

**Project title:** Integrated Food Security Project

**Location:** Kitui, Kenya

**Partner:** Diocese of Kitui

**Project duration:** July 2014 to June 2017

## The need

The majority of communities living in Kitui County, an arid area east of Nairobi where this project is based, are small-scale farmers who rely on their crops as a means of survival.

Ten years ago, the people of Kitui lived in a green and fertile land. A dam provided water and irrigation. Local farmers grew a variety of crops and raised livestock, and there was enough food for every family to eat well and have a little left over to sell at market. But over the last decade, poor rains and soil erosion have left the dam dry and the fields barren, meaning that the people of Kitui struggle to grow enough food to make a secure living.



Feeding improved breed chickens, which have been provided by the project to communities in rural Kitui

In the face of a changing climate and with a lack of access to new farming skills and technology, farmers have little resilience to droughts and are pushed further into poverty. **38 per cent of the population of Kitui earn less than 30 pence per day.**

## Project description

In this challenging context, with BSSEC's support our partner the Diocese of Kitui is working with vulnerable farmers to improve their food security, help them to lessen the impact of climate change, access clean water and engage with local government on the issues that affect their livelihoods.

The Diocese of Kitui is providing seeds and saplings for the farmers, as well as training on drought-resistant agricultural practices. Planting fruit trees and

indigenous saplings not only provides families with fruit to eat and sell, but the trees also protect the nutrient-rich topsoil from erosion during the dry season. When the rains arrive, water will be absorbed into the soil and the young tree roots instead of running off the land.



Our partner is also supporting farmers to terrace their farms, re-sculpting the landscape to

retain rainwater where it is needed and prevent topsoil from being washed away during the rainy season. Terracing ensures that seeds will not run down hillsides, but will grow evenly, maximizing crop production.

As a further means of protecting families from the changing climate and to enable them to earn a living, members of the community are being taught how to make and sell energy saving jikos (stoves) using local materials. Each person trained is responsible for the training of another community member, ensuring that skills and knowledge are passed on.

'The soil in Kitui is not good at capturing water. People who have done terracing have done this because it is good for the land. It will mean water doesn't destroy the land.'

Stella, a farmer in Kitui

Other income generating activities such as saving and lending initiatives are being introduced to the farmers, alongside training in goat and poultry husbandry and bee-keeping. 192 families have been provided with improved and hardy breeds of chickens and goats, which flourish in Kitui's arid climate and provide sources of food and milk for families.

There are no permanent natural springs in Kitui and communities must walk long distances to reach water sources. Women and children spend a significant amount of time fetching water, which is often unfiltered and unsafe to drink. To ensure that communities can access water, sand dams are being introduced to collect rainwater. The sand dams will contribute towards the reduction of water borne diseases as well as reducing the distances and time taken by local families to access water points. Sand dam technology is simple and its construction involves communities, making it economically and socially effective.

To ensure that these activities continue to have a positive impact upon the people of Kitui long after the project is completed, our partner involved local government officials in project planning from the outset and the farmers meet regularly with officials to discuss the issues that affect their livelihoods.

**Project activities directly benefit 1,150 people (598 women and 552 men) and indirectly benefit their families (a further 6,900 people each year).**

## Case study and photographs

### Philomena, 96

"Welcome to our place. I am a member of Muimi Farmers Group. There are 31 women and five men in the group."

I moved here in the 1950s when I got married. My son has married and settled here also. In the early years, the rain was good and we enjoyed many harvests. As time went on, the drought made it tougher for us to grow enough crops. I have now realised that we can change the situation with soil conservation.



Philomena outside her home in Kitui



Philomena and her son with their maize crop

Some things are God-given and we can't control the droughts and flooding – they make life hard. We have to cross the river to buy food, but our path is blocked when the river is full.

I am happy now. We can grow enough food here at home and I look forward to a positive future for my family. We have planted mango trees and citrus fruits. I am grateful for the support we have received and wish you well."





### **Kakululo Sub-location Farming Group**

**Kikombo Ngesa (centre, grey shirt):** "When the project started, I took measurements to terrace the land. I was trained by the project to do this and the training has enabled my community to become self-reliant. The quality of the soil has improved so much that some areas are even overgrown! I planted maize and this season I was able to fill a cartful – this has never happened before. I also received chickens, they are producing big chicks. Selling the chickens means I can pay school fees for our children. Recently I sold one chicken for 1,500 KSH (£10). In the past we struggled to get school fees, I used to sell my own food.

There are still issues with unreliable rainfall, but with the new knowledge the project has given me, I feel secure.

I appreciate the support that is coming to our community. Knowledge is so important to us, we want to keep on learning."

**Francesca Kikombo:** "Before, the community would eat once a day. Hunger made us unhappy and unable to work for long. People were short tempered. Now there is harmony in the households, and communal food is provided throughout the day. My children are harvesting sweet potato. They eat it with tea before school, either boiled or roasted."





Kikombo Ngesa with his wife and their three day old, improved breed goat



Weaving baskets to sell



Harvested maize



Nzalaie Farming Group with their harvest



Land terracing