

Diversifying Livelihoods to Combat Drought Impact in Biliko -Kenya

The communities in Biliko, one of the PfR operational communities in Kenya, are traditional pastoralists. They have been experiencing drought for decades once in ten to five years and relatively managed to cope up quite well. However as the frequency and severity of the drought is increasing, it started denying them a recovery period and consistently depleted their asset bases. This has put the community in a very vulnerable condition with most of them surviving on relief food aid from WFP.

Under this situation KRCS and MID-P approached the community with the PfR project to discuss the importance of proactive risk reduction and climate change adaptation interventions. After some initial discussions the two implementing partners engaged the community in participatory disaster risk analysis. The exercise challenged the community's attitude and stimulated the needs to think out of the box to find solutions for their recurrent and potential problems. It also helped them to identify the various livelihood options adaptable to the environment. Some of the key capacities identified are: the rich soil and water resources in the areas, availability of some drought resistant crops and short maturing vegetable seeds in the area and neighboring communities. However, the main challenge was in adapting to farming which is considered a taboo and a livelihood for the poor and ill-fated ones. The fact of the matter is that most community members did not even know how to cook vegetables.

KRCS and MID-P repeatedly engage the community in a regular discussion to change their attitude and perception. After these discussions though most of the community members were not yet convinced, though there were some members who were willing to give it a try. KRCS and MID-P decided to start with volunteers some of were actually the most vulnerable member of the community. They were trained on small scale irrigation and farming techniques, harvesting and storage, cooking and consumption, provided with drought resistant maize and short maturing vegetable varieties and linked with the local Agricultural Office for day to day technical support. In 2011, the first year of project implementation most beneficiaries struggled however in 2012 they started performing quite well to the extent that even those who were resisting are now asking for crop and vegetables seeds to plant. The community response is currently encouraging.

Most community members today consume vegetables and cereals harvested from their own farm. It is no more surprising to see fresh vegetables (tomatoes, onions, potatoes, spinaches) on the road side in Biliko amid a dry-spell season. It is obvious that the intervention contributed to community food and nutrition and reduced dependency on relief food aid.

These were the words of Mzee Bidu, a veteran farmer aged 65 years old and father of 9 children in Biliko. "I have never imagined that at one single time we would get over this dependency on relief food. We have reclaimed our pride once again and produce our own food. However, the

VCA training and the VCA exercise facilitated by Kenya Red Cross – Isiolo Branch was an eye opener that exposed to us the immense opportunity available around us. We started the farms and now we are better off in terms of food security and income from the sales of vegetables and cereals”.



A lady from Biliko stood up



Vegetable farm in Biliko