



# Financing water Investments at Farm Level

Location:  
Laikipia County  
Kenya

Partners:  
LWF

Authors:  
James Mwangi  
& Stanley  
Kirimi



Mr Richard Murigu, Laikipia County Cooperative Officer trains EMU SACCO board members on Sacco governance  
Photo credit:LWF



EMU Sacco officials interacting with Kigama Water Project members in Naromoru during a sensitization session on the need to enrol in the Sacco.  
Photo credit:LWF

*"For the last ten years I have been in commercial farming, its only during few seasons I have managed to make profits mainly due to water scarcity. At one time I thought of abandoning irrigation farming to depend on rains which are even more unreliable."*

*Stephen Nkingi a horticulture Farmer in Meru County*

**Mr Stephen Nkingi painfully recounts how he lost two acres of his crop of onions to drought three years ago, after investing heavily following a rising demand for the produce.**

River Isiolo where he used to get water to irrigate his farm at Maili Saba village, Meru County had dried up before the onions were ready for harvest.

A few years back, farmers in the region had been introduced to drip irrigation as an efficient way to irrigate but this method would occasionally fail due to blockages caused by solid particle suspensions in the water.

"We normally irrigate our farms using furrows where we flood the waters across the land. It is not a very good method to use since it consumes a lot of river water but we have no other way to make a living here apart from working on our farms," he explains.

The farmer who is the chairman of Kaithe Irrigation Water Project with a membership of 80 people says a big number of his colleagues have quit farming due to frustrations and others are now utilizing only a small portion of their farm to avoid incurring heavy losses due to water shortage.

In the Ewaso Ng'iro Catchment Area, competition for the scarce resources has led to water related conflicts occasioned by heavy consumption upstream leaving those downstream with no flow for their livestock and also for the wild animals.

[www.partnersforresilience.nl](http://www.partnersforresilience.nl) | [partnersforresilience@redcross.nl](mailto:partnersforresilience@redcross.nl)





WRUA members during a field day cum training on smart water technologies.  
Photo credit: LWF

"We have contemplated other ways of farming including abandoning the irrigation to relying on rainfall which is also unpredictable. At times we agree to farm in phases such that not everyone is irrigating at the same time to avoid over stretching the natural resource," he explains on how they are trying to cope with declining volume of water flow at the region's main river.

The challenges facing Mr Nkingi and other farmers who rely on irrigation has been documented by Laikipia Wildlife Forum, an implementer of Partners for Resilience (PfR) Programme.

Within the Ewaso Ng'iro North Catchment Area where Isiolo River traverses, such challenges abound and have been attributed to lack of knowledge and resources to use modern irrigation methods which are economical on water use but efficient.

Majority of the farmers have no access to loans owing to the strict measures imposed by lending institutions including demand for collateral.

With support from Cordaid's PfR programme, an idea was mooted to form a farmers Savings and Credit Cooperative Society (SACCO) that would advance the farmers loans to buy irrigation equipment as a way of mitigating the hazards of drought.

Ewaso Maji Users Sacco also called EMU Sacco was registered at the Registrar of Societies office in 2018 and became a member of the Kenya Union of Saving & Credit Cooperative Limited (KUSCCO) the same year. Its main objective is to provide financial solutions to small holder farmers on technological uptake in water conservation through embracing water harvesting techniques, storage and application of modern irrigation technologies.

Cordaid facilitated the formulation and development of a Credit, Risk and Procurement policies to enable its smooth running. It has also supported the Sacco Annual General Meeting in 2018 and 2019 as well as funding awareness creation among the members. The recruitment drive is on with a target of 1,000 members by end of 2020.

*"The PfR support enabled the Sacco to stand on its feet and established an office with two staff members. In a few weeks to come, farmers will be in a position to borrow money to either purchase irrigation equipment, construct water pans or buy water reservoirs." James Mwangi, Programme Officer, Laikipia Wildlife Forum.*



Ms Susan Gathoni, the Sacco's Executive Officer revealed that by end of August 2020 they had recruited 230 members and marketing officers were moving around five counties of Nyandarua, Nyeri, Laikipia, Meru and Isiolo seeking farmers to join EMU Sacco.

"It has been a journey to convince members on the importance of a water related Sacco. The idea behind it was to have a financial institution that is different from the traditional ones which are governed by strict regulations that might not fit the small-scale farmers who are our target group," explains Ms Gathoni.

Mr James Mwangi , Programme Officer at LWF says the PFR support enabled the Sacco to stand on its feet and established an office with two staff members and in a few weeks time, farmers will be in a position to borrow money to either purchase irrigation equipment, construct water pans and buy water reservoirs.

"The Mount Kenya Ewaso Water Partnership (MKEWP) under the secretariat of LWF is supporting EMU Sacco's growth as an alternative financial institution that will allow small holder farmers to save proceeds from their economic activities and borrow to improve their livelihoods with a focus on improving water productivity at farm levels," explains Mr Mwangi

A 2017 survey done on Mutara River Catchment in Laikipia County by the Water Resource Authority (WRA) found out that there were 260 abstractors where the volume of water abstracted being over 17,800 cubic metres daily.

WRA regulations require farmers to have storage structures for water harvesting during rainy seasons to support irrigation during dry season. This however is a tall order for many of the small holder farmers who have no financial capacity to install the water storage pans and lagoons.

The Executive Officer notes that they have had vigorous training and sensitization for members who had gone down in their monthly contributions. They have now regained momentum with ten of them having applied for their first loans.

With the growing demand for sustainable use of water as a natural resource, the future for small scale farmers is storing adequate water for irrigation.

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Susan Gathoni, EMU Sacco Executive Officer.

