

# New NAg

# New Agriculturist

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## Focus on ... Youth in agriculture

The world is home to more than 1 billion young people aged between 15-24 years. Many are unable to fulfil their potential because of poverty, hunger, poor health and lack of education. As a result, they lack the skills needed to gain employment, with rural youth typically, but often fruitlessly, migrating in search of economic opportunities.

However, given support and the opportunity of employment, young people have the potential to play a significant role in rural development. According to the International Labour Organization, GDP in sub-Saharan Africa would rise by 12-19 per cent if young people were employed in productive work. "Current events show the energy, creativity and power of young people, and also the importance of ensuring that they can see a future for themselves in the societies in which they live," said Kofi Annan at the recent annual meeting of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). "They deserve support to take advantage of the opportunities opening up. We need to tap into the energy and entrepreneurial spirit of Africa's younger generation."

In this edition we focus on the role of young people in agricultural development and highlight initiatives that are delivering the support and skills they need to create profitable agricultural enterprises and fulfil their extraordinary potential.





## Young ARD professionals link up

In the challenging world of agricultural research for development (ARD), young professionals can bring a fresh perspective, enthusiasm, a grasp of new technologies and a willingness to embrace change. Unfortunately, being younger and less experienced can make it hard to be heard.

Now, an open online network of professionals have connected to support, inform and share a voice with others under the age of 40 in The Young Professional's Platform for Agricultural Research for Development (YPARD).

Forty may not seem very young, but in some countries as many as 80 per cent of professionals employed in agricultural research institutes are over this age. Younger professionals are often considered too inexperienced to be valuable, and they may find themselves stuck for many years following the instructions of older colleagues, seldom participating in conferences or policy discussions. This imbalance is unfortunate for any young person starting a research career, and it also holds back much of what they have to offer.

It was at a typical international conference, the European Forum on Agricultural Research for Development in Zurich, in 2005, that a handful of young participants noticed how many important discussions were without any young voices. These young scientists formed the idea of an organised network for young ARD professionals, and the following year in New Delhi, at a side event of the triennial conference of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), YPARD was officially launched.

### A coordinated effort

YPARD Coordinator, Courtney Paisley, organises the platform's activities from FAO headquarters in Rome, where she is hosted by GFAR. "We operate within the structures of our host organizations," she explains. Working inside other organisations allows YPARD to share their hosts' resources, partnerships and authority. It also, she says, "gives us a stronger pull inside these organisations to promote young people within their own organisational structure." As a movement by young professionals for young professionals, YPARD has an open membership system requiring nothing but an email address to register on the website. "The current YPARD count is 2,530 registered in our system," Paisley reports, a growth rate of almost 50 members per month since the platform's launch, with an average age of 28.



credit: © Jerry Galea/Oxfam Australia

connections and information. It provides a forum for information about funding, scholarships, conferences, jobs, and new research, while also allowing young researchers to offer their own ideas for feedback from a safe and supportive group of peers. There are opportunities to attend meetings and workshops, to post reports of these meetings from the perspective of a young attendee, and the chance to organise side activities or independent events under YPARD.

### Doing it yourself, together

In keeping with the platform's open framework, YPARD's regional and local branches operate autonomously, local representatives working within their own host organisations in the same way that Paisley operates in Rome. There are regional branches for Africa (hosted by FARA), Latin America (at CIAT), and Asia (at VIT University in Tamil Nadu, India). YPARD Asia representative Dr. R. Seenivasan is typical: he started as an advisor with YPARD India in 2007, at the age of 33. "It is really a wonderful opportunity to make my contribution," he says, "and I too have learned many things from this unique, worldwide platform."

Dr. Seenivasan also organises for India, the country with the single largest YPARD membership. "We have a strong membership base in India due to our continuous and effective advocacy efforts and other Young Person programmes conducted in India on behalf of YPARD," he says. "We have been arranging tailor made training programmes in the last few years for young farmers and young professionals involved in ARD. This year we are planning to organise a short course on international grant proposal writing."

"YPARD members have overwhelmingly stated the need for



credit: © FAO/Giulio Napolitano

guidance and increased networking opportunities in their field," Paisley concludes. "Currently we have a young professional in Kenya, Grace Mwaura, working on a mentoring strategy." Grace is also, incidentally, the first young person elected to the council of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. With her help a new online system, which will connect members with senior and peer-to-peer mentors, will launch by the end of the year. And, as always, it's the members doing it for themselves.

Written by: T. Paul Cox



Through its online young professionals' database, news updates, and regional events, YPARD allows members to share



## Healthy learning

Twelve year old Kennedy Mwangi is a happy boy. Last year he helped to grow food for his fellow pupils at Naromoru Primary School, planting his class garden with kales, tomatoes, spinach, African nightshade, onions and cabbages, and tending the school's one acre farm. In 2010, the school pupils harvested 14 bags of maize and two bags of beans, and were able to donate surplus food to orphaned classmates, to share at home with their relatives. Thanks to the home-grown lunches, which serve as an incentive against truancy and dropouts, enrolment at Naromoru has risen from around 615 pupils to 820 in 2011.



credit: © VVOB

Located on arid and rocky land in the Maasai area of Kaijado, Naromoru Primary School is one of 30 schools across eight arid and semi-arid districts of Kenya benefiting from the Healthy Learning Programme. Undertaken by Kenya's Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB), the programme has been supporting children and their communities to use school-owned land to grow crops and keep small livestock.

Launched in 2008, Healthy Learning encourages school communities to grow food and practise agroforestry and water conservation. Through these initiatives, the programme hopes to boost nutrition among school children and their communities and conserve the environment, while primarily aiming to equip pupils with life skills, and enable them to earn a living after school. As of 2010, a total of 16,794 pupils were engaged with Healthy Learning in eight districts, with the number continually rising through increased school enrolment.

### Meeting local challenges

Naromoru headteacher, Joyce Sankok, says that establishing a garden and farm at the school was not easy since the area is so rocky. She has had to rely on local building contractors to provide soil, excavated



credit: © VVOB

from their building sites. With the soil levelled, the school bought manure from neighbours and when rains came, in mid-2010, planting began. The results impressed everyone.

However, with drought a constant problem, Ministry of Education Quality Assurance and Standards Officer, Clement Osano, says that water harvesting has become a major element of the project, coupled with growing drought-tolerant crops like African nightshade. Water harvesting tanks have been placed in schools, and pupils are taught to wash their hands using 'leaky tins' - suspended buckets placed next to kitchen gardens, so that all the 'run off' benefits the plants and none is wasted.

At Naromoru, the school also has its own nurseries, where pupils plant vegetable seedlings and trees, both of which now flourish in the school compound after transplanting from the nursery. "Obtaining seeds for the tree nurseries has not been difficult," says Sankok. "Pupils collect seeds at home and bring them to school. Later we allocate duties for watering until they sprout and become seedlings."

### Working with the community

Implemented jointly with the Ministry of Education and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), schools are given support to grow crops suitable for their area and to practise rabbit and poultry keeping, supplying their produce directly to the school kitchen. "The project takes a participatory approach, where pupils, teachers and parents all take part in running the school agriculture programmes. These are also replicated at home by pupils and the wider community," says Vivian Nereah, Healthy Learning information and communication officer.

In particularly arid regions, school compounds are harvested for hay, which is packed and stored for sale to neighbouring communities to use in times of drought. "We have seen pupils keeping chickens and rabbits in their homes, something that the majority of our beneficiaries, being mainly pastoralists, do not normally do," says programme officer Wangari Mathenge. "Encouraging communities like the Maasai to accept chicken or rabbit as a source of meat



credit: © VVOB

is not easy: to this community, chickens are just birds and adult men are not comfortable eating or keeping them," adds Vivian Nereah.

However, with the project set to run until 2013, more communities around Healthy Learning schools will gain experience with water conservation, tree planting, growing crops and keeping small animals, so boosting food security and uplifting nutrition while also conserving the environment.

Written by: Maina Waruru



## A strategy for 'youth in agriculture' in the Pacific region

Limited employment options and high unemployment rates among young people are not unique to the Pacific region, but they are exacerbated by the realities of island living. Rural-urban migration is a similar story, leaving behind ageing farmers and declining traditional agricultural systems. And a worrying accompanying trend for the islands is an increased dependence on imported foods, with both economic and health implications - rates of 'lifestyle' diseases such as diabetes and obesity are soaring.

Encouraging young people back into agriculture would be a neat way to address all of these issues, and this was the motivation behind the development of a regional strategy which was launched in October 2010. The strategy targets stakeholders across the board - governments, non-government organisations, the private sector, formal and informal education providers, communities and families - with actions and initiatives to increase youth participation in agriculture.

### Finding out what young people think

The strategy was developed by the Pacific Agriculture and Forestry Policy Network (PAFPNet), which is coordinated by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). The strategy team asked young people in three Pacific island countries - Fiji, Tonga and Kiribati - what would support and encourage them to choose farming as an occupation. The strategy is built around their answers, with additional input from an online consultation.

Adequate support from families and communities, and appropriate recognition of the contribution young people make, were among the most common responses. The community is central to traditional Pacific island life, and much of the land in many of the countries is communally owned, so support at the community level is clearly critical. Recommendations include

giving young people a voice in community decision making, and ensuring they share in any profits from their farming.

"Young people contribute a lot to agriculture at the family and community level," says Vikash Kumar, manager of the Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovations Programme in the Pacific (MORDI), which works with youth groups. "But they often feel frustrated because

they are not being listened to, for example by the elders in their communities." Strengthening and empowering youth groups is one way to give young people a voice in their community.

Many of the respondents also talked about the importance of messages given to young people at school, which often instil negative images of farming from an early age. The strategy suggests a 're-education' of teachers from primary school up, so that they learn the value of the agriculture sector and promote it as a positive choice for students, rather than a fall-back option. This also emphasises the need for different government agencies and other groups to work together to bring about the desired changes - in this case departments of agriculture and education, along with education providers.

### Encouraging enterprise

But perhaps the best way to attract young people into agriculture is to facilitate and promote enterprise and entrepreneurship. "Young people have a lot of initiative that should be nurtured" says Kumar. "With the right support and training, they can turn good ideas into viable businesses." Such support and training might include scholarships in agriculture or business development skills, and training in financial management, including how to access credit.

Agriculture as a profitable business rather than purely for family and community subsistence is an indicator of the different views and aspirations of the new generation of farmers. While these may challenge more traditional ways of working, embracing them is key to revitalising agriculture in the Pacific. The challenge will be to keep the best of traditional systems and traditional knowledge, but move them into the 21st century, with all the opportunities that brings.

One small success in this direction - and a spin-off from the consultations held on the draft strategy - is the setting up of a Facebook group, the Pacific Youth in Agriculture Network. So far nearly 500 people have joined, and are using the facility to exchange news and views on current issues, events and opportunities in the region, and share photographs.

The next step for the strategy is to get it endorsed by leaders across the region and, hopefully, incorporated into the Pacific Plan, the region's overarching policy document. Then the different countries can get down to adapting the recommendations within their own contexts, and develop the potential and creativity of their young people to reshape Pacific agriculture for the future.

Written by: Anne Moorhead



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## The impact of ICTs on a Kenyan youth

In societies where people have to travel several miles to get access to bank services and information, relatively inexpensive Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) are being increasingly exploited by rural youths in Kenya to fill these gaps and support their economic and social life. Using these ICTs, the youths are able to access real time price information, find help from farm professionals and connect to other young farmers in the region.

With mobile phone networks spread throughout the

country, services such as Safaricom's mobile money transfer (M-Pesa), mobile banking (M-Kesho) and information on agricultural produce markets (411 Get It) have increased job opportunities for rural youths as the demand for local agents increases. In his late twenties, Elijah Kamau, from Pwani in Nakuru district, is an example: he approached Equity Bank in 2007 for a loan to set up an M-Pesa kiosk. As well as enabling farmers and traders to deposit or withdraw money using their mobile phones, Kamau was able to pay back his start-up loan in just six instalments.

### Benefits of simplifying commerce

By simplifying money access, members of the community have more money at their disposal and therefore are more likely to spend it locally. The service has also enabled farmers and traders to purchase inputs and make orders with their suppliers without having to travel into town. The savings made on transport costs enable them to acquire more stock, which means that the entire community benefits from more goods being available locally.

Kamau's business has also benefitted from transactions made by the farm owners residing in Nakuru, who do not have to commute to the village to pay their casual labourers. These farm owners are also able to pay their farming supervisors for land preparation and purchase of fertilisers and seeds.

In 2008, the entire region of Nakuru experienced a severe drought, which led to widespread crop failure, and Kamau noticed an increased flow of money through his business due to remittances from relatives in urban areas. "This service has strengthened friendships and social interactions in the community," Kamau says. "Moreover, this has greatly contributed to the success of my business. This means that the entire community benefits from the goods available."

Using the revenue generated by his M-Pesa business, Kamau has diversified into farming, now leasing 20 acres of land. He also receives information about agronomic practices from the



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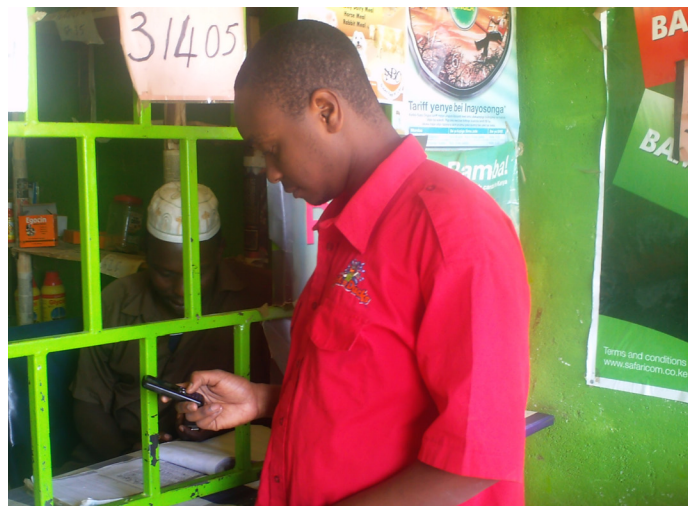
Organic Farmer e-bulletin, published by the International Centre for Insects, Pests and Ecology (ICIPE), through his data-enabled mobile phone, helping him to grow maize, beans and potatoes.

### Integrating and adapting ICT services

The SMS-based '411 Get It' service, a joint venture between Safaricom and the Kenya Agricultural Commodity Exchange (KACE), also provides Kamau with information on agricultural produce and market prices, enabling him to identify favourable markets and cut out middle men. With the profits from his farm, Kamau opened an M-Kesho business, allowing community members to make deposits from their M-Pesa accounts into an Equity Bank account where they earn interest. "This is an incentive for rural youths to engage in farming," Kamau adds.

During the planting and weeding season, Kamau's operating capital is reduced as his customers increase their M-Pesa withdrawals. To counter this problem, Kamau took out another loan from Equity Bank to purchase a motorcycle so that he could travel to Nakuru town quickly to top up his M-Pesa account. As a result, he has a steady flow of cash in order to facilitate local business transactions.

Despite an increasing range of information services available through the internet, literacy remains a major obstacle for many people because these services are only supplied in official languages. The technologies therefore need to be adapted in such a way as to be accessible in a variety of local dialects to help farmers have easy access to modern farming information and technologies, especially to tackle the current



credit: © Chris Mwangi

climatic uncertainties that are being experienced. Access to ICT services would also help to foster local skill building and knowledge sharing between rural communities.

Yet guided by locally driven business oriented solutions, Kamau's experiences and business knowledge clearly show the important linkages and synergies that exist between the development of ICTs and information sharing that can support the livelihoods of a large cross-section of youth and other members of communities for agricultural and rural development.

Written by: Chris Mwangi



## Mexico's programme for young rural entrepreneurs

"Entering its seventh year, Mexico's Programme for Young Rural Entrepreneurs and Land Fund has yielded encouraging results," says Gerardo Falcon, Co-ordinator of Planning at the

Secretariat for Land Reform. Known as JERFT (Programa para Jovenes Emprendedores Rurales y Fondo de Tierra) the programme focuses on 18 to 39 year olds

in areas (covering 53 per cent of Mexico's territory) where land is held by ejidos, based in 31,623 nucleos agrarios (agricultural nuclei).

An Aztec community landholding system abolished by the Spanish conquest, ejidos were reinstated after the 1917 Mexican revolution. Traditionally, ejido members could grant, inherit and bequeath cultivation rights to other ejido members but not sell the land. In 1991, the ban on land sales (even within ejidos) was scrapped as part of Mexico's preparations for membership of the North American Free Trade Area. However, few commercial sales appear to have taken place.

With an estimated indigenous population of 8 million (nearly one-third of Mexico's rural dwellers), some 750,000 of them under 39 years old, ejido lands are almost entirely situated in marginal, mountainous and other locations unsuitable for modern large-scale commercial agriculture. Poverty is endemic with an ageing population of rights holders, outmigration of youth, lack of capacity building and inequitable patterns of access to land and capital.

### Targeting beneficiaries

The programme targets those areas with high rates of marginalisation located in Rural Priority Attention Zones which have been duly registered, are not involved in any land dispute and show some potential, such as a minimum local market infrastructure (water, electricity, road access to sales points).

"Fully reflected in the current 2007-2012 National Development Plan, JERTF's central goals are to encourage 'social' sales or rentals of ejido holdings to ejido youth within their agricultural nuclei of residence. Financial assistance is extended by a national trust fund for ejido development (Fideicomiso Fondo Nacional de Fomento Ejidal). Between 2004 and 2010, 18,000 youths have entered JERTF and 5,072 have set up a rural enterprise, for a government outlay of US\$1,474 million pesos (€89 million).

The programme's sequencing was redesigned in 2006 and 2009 reflecting lessons learned, and since 2010 has consisted of two components, rather than the previous four. The first is a 'project school', a kind of full-scale 'learning by doing' training

agro-enterprise run by the 15 to 30 member Youth Committees in the agricultural nuclei.

Under the second component graduates present a business plan, which if accepted is supported by a mix of grants and loans covering land acquisition (purchase or rental), fixed assets, working capital and training in business management and marketing. While women usually outnumber men in the school phase, the reverse is so for this second phase, reflecting enduring social attitudes on gender roles in ejido areas.

### Learning from experience

"On the basis of experience a significant number of other changes have been introduced," says Falcon. "First of all, flexibility as to the minimum holding size, to avoid acquisitions (and related costs), way beyond the needs of the planned enterprise."

Selection of beneficiaries is no longer based just on social needs, but also on entrepreneurial potential. Increasing attention is being paid to ensuring that a market exists for the enterprise visualised. Financial procedures have been speeded up, results have been monitored and observations of external evaluators incorporated.

FAO's survey of enterprises created during 2007-2008 found that entrepreneurs achieved an average increase in their incomes of 21 per cent. The enterprise survival rate was 90 per cent, with 62 per cent turning a profit, 66 per cent of entrepreneurs adopting technologies proposed and 23 per cent of beneficiaries being from indigenous peoples.

FAO evaluator Luis Gomes Oliver says that FAO had advised against isolated projects in favour of clusters and advocated payment of personnel, who had assisted the drafting of enterprise proposals even though they had been rejected for financing, and linking up entrepreneurs for the transport of goods to market. FAO has emphasised the importance of case studies, market research and stronger monitoring.

Oliver also feels that overall government funding of rural areas in general focused too

much on income support and not enough on capacity building, while there was very little donor support to projects with the JERFT approach. So can JERFT be successfully replicated elsewhere? "Not entirely, insofar as it is designed to meet a specifically Mexican situation," Falcon says. "However, several aspects could be adopted such as the project school, location criteria for enterprises, the importance of business plans and business tutors (providing both services and advice) and a mix of subsidies and loans."

Written by: Vanya Walker-Leigh



## Flower power for Kashmiri youth

The people of Kashmir, a region without industries and ravaged by two decades of armed conflict, have always preferred government jobs. The preference for government jobs in a conflict zone, where investing in businesses is never considered free of risk, is understandable but this preference has resulted in high unemployment. However, limited employment opportunities in the government sector are beginning to sway youth like Abdul Rashid Tantray towards self-employment.



Credit: © FAO/Jon Spaul

According to 30-year-old Tantray, he first tried growing vegetables. "We had two acres of agricultural land for growing vegetables," says Tantray. "This did well, but not to our full satisfaction. Then we learnt that the government had launched a scheme for supporting unemployed youth to start floriculture projects." Convinced that floriculture was more profitable, Tantray registered for this scheme, which provides financial assistance of up to INR 26,000 (US\$600) and imported seedlings and bulbs supplied free. Ever since, says Tantray, his family has been doing comparatively better.

### A future for flowers

Mohammad Shehzad is another young flower grower who sees a good future for growing flowers. "Flowers are in huge demand. So it is all about working hard to grow flowers in good quantity," he says. While Dr. G S Naqash, director of Floriculture Kashmir, points out, "A floriculture nursery assures you maximum gains in the shortest possible time. If you sow the crop today, after four months it will give you the harvest in the form of bulb, seed or flower. It pays good dividends, giving an average farmer an additional income of around US\$2,000 per season."

"Much to our delight, nature has bestowed on us good climatic conditions, due to which our flowers have the best colour, size and spread. And the spike-length, which is a requirement for commercial cut-flowers, is also pretty good," he adds. Alexander Mudragey of Wisdom Flowers Russia, who visited Kashmir last year, put the potential of floriculture in Kashmir at US\$100 million, observing that, "Flowers from Kashmir are of better quality than other countries."

### Entrepreneurial spirit

Little wonder that more and more youths want to be floriculturists. An example is Nusrat Jahan, a 34-year old woman from a remote south-Kashmir hamlet who is considered to be the pioneer of the cut flower industry in Kashmir. A computer graduate, Jahan gave up her government job because she had the dream of becoming a successful businesswoman in the male-dominated society of Kashmir. "It

was never a smooth run for me. I would take flowers on credit from the farmers and would pay them later when I was paid by my customers in Delhi. Those were days of utter frustration and hard work," says Jahan, who started her venture without any help from the government.

Now, Jahan is recognised as the most successful woman entrepreneur in the Kashmir Valley with her business touching an annual turnover of half a million US dollars. She owns the state franchise of Ferns N Petals (FNP) - India's largest chain of fresh flower stores. Employing around 20 people, she has three flower farms and is now planning to export flowers to international markets such as the Gulf. Little wonder that Jahan is a role model for hundreds of Kashmiri women who want to make their mark.

### A blooming sector...

According to Naqash, floriculture has "proved to be a vibrant sector for direct and indirect employment generation." He continues: "Despite the fact that we are just beginners in floriculture, we have more than 700 educated unemployed youth, both men and women, registered as flower growers with us. They are hard-working and doing their best."

Registration with his department entitles the members for benefits of schemes like the National Policy for Development of Farmers (or RKVY) and Technology Mission (TM). "The major crops we are growing are cut flowers like carnations, lillies, gladioli, marigolds, and tulips under open field and greenhouse conditions." Naqash states that "Kashmir earns around US\$6 million annually with just 250 hectares of land under flower cultivation." He adds, "It is growing 20 to 30 per cent every year."

Flower growers do however have some complaints, particularly about finance. Grower Umar Khurshid says, "A flower grower



Credit: © Athar Parvaiz

should be provided with full financial assistance for buying infrastructure like greenhouses. A farmer can't do it on his own, especially a beginner." Tantray adds that, "A farmer needs a sum of INR 50,000 (US\$1,200) for setting up a greenhouse whereas we are not provided any assistance in the beginning when we need it the most." Flower growers are also frustrated that the government provides no help to them for selling their flowers and they have to look for buyers.

However, Kashmir, says researcher Shams Imran, has a huge market. "Demand for flowers, as cut, loose, dry, potpourri, bulbs, seeds, bunches bouquets, ornamentals, fillers and other forms, is increasing throughout the world. Be it birth, marriage, meeting, death, health, or reception, flowers are the essential ingredient and the youth can play a key role in this booming sector."

Written by: Athar Parvaiz



## Training youths for peace in northern Kenya

Livestock theft, cross border raids and revenge attacks can mar remote villages in northern Kenya following long-standing armed conflict between pastoralist communities over water and pasture resources, land ownership and political supremacy. In Wajir, Garissa, Tana River and Mandera districts, youths have been provided with weapons by their communities to defend their tribes and carry out raids against 'enemy' tribes. This violence, and the loss of livestock, has caused thousands of pastoralists to flee to major towns.



credit: Abjata Khalif

In a bid to stop this cycle of conflict, government-backed peace-making activities were initiated in 2003, bringing seven local tribes together to search for local solutions. By engaging clan elders, women leaders and youth leaders, the tribes were able to address the factors that fuelled the conflict, sign a peace agreement and form a committee to solve disputes and ensure that resources were shared. Hundreds of youths also surrendered their weapons and returned to their communities. Now, if a tribe sources arms from Ethiopia, a penalty of 100 camels can be imposed.

### Making a new start

To provide the demobilised youths with the skills necessary to start their own businesses, the Frontier Indigenous Network (FIN), a local community-based organisation, began providing livelihood training in the area. "We decided to engage the youths because cases of insecurity were on the rise after demobilisation," explains Asha Mulki, programme coordinator of FIN. "After training, the groups came up with business ideas and we assisted them in obtaining loans from local banks, which they could repay as they worked." Two hundred youths have been provided with training so far.

Forty youths formed a group called Wathajir - meaning 'together as one'. After receiving training from FIN on forming a business, and managing capital, and from local agricultural extension officers on farming techniques, they were helped to

establish links with national and international markets. Wathajir soon began growing mangoes, apples, watermelons, lemons, kale and spinach along the Tana River. "We got a loan from a local bank to buy seedlings, farm implements and a diesel engine to pump water from the river," says Mohamed Abikar, Wathajir group leader. "We organised ourselves with a



credit: Abjata Khalif

great deal of discipline. Everybody does his duties without fail."

Wathajir members have also benefited from a bi-weekly radio programme, put together by the local agricultural office and the Kenya Pastoralist Journalist Network. Broadcast in Somali and Orma, the programme offers farming advice to agro-pastoralist communities in the area, including information on soil fertility, drought-resistant crops, terracing, and establishing fruit nurseries.

### Sharing responsibility

All 40 young men share the duties on their 20 acres farm. "We share activities regardless of our positions," Abikar says. The group also meets every Friday to discuss the business and farming challenges, opportunities and contributions to the farm. "We also solve problems like misunderstandings between members, non-performance of duties, and failing to meet targets. We translate these weaknesses into opportunities: such spirit has lifted our work and brought us big profit."

"We started our farm in 2003 and we have made significant progress," he adds. "Now vegetables from our farm are consumed by locals in Garissa town." With the help of an agent, Wathajir also sells mangoes to Masafi, a Middle East-based fruit processing company.



credit: Abjata Khalif

With high sales and profits from selling their farm produce to local and international markets, the group has been able to form a saving scheme. Here, a portion of their profits are used to provide loans to members who want to start another project or business.

Due to falling water levels in the Tana River, Wathajir is planning to begin an environmental education campaign in the area to raise awareness of the need to protect the river bank in order to maintain water levels.

### A model for youth

This farm is a model project for other youths in Kenya, the regional government leader in the province explains. "We want youths to copy such efforts and replicate them in their own areas. We are encouraging youths to start income-generating activities and create self-employment." Other ex-combatants are now mechanics, waste collectors, builders, livestock traders, milk hawkers, and harvesters and traders of gum arabic. Their businesses have contributed to the development of the community and helped the young men to re-integrate into their communities.

Despite a few continuing incidents of conflict over shared resources during prolonged drought, Wajir, Garissa, Mandera and Tana River districts have seen a significant reduction in inter-clan violence since the youths were demobilised and trained. And when conflict arises, the community mediation committees offer a rapid response in addressing these isolated cases.

Written by: Abjata Khalif