



Learning Progressively for Better Harvest

'Whenever members cannot join the group work, their family members take over to make sure that the work gets done.'

Mr. Joseph Mutwol is a 47-year-old farmer living in Soy Division of Keiyo North District. Soy is in Kerio Valley at between 1,000 and 1,200 meters above the sea level. It is in the Semi Arid districts of Keiyo and Marakwet of the Rift Valley Province. About 55% of the population is estimated to be living in poverty and 62% have limited access to adequate food, according to government reports.

Mr. Mutwol is among the 25 farmers who came together in 2007 to form the Irbei Self Help Group to engage in activities to improve their lives. They began with merry-go-round* and bee-keeping as their main activities.

The group had initially planted sunflower in 2007 and had relatively good yields supported by favourable rainfall. With this experience, the group applied for CADSAL's support in order to expand their sunflower farming and also begin extracting Sunflower oil.

Their application was taken up by CADSAL who supported the formulation of further action plan. However, the following three seasons the group did not see any harvest due to the serious drought between 2008 and 2009.

In the meantime, the group remained active. The Irbei farmers took the initiative and used its local network to rent an oil extracting equipment from a fellow farmers' group in Nandi area. With the sunflower seeds the group harvested in 2007, the group succeeded in extracting 24 litres of oil which they sold in the community. The by-product of oil, sunflower cake, was also sold in the community as supplementary livestock feed.

During these two years, CADSAL continued monitoring and advising the group to consider

reviewing their plan to minimize the impact of drought.

The project team decided to make a final effort to assist the few groups that had not progressed to achieve their goals. The consultation intensified and CADSAL team facilitated the group to review their enterprise critically. The group began to see that perseverance alone does not produce results.

After technical assessment assisted by CADSAL, the group saw that there were ways to address water scarcity. They concluded that this can be done by accessing the limited amount of water from the communal water source and using it in an efficient manner. They also agreed that diversification might reduce the risk of losing entire yields. With technical advice from CADSAL, the group decided to try watermelon and tomato farming in addition to sunflower using three different methods of irrigation (drip, furrow and sprinkler.)

The group drew up a revised action plan with the assistance of CADSAL team and agriculture and irrigation officers of the area. They then sought an approval from the Community Water User's Committee to access the communal water for irrigation. As they had saved on spending on the oil extracting equipment, they could propose CADSAL to allocate the project's assistance to procure necessary goods for irrigation.

Furthermore, with coordination by CADSAL, the group had the chance to go to the pioneer CADSAL group which tried drip irrigation in the

* Merry-go-round is a kind of non-formal financial mutual support mechanism. The members contribute a set amount of fund each month and a selected member receives the total sum each month to invest in activities to either sustain themselves or improve their livelihood.