

THUNGURURU INTEGRATED FOOD SECURITY AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROJECT (FARMING GOD'S WAY) - SEPTEMBER 2020

Current situation:

Since our last report in January so much has happened to affect the whole world that it's a job to know where to begin. As reported then, the October 'short' rains had continued through the 'dry' season and kept going into February, making it a real challenge for farmers to harvest and safely store their crops, and giving little time to prepare the soil for the next planting season. When the March 'long' rains arrived they did not last very long and the Thungururu farmers had no harvest at all - apart from those practising the 'Farming God's Way' methods. A big success in production was achieved in terms of harvest by the participating farmers, especially those who used 'zai pits' to plant their crops. Thankfully the locust swarms seem to have been controlled for the time being and cases of Covid-19 are reducing. Thika is now cool and dry and anxiously waiting for the next rains.

Report from the Project Officer in June:

Since the eruption of coronavirus in Kenya in mid-March all group trainings were stopped and in April and May the field officer visited the farmers in their individual farms and offered technical assistance on-farm. With movement from one county to the other restricted and also a dusk to dawn curfew, most businesses and jobs stopped and families had to depend on what they were getting from their farms for their daily food,. This made us realize how much the community needs our services to help in mitigating drought and hunger.

In June group trainings resumed, although in smaller groups of not more than fifteen people. The trainings embarked on vegetable growing and land utilization more especially now that the county government, in collaboration with the field officer, has resumed sinking shallow dams for farmers in the project area. After sinking the dams, the officer is advising the farmers to consider fencing the dams as a safety precaution. It is believed that the dams will assist a lot in mitigating hunger months in the project area.

Further developments:

By the end of July most of the shallow dams had retained substantial amounts of water, depending on the type of soil in a particular farm. Some farms have red sandy soil which is very porous, so the water in these dams will not go far into the dry season, while other farms have sticky clay soil which holds water and doesn't let it through. In some cases dam liners are needed but they are expensive. The field officer has introduced a water weed that grows on water and protects the shallow dams from excessive evaporation. It is hoped that this water weed will multiply and be shared by all farmers who have the shallow dams. In future however, the dams may need dark netting as a shade for the dams. A lot is also being done by the field officer to ensure proper use of the water from the dams to establish intensive kitchen gardens and also utilization of waste water from the kitchen for those who do not have dams.

Rain water tanks - group saving for the purchase of water tanks was taken up by the community, in spite of the many financial challenges and, by end of February 2020, they had managed to buy twelve 5000 litre water tanks. However, the field officer thought it wise to share this idea with another non-governmental organization called 'Hand in Hand Eastern Africa'. This collaboration has so far helped to organize the community to buy 30 more tanks of 5000 litres each. The officer looks forward to more collaboration and seeks to bring on board more like minded governmental and non-governmental organizations for the benefit of the community.

The target:

Our target for the project is to reach 200 households. However, amid the many challenges that we have encountered in the project area since its inception, we have managed to reach 150 households who have so far been introduced to the programme and who are undergoing training. Out of those 150 households, 70 households have seriously put the trained techniques into practice and are successfully implementing Farming God's Way as they continue to learn more new techniques. Amid the many challenges, it is hoped the number of implementing households will increase and more new households will be introduced to the programme through groups and individual farmer visits and follow ups.

The challenge:

The project has been facing a lot of challenges, making it difficult for the Project Management Committee (PMC) to give enough concentration to the project. With the understanding that the community was so exposed to handouts and relief food from the government before the project began, it has been a process to discourage the dependency syndrome which has had its roots in the community for so long. To succeed in getting the community to be self-dependent, by empowering the PMC through empowerment and leadership trainings, is a gradual process. The project has come a long way, but it may be that it could be given support for a little longer to get the PMC to the stage when it can report to the local authority and solicit for the community's needs, in terms of food security, from the relevant government bodies and other agencies. Given the challenges that have been faced, can we, in Exeter, continue to support the project for a little longer to give the farmers of Thungururu the tools they need to become sustainable after the field officer moves on?



Learning to make a portable kitchen garden



Excavation work continues



Dam retained water in the hot, dry season



Training on ridge and furrow method of vegetable production



Making a sack fence to protect the seedlings from chickens



Vegetables planted using water from a shallow dam



A farmer receives advice from the field officer on tomato production



Training on how to mark and dig soil and water conservation trenches continues



The field officer demonstrates how to prepare a zai pit or multiple seed hole

For more information please contact thika.link@exeter.anglican.org