

Fighting poverty with vegetable seed production



In her wildest imagination, Catherine Atii, a mother of four living in Kenya, could not have believed such a bright and prosperous future lay ahead of her. A year ago, she was living with her children in a run-down rental house by the roadside. Today, Catherine earns almost US\$3,500 a year growing and selling seeds of African Indigenous Vegetables (AIV). She learnt to do this through a CABI-led project to reintroduce nutritious local vegetables back into diets and help smallholder farmers improve their livelihoods.

To Catherine, who used to work as a casual labourer, the idea of farming local vegetables for seed production was entirely new. She was sceptical. "I wondered how somebody could make money out of the indigenous vegetables, which we had never thought of highly." But despite her doubts, Catherine attended training organized by Simlaw Seeds Co Ltd, the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) and Technology Adoption Through Research Organizations, which together implemented this CABI-led project, with funding and support from the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA).

At the time of Catherine's training, her husband was away and she was taking care of her family single-handedly. But despite the hardship, Catherine flourished. Excited about the prospect of AIV farming, she asked to be selected as a farmer under a contract seed arrangement with Simlaw Seeds, a subsidiary of the Kenya Seed Company.

Since then, Catherine has become a registered seed stockist, running her own shop. And when her husband, Robert, returned to the village, he followed in her footsteps, embarking on a career in vegetable seed production. Proud of his wife, Robert sees their business expanding further.

Seed enterprise transforms lives

Today, Catherine's life is utterly transformed. CABI's AIV project gave her the knowledge and tools she needed to lift herself out of poverty. She paid for her children to attend high school, built her own house and bought

a cow. With AIVs, she feeds her growing family the nutritious meals they need.

Catherine has changed not only her family's life, but also the lives of those in her community.

She is a crusader of AIV farming in her region, training her neighbours in seed production and raising public awareness about AIV's nutritional benefits, like higher concentrations of iron and protein.

For a long time, AIVs lost favour with people in Kenya, who preferred to eat imported, but less nutritionally valuable, produce. Catherine has helped reintroduce AIVs back into local diets. Now, parents in her community report how their children prefer the taste of AIVs and choose them over other vegetables. Using the knowledge she gained from this CABI-led project, Catherine is helping her community to make better, healthier futures for themselves.

Along with Catherine, the project trained a total of 294 farmers in Bungoma in seed production, 83 of whom were women. The training included how to apply regulatory requirements, and how to process, pack and market the seeds. The project also connected participants with lucrative, ready-made markets, and provided training to nine seed stockists, various marketing agents and 13 field assistants.

As a result, AIV contract farming has benefited both farmers and private companies alike.

Catherine believes that, "Contract farming is the way to go for us smallholder farmers." Edwin Kiptarus of Simlaw Seeds agrees, claiming that, "Companies are assured of meeting their production targets, while farmers are assured of ready markets for their produce". Likewise, Nasambu Okoko of KARI is sure of the benefits of contract farming. According to her, "It is an effective way of coordinating and promoting production and marketing in agriculture."

Catherine's story is part of a much bigger picture. CABI's involvement in AIV projects with ASARECA and Irish Aid funding has helped not only individuals, but also local markets and trade. This is essential for lifting developing countries out of poverty in the long-term and reaching greater numbers of people.

How CABI's seed programme works for AIVs

**EARNINGS
INCREASED TO
US\$3,500 A YEAR**

Farmers across Africa face challenges in accessing quality seeds. For this reason, CABI, originally funded by ASARECA, and now by Irish Aid, has been facilitating partnerships to scale up AIV farmer-led seed enterprises in Kenya, Tanzania and other countries in East Africa.

"Seed development requires intense training for farmers and constant support to ensure that farmers produce clean seed," says Dr Daniel Karanja, a plant pathologist working for CABI in Africa. "Once registered, the farmers are supplied with AIVs, which include African nightshade, amaranthus, crotalaria and jute mallow seed – four species that have been prioritized by farmers in the area".

As one of the beneficiaries of the project in Kenya, Catherine acquired the technology to grow jute marrow, which she planted on a 0.4 hectare plot in the first season. In the second season, she planted crotalaria on a similar sized piece of land. "After planting, we continued to receive hands-on training, which helped in ensuring that we realized our target," says Catherine.

**294 SEED
FARMERS
TRAINED**

From her plot, Catherine harvested 121 kg of jute marrow seeds and 485 kg of crotalaria seeds. She delivered these to Simlaw Seeds and received a total of Kshs. 277,825 (US\$3,473) for her AIV seed production.

Donors:

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