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Women Thriving Through Commercial Fodder Production in Isiolo County, Kenya

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USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) is funding a 5-year Development Food Security Activity (DFSA) project known as Nawiri, led by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and being implemented in the arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) counties of Isiolo and Marsabit in Kenya. The project's goal is to sustainably reduce levels of persistent acute malnutrition among vulnerable populations in Isiolo and Marsabit Counties.

In September 2021, Isiolo County government and Nawiri (CRS) undertook a joint documentation initiative in collaboration with other USAID PREG implementing partners, the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), local media outlets and communities. The aim was to identify and showcase compelling stories of community resilience in the county, by capturing inspiring efforts underway to help prevent and withstand the impact of climate- and human-made shocks. The activities reported on below are supported by Isiolo County government and CRS funding, through USAID Nawiri.



Photo: CRS/Nawiri

Hay being loaded in a lorry in Kinna, Isiolo.

As pastoralists across Kenya's ASALs continue to endure the harsh effects of the drought that has resulted in the depletion of pasture dealing a big blow to pastoralism, a group of women in dry Garbatulla, Isiolo County, is cashing in on commercial fodder farming.

Ms Makai Mamo, the Chairperson of Bisanadi Cultural Group, initially used to strain to provide for her family due to lack of a reliable source of income, but since they formed the group of 15 that engages in fodder farming in Kinna ward her life has immensely improved.

She also struggled to educate her children and says a majority of group members had given up on taking theirs beyond primary school level, with pastoralism proving ineffective.

"Our animals used to die during drought while we watched. We were trapped in poverty, but we can now comfortably provide for our families, fatten our animals and save," said Makai.

The availability of fodder that retails at Sh500 per bail has helped revive their livestock rearing venture and their animals no longer die during dry spells.

After planting, the group is advised by Isiolo County livestock officers on the right time to harvest and thereafter store the feed for sale and some amount for use when drought hits.

They sell the fodder to local Non-Governmental Organizations at a slightly higher price, who in turn donate it to herders in other parts of the county to salvage emaciated animals and help cushion them against losses.

Profit from the business is equally shared among the members who then buy food for their families and sort other expenses.

A few kilometers away is Kinisa Community Based Organization (CBO) of 20 members, 18 being women.

Formed barely five years ago following the ravaging effects of drought on livestock and human life, the group farms on a 15-acre piece of land donated to them by the community.

The members came together seeking solutions to the numerous challenges they were facing, drought being one of them.

“We formed the group after realizing that we were the only people who would provide a solution to the challenges affecting us. The majority of us had lost our animals to drought,” said Mr Hassan Bagaja, a member.

Their first harvest was 200 bales of fodder but the lack of markets for the product frustrated them as they could not easily get money to buy food for their families as initially thought.

Determined amid the challenges, their production has improved in recent years, and they have this year



alone harvested 615 bales of fodder, pocketing over Sh200,000.

“We are able to feed our families and also save remaining money for our future needs,” narrates Mr Bagaja.

A sizeable number of pastoralists are nowadays considering farming as a way of diversifying their livelihoods, as pastoralism has proven unreliable due to ongoing drought.

Malka Bisanadi Cultural Group is among several groups in Isiolo that received fodder seed donations from the World Food Program (WFP), in partnership with the county’s livestock department.

The livestock department trained and offered advisory services to the farmers who have since embraced farming.

Apart from fodder crops, the group is also engaged in farming fleshed sweet potatoes that are high in Vitamin A and nutritious for mothers and children.

With the support of its private donor fund, CRS helps the farmers to source reliable markets for their products and provides market linkages.

“We came in and assisted the groups in stimulating the market by linking the farmers in Kinna with buyers in Garbatulla who are in need of fodder,” Nawiri’s Livelihoods and Livestock Sector Advisor Gabriel Mbokothe says.

Photo: CRS/Nawiri

“Whenever I want fodder for my animals, I can get it easily and at a subsidized price. We locally sell a bale at Sh500, but the price varies for NGOs”



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