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KENYA

SUCCESS STORY

Diversified, high-value production fills income gaps



Photos: Fintrac Inc.

Josiah Mwatela harvests a sweet potato.



Bendera Kahindi harvests sweet potatoes at the Vitendo group's demonstration farm.



African Bird's Eye chili ready for harvest.

In Kenya's Coast Province, tree crops such as mango and cashew are the backbone for many small farms. These crops, however, only generate income during part of the year. To supplement incomes, USAID's Kenya Horticultural Development Program (KHDP), started identifying other crops that work well in the region and set out to train farmers how to turn crops such as chili, passion fruit, and sweet potatoes into cash crops that turn subsistence farmers into small businesses with diversified production systems.

The Vitendo group in Malindi formed in 2002 and is made up of 7 men and 8 women who were mostly getting by on maize, millet and sorghum production. Members of the group were barely making ends meet and faced difficult growing conditions such as high temperatures, sandy soil and low rainfall. After linking up with the KHDP in 2004, the farmers started growing African Bird's Eye chili, African leafy vegetables, passion fruit and sweet potatoes. The group starting using KHDP technologies such as raised beds, improved planting materials and integrated crop management and the group's demonstration farm and their own farms have flourished.

"These new crops have really helped fill in the gaps in incomes," said Vitendo farmer and group vice chairman Josiah Mwatela.

One of the big successes on Mwatela's farm is the introduction of African Bird's Eye chilli. Last year from 300 plants, Mwatela earned Ksh 100,000 (\$1,429) from selling chilies to Mace Foods, a local processor. Mwatela also started growing orange-fleshed sweet potatoes on a quarter acre and sells them to the local market for Ksh 50 per kilogram. After a year in production, he expects to have earned Ksh 50,000 (\$714) from sweet potatoes alone, all on land that was bare before KHDP assistance. He expects to further increase his income from these two crops as he expands production and as plants mature.

"Now I am able to buy food, clothing and medical treatments for my family," Mwatela said.

The overall feeling in the group is that they have more power. Their crops are high value, their farm systems as a whole are more reliable and they are less worried about drought because their farms produce year round. All of the farmers in the group have diversified production and have adopted new technologies introduced by KHDP.

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.