



## SUCCESS STORY

# Woman-owned chili processor benefits Kenyan farmers

In 2002, MACE Foods consisted of only two people: Margaret Komen, the owner and manager, and an employee she paid to sweep the floor of her home office. Today Komen has expanded her small business into a leading exporter of African Bird's Eye (ABE) chili, employing 25 permanent and contract staff and more than 100 part-time personnel.

To get there, she built the business slowly but it wasn't easy. When she started, Komen had one serious problem – not enough chilies. USAID's Kenya Horticultural Development Program stepped in to help and mobilized its team of agronomists to help small farmers in the area learn to grow ABE chili and keep yields and quality high through modern crop production practices. USAID-KHDP built a network of thousands of farmers. In addition to improving production yields and quality, MACE Foods and USAID-KHDP are also teaching farmers to grade and sort chilies to further add value to their harvests.

The company's dedication to improving the incomes of smallholders was a key ingredient that helped MACE Foods form strong relationships with local farmers, on whom the company depends to sustain its export growth. MACE Foods buys 65 metric tons of ABE chili, worth an estimated \$91,000 a year to smallholders in western Kenya.

MACE Foods and USAID-KHDP continue to get more small farmers involved in the value chain because MACE still has unmet demand.

"Out of the 200 partnerships we have developed, it is only the partnership with USAID-KHDP that has yielded tangible results. With this partnership, we can say that we've impacted many, many farmers on the ground," Komen said.

USAID-KHDP also teaches farmers to grow other crops such as indigenous vegetables and herbs to diversify income and increase food security.

USAID-KHDP works in Central, Coastal, Eastern, Nyanza, Rift Valley and Western provinces to increase incomes through smallholder production and employment in the horticulture industry. The program works with more than 15,000 members of 500 smallholder groups in conjunction with 52 private and public-sector alliance partners.



MACE Foods Owner Margaret Komen, above, displays some of her products at the company's processing plant in Rift Valley Province, Kenya. Thousands of small farmers earn money by selling their harvested chilies to MACE Foods for processing. At left, a USAID-KHDP farmer works in his field harvesting ABE chilies.

Photos by Fintrac Inc.

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– Margaret Komen, Owner, Mace Foods, Kenya