



Crop Diversification & New Technologies Open New Markets for Smallholders



Felistus Hato (extreme right) and her neighbours who recently formed a producer group of 26 members.



African Birds Eye Chilli demonstration plot.



Felistus Hato's nursery enterprise producing grafted passion seedlings. Seedling trays, a low cost technology to reduce seedling mortality, have been introduced to Kenyan smallholders by HDC.

Felistus Hato, has been farming her land for the last 30 years in Thika District, located in Central Province of Kenya. She grew primarily subsistence crops such as maize, beans, spinach, and bananas, depending on her own family's needs, demand from neighbours, and instructions of local brokers. Lack of access to high quality seeds, quality extension services, and poor market information all contributed to poor yields, product quality, and profits.

In February 2004, Felistus became one of the first lead farmer partners of the new USAID-funded Horticultural Development Centre (HDC). She donated a portion of her land for an HDC demonstration plot that included African Birds Eye chilli, vanilla, tomatoes, onions, cabbages and grafted passion fruit plants. She organized her neighbours to attend weekly extension training sessions provided by HDC Agronomist Lydia Njuguna.

Not long after the demonstration plots were set up, Felistus had incorporated many of the same improved production practices and diversified her main crops to include the production of higher value products such as African Birds Eye chillies, hybrid tomatoes and red onions, and improved varieties of capsicum and kales. As a result, her gross sales have increased by 30 percent and her net profits by 38 percent. "With HDC's technical assistance, I am able to produce more efficiently and am now focusing on products with a higher market demand," reports Felistus.

Felistus, along with 27 of her neighbours (including 16 women) have now joined together in forming the Mwitithia Women Self Help Group. Mace Foods, a Kenyan exporter, has subcontracted the group to supply it with African Birds Eye chilli. Meanwhile, almost half of the group has started to produce hybrid tomatoes and an improved capsicum variety. They have prepared land, laid mulch, and planted nearly 8,000 ABE chilli seedlings. With increasing demand for high quality onions in the Kenyan domestic market, more than half of the group has planted hybrid red onions. Felistus has also expanded her irrigation facilities and plans further expansion in the near future. Her farm alone is providing full-time employment to 10 neighbours (6 women) and part-time employment to another thirteen (7 women). Felistus and other members of the Mwitithia Women Self Help Group have provided their community with renewed hope through new income and employment opportunities.