



SUCCESS STORY

Greenhouse profits feed children and keep them in school

From the outside of its wrought iron gate, the Macheo Children's Center in Thika, Kenya looks like any other farm. But once inside, you will find swing sets and lots of happy children.

The Macheo Center, a school and a refuge for children and orphans from local slums, generates profits from agriculture and uses the money to feed their students and keep them in school.

The Macheo Center started with just a small vegetable garden but wanted to find a way to feed the center's 55 residents. In 2004, USAID's Kenya Horticultural Development Program (USAID-KHDPII) stepped in to help the center fund and build a greenhouse to demonstrate hybrid seeds, drip irrigation and integrated pest management (IPM). Today the center manages seven commercial greenhouses that generate enough profit to feed the orphanage's residents and pay school fees for thousands of children from local slums.

The Macheo Center continues to receive training from USAID-KHDPII, which now focuses on crop and plantlet production. Using USAID-KHDP's package of improved agricultural practices, each of the Macheo Center's greenhouses yield 94 crates of tomatoes per year. At current market prices, this amounts to \$2,800 per greenhouse per year, which means they will make more than \$19,000 this year on tomatoes alone. The center also grows peppers and cucumbers for supermarkets and re-invests all profits into the orphanage.

"We are still learning, but we've come a long way," said Marmix Huis in't Veld, the director of the Macheo Center.

In Macheo's early years, the staff interviewed families from nearby slums and found that they could not afford tuition, lunches or uniforms. With income from agriculture, the center has been able to set aside funds and now covers costs for 2,500 children from a nearby slum.

Senior agronomist Lydia Njuguna stops by the Macheo Children's Center not just during her regular technical assistance visits but in her free time as well.

"I love coming here because we are not just touching one person, but many, many little souls," Njuguna said.

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



Photos by Fintrac Inc.

Macheo Children's Center Director Marmix Huis in't Veld and his students show off tomatoes from the schools greenhouses.



Greenhouses at the Macheo Center are used to feed orphans and generate income to pay school fees for 2,500 children from a nearby slum.

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– Marmix Huis in't Veld, Director of Macheo Children's Center, pictured with children from the center