as well as create their own revenue using the agricultural produce that they harvest from their once dry and barren land. This month we share some inspirational stories on how ActionAid Kenya is working with women to realize their potential to create sustainable livelihoods and food security for themselves and their families.

In solidarity,

Kenyatta Maitha

The green Amendment Campaign is a popular initiative by the people of Kenya led by National Women’s Steering Committee (NWSC), the Kenya Human Rights Parliamentary Association (KEPHRA) and Civil Society Organizations which aims at mobilizing 1 million signatures to introduce a formula through an amendment of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 that would ensure that at least 1/3 of members of the Senate, National and County assemblies are women.

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 entrenched substantive affirmative action safeguards by providing that no one gender shall occupy more than 2/3 of elective seats in the Senate, the National Assembly, the County Assemblies as well as in all public offices in Kenya. However this provision has not been complied with. Through an advisory opinion sort by the Attorney General on this Constitutional requirement, the Supreme Court advised that the provision must be complied with by 27th August 2015.

The process is a bottom-up approach which resonates well with ActionAid’s HRBA principles that advocates for inclusion of the poor and excluded people in governance and decision making processes in the country. Through our local networks, AAIK will raise awareness on the proposals to enable the women take lead in mobilization for the 1 million signatures.

ActionAid Kenya hosted the launch of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alliance on June 9th 2015.

Bringing together more than two decades of experience in quality, accountability and people management, the CHS Alliance will form one of the largest and most influential networks in the humanitarian and development sector. It will be a truly global enterprise, with a membership of more than 200 organisations headquartered in 55 capitals and operating in more than 160 countries worldwide. The Alliance will benefit from the reputations, legacies and successful working practices of HAP International and People In Aid, the two organisations which merged to form the Alliance.
How Farmers Field Schools transformed Temea’s life

By Serah Mwingi

Dorothy Temea is 65 years old. She lives in Katuluni village, Thaana ward, Kitui County in Kenya. She is a member of Mseto farmers field school (FFS). She joined the group in the year 2013 because she wanted to learn more about agriculture. She explains what she has learnt from the FFS group.

“I have learnt many things key among them being appropriate dryland farming technologies for Arid and Semiarid Lands (ASALs), water harvesting, and indigenous chicken management.”

Before she joined the FFS group, life was very difficult. She planted only maize and beans. The yields were very little and she struggled to feed her children. She had no chicken since they would all die of new castle disease in the month of July. After the farming technologies trainings in the FFS groups, Temea started growing green grams, cowpeas, sorghum, pigeon peas and millet. This has enabled her not only to produce enough for her household but also some surplus for the market. The sale of the surplus brought in much needed income which has enabled her to invest in assets such as dams and goats.

From lessons learnt at the FFS, she now vaccinates her chicken minimizing deaths from Newcastle and other diseases. From sale of chicken and surplus farm produce, she has managed to see her daughter Catherine through secondary school which she completed last year. An excited Catherine explains,

“Since my mother joined the FFS, I have never been sent home for school fees. She sold surplus harvest for my education and gave me enough pocket money. She even bought a goat for me, I now own livestock that ordinarily is the preserve for men.”

Catherine is very happy because the family can now include chicken in their diet frequently and her mother even bought a radio that she uses to listen to agricultural programs and to keep herself abreast with happenings at the county and national level.

Temea has adopted water harvesting technologies and has dug a big run off water reservoir at her farm. She is currently cementing the dam to minimize water loss through percolation having learnt this technique through a recent exposure visit. She uses the harvested water for vegetable production and planting trees.

Temea is also a member of the Mwingi Smallholder Farmers’ Cooperative from where she buys certified seeds of drought tolerant crops at a fair price. The table banking activities of Mseto FFS enables her to access credit easily and cheaply enabling her to afford important agricultural inputs whenever she is short of cash.

Now Temea has started to train her children and neighbors on these appropriate dryland farming technologies and practices.

“I am training my children on agriculture technologies. With these technologies, the community around can never go hungry despite the little rains and changing climate,” a thrilled Temea concludes.
In Kakili village, Gurat location in Isiolo County, farmers are raking in profits as well as sustained livelihoods through agriculture in the extremely arid area. Elizabeth Kalemnya, a small scale farmer gives her experience.

"Before, we used to live in anguish because rainfall in this area was very scarce. My husband is disabled and this means that I am the sole bread winner for my six children. I was a casual laborer and used to harvest charcoal which put me at risk of being attacked by men while in the forest. Things changed when Action Aid started the Kakili irrigation scheme project. I started in the General Food Distribution (GFD) program and later moved to the Food for Assets (FFA) program. I also learnt integrated farming systems in a farmer field school (FFS) supported by ActionAid. I now get my income from the sales of my farm produce and the crops are doing great since last year."

Kakili irrigation scheme is a joint program initiated by ActionAid Kenya and Australian Aid, worth KES 2, 979, 198.00. It was initiated for provision of water for irrigation and domestic use for small holder farmers and is currently benefitting 200 households in the area. Through the program, ActionAid Kenya provided trainings on gardening, bee keeping, rabbit keeping, poultry keeping and fish ponds, capacity team building and exposure trips for small holder farmer groups.

As a result, each member has now been empowered and has increased their individual farm produce. The farmer's living standards in the area have improved too and their children now enjoy school. Ksh 1.8 Million is available in the small holder farmers groups’ account and is loaned to members to run their activities after being introduced to table banking by AAK.

You can watch a short video of Elizabeth’s inspirational story here: https://youtu.be/KVGeEUPkO7M
Women’s groups in the scheme are now exporting green beans.

Farmers have embraced diversification in farming, in particular, fish farming is doing quite well considering that the area is quite arid.

Nyarongi LRP initiated the first reflection action circle for accountability review. The topics discussed included violence against women and girls, lack of access to land by women, and political violence.

Water irrigation has turned the once barren, dry land into an agricultural mine. Small holder farmers now have sustained food security and livelihoods.

Shifting the Power project marked its 2nd launch on June 11, 2015. In attendance were partners who included ActionAid Kenya (lead agency), Catholic Agency For Oversees Development (CAFOD), ChristianAid, Concern WorldWide, Oxfam and Tearfund.

The Safe Schools For Girls (SSG) project came to a close in the month of June 2015. The DFID funded project sought to understand and address the root causes and consequences of violence against girls and its impact on the enjoyment of their rights to and in education. The SSG team met to reflect on lessons learned from the project and will soon be sharing the end term evaluation of the project.
The Farmer Field Schools were established to strengthen Communities’ Livelihoods by promoting the following:

1. Alternative Livelihoods
2. Sustainable dry land farming technologies
3. Drought tolerant and high value crops
4. Small scale irrigation systems
5. Agroforestry and river catchment protection
6. Organized production and collective marketing systems
7. Advocacy for improved agricultural policies and practices

Mary Mulwa, a farmer in Kakili Village in Isiolo County, Kenya

“Even if AAK leaves today, I will not worry because am in a position to move on with farming adequately.”

Mary Mulwa

Participate!
Please Email Pascaline.Kangethe@actionaid.org to find out how you can take part in our ongoing Tax Justice Campaign

Participate!
Please Email Philip.Kilonzo@actionaid.org to find out how you can take part in our ongoing Land For Communities and With Women Campaign

Produced by the AAK Communications Unit. Design: Christine Muna.

Do you have a story or update to share? Send it to Lucy.Wanjiku@actionaid.org / Christine.Muna@actionaid.org.

Find us online for more information ActionAid International, Kenya Twitter.com/ActionAid_Kenya W www.actionaid.org/kenya