



Crop diversification, technology boosts farmer's sales

Rodah Kibuchi, a 66-year-old farmer and widow with 10 children, was forced to abandon her cabbage, tomato and onion crops in Kenya because of soil-borne pests and disease. And, with few technical skills in crop management and frequent water shortages, her future in farming looked bleak.

But, after receiving technical assistance and training from USAID's Kenya Horticultural Development Program (KHDP), Rodah's crops are thriving and her income has increased by 30 percent.

"I am very happy because with the increased income, I have been able to buy a dairy cow for the family's milk, educate my grandchildren and build a better house," Rodah said. "Now, I don't struggle to buy the farm inputs needed to maintain the high yields — seeds, fertilizer, chemicals."

Rodah is a member of the Kibirigwi farmers Co-operative Society (KIFCO) which receives technical assistance through the KHDP. KIFCO has 469 members and is part of the Kibirigwi Irrigation Scheme in Kenya's Central Province. Before USAID assistance, Rodah relied heavily on sweet potatoes and coffee and she struggled when prices or production problems came up. But now, like other KIFCO members, Rodah has diversified production and grows coffee, maize, sweet potatoes, bananas, cabbage, tomatoes, onions, French beans and other local market vegetables. Crop diversification has eased the pressure on Rodah and other farmers and has provided new sources of income.

As part of the KHDP, USAID provided financial and technical assistance to set up three joint demonstration sites with partner Seminis, a seed supplier. At the demonstration sites, Rodah and other KIFCO members received training in land preparation, nursery management, transplanting, crop rotation, field hygiene, pest and disease identification and control and other Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs).

To address specific problems, the program analyzed soil and found that some of the farmers had low levels of potassium and other nutrients. The program advised the farmers on fertilization and manure application to improve the soil. Lydia Njuguna, a Fintrac senior agronomist, also introduced new hybrid varieties of tomatoes, cabbage and onions that have higher yields and are disease resistant. To help overcome water shortages, some farmers — including Rodah — have received drip irrigation kits to help improve water management and plant growth. The farmers have also received training in record keeping and cost analysis.

"With these new hybrid varieties and the training in record keeping and cost analysis, we have been able to farm in a more commercial manner and increase our overall profitability," said Kibirigwi Irrigation Scheme Manager James Wang'arang'u.

With the investment of Ksh20,000 (\$280) for drip irrigation, and KHDP's introduction of new crops and improved production practices, Rodah's *net* income is now KSh 15,240 (\$208) a month — 30 percent (\$58/month) higher than in 2004. KHDP intervention, she says, has resulted not only in higher yields and income, but also in improved food security for her family and has helped put her 10 children through college.



Rodah Kibuchi installs a drip irrigation system with the help of Kibirigwi Irrigation Scheme Manager James Wang'arang'u, and USAID's Harrigan Mukhongo on her farm in Central Province Kenya.