



INUA VILLAGE TO GLOBAL FOUNDATION

WEST BUNYORE

FARMERS' FORUM

2022

Volume 1

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THEME

The role of local small scale farmers in contributing to food security within West Bunyore and the larger Vihiga County.

Held on 26th November 2022 at Inua Village to Global Achievers School in Ebukanga, West Bunyore, Vihiga County.

Facilitated by

SAHLIM CHARLES

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One of the focus areas for Inua Village to Global Foundation (IVTGF) for the year 2023- 2027, is to contribute to sustainable communities through engagement and partnership with local communities and stakeholders. Farmers and organizations working with local farmers are integral part of this process.

On 26th November 2022, IVTGF organized its first ever engagement with local farmers and other players in the agricultural sector within Vihiga County. The forum brought together over 20 farmers drawn from across West Bunyore, Vihiga County.

Under the theme “The role of local small-scale farmers in contributing to food security within West Bunyore and larger Vihiga County, the forum's main objectives were;

1. Look at the existing plans and policies by the county government for local farmers and agricultural sector.
2. Discuss how to utilize family farming and sustainability.
3. Discuss key challenges and opportunities for agricultural sector within the West Bunyore.
4. Explore existing knowledge gap among the farmers.

This engagement will provide an opportunity to raising awareness and educating the farmers on the best practices for their agricultural activities as well as providing insights on the existing county policies especially for agri-business. The forum seeks to build momentum on what the county government is already implementing in terms of hunger and poverty eradication.

Opening Remarks **by Zachuas Ogonji, IVTGF's Chairperson**

The one-day engagement started with IVTGF team led by its chairperson Zachuas Ogonji sharing with the participants the organization's strategic focus, work and beneficiaries, and how this forum is key in its work for 2023 and beyond.

Zachuas spoke about the foundation's focus in education where it has benefitted over 1000 children through its three schools in Vihiga, Nairobi and Kakamega. Most of the learners are beneficiary of the feeding program which is managed through the Inua Farm - The host of this forum.

He elaborated that the foundation provides high quality nutritional food to its learner especially those from poor families. However, to reduce over-reliance on the school support, the families are being encouraged to produce food and utilize its usage and storage for dry seasons- to ensure they have enough food to take them through emergencies. Zachuas also shared that during the Covid-19 period, the foundation distributed over 4,000 food packs to needy families in the three counties of its operations. In conclusion, he emphasized to the farmers to think on how they can adopt sustainable methods of farming and storage of surplus food for future use or sale. He welcomed the participants and urged them to feel free, network and be open minded in discussing possible ways they can collaborate with each other.

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Sustainable Agricultural Practices

by Brenda Nyakoa, Vihiga County Extension Officer

Brenda Nyakoa started her session by highlighting that Agriculture is the main economic activity in Vihiga County. That most farmers practice smallholder mixed farming rearing livestock and cultivating crops on the same piece of land. Some of the major food crops grown are maize, beans and local vegetables. Banana and ground nuts are cultivated as both food and cash crops while tea is cultivated as a cash crop. Livestock kept are dual purpose cattle, chicken and shoats.

Continuous land subdivision has put pressure on the available land, this has led to reduction in the land available for farming. Due to poor agricultural practices on the constantly cultivated parcels of land, continual decreasing soil fertility, build up of crops pests and diseases has led to a decline in agricultural productivity. Some livelihood activities that involve the exploitation of land in the county, such as prospecting for gold, bricks making and sand harvesting has resulted into significant localized environmental degradation.

Climate change, which poses a threat to farmers worldwide, has not left Vihiga farmers behind. Increasing incidences of extreme weather related incidences such as massive hailstorms, prolonged dry spells or rainy seasons, increasing emergence and resilience of hirtheto unknown pests and diseases have become a common thing in the county.

There is therefore need for the promotion and adoption of sustainable agricultural practices for increased agricultural productivity: economically, environmentally and socially sustainable farming practices that enables farms of all sizes to be profitable, support the next generation of farmers, create healthy food for all and avoid damaging the environment. These practices include; Conservation agriculture; this revolves around minimum tillage of farms, retaining crop residues on the farm and using them for mulching and crop rotation Integrated pest Management; using mechanical and biological methods systematically to control pests and diseases while minimizing use of chemical pesticides.

Adopting agroforestry practices; planting environmentally friendly trees alongside crops and livestock enterprise; these help protect water resources, reduce soil erosion and offer additional income especially from fruit trees. Soil and water conservation practices; this includes construction of farm terraces to control loss of soil through surface water run off erosion. Farm ponds can also be constructed for harvesting available excess surface run off water during the rainy season and using it for irrigation during the dry season.

Organic farming; this highly relies on a deliberate effort at utilizing non-chemical inputs and chemical free products in crops production. Besides the obvious unexplited economic benefits of this approach to crops production, organic farming allows for an environmentally sustainable production.

Farmer's response

In their response to the presentation by the Agricultural Extension Officer, farmers stated that they face challenges that have continued to hinder their progress;

1. Inability to fully utilize the available resources to commercialize their farming practices. This is in spite of the fact that other farmers from other counties with identically small farm parcels have been able to commercialize agricultural practices.
2. Access to information on the most suitable practices and technologies has remained a challenge.
3. Projects rolled out by the County Government in the sector, though well intentioned, did not reach out to as many farmers as desired. Some farmers felt left out.

Brenda acknowledged the farmers concerns and emphasized on the importance of forum like this as they provide such vital feedback.

She encouraged the farmers to work in groups as through this, it would be easier for more of them to be reached by county projects, noting that the County Government projects interventions entry points is farmer groups and not individual farmers.

County Policies and Programs for the Agricultural Sector

by Fredrick Etale, Assistant Chief

Fredrick Etale started his session by encouraging the participants to grow diverse crops as this would help them become food secure. He also stated that there are a number of policies that guide agricultural sector within the county and Kenya, in general. However, what has been challenging is its implementation as the citizens think it's only the responsibility of the government to implement them while they forget that these policies are made for them and they should be in the know on which policy applies to them and their different sectors. Willing farmers should be able to study the existing policies and contribute in policy forums: this would influence growth.

He explained that both national and county governments only respond to identified needs and it is the responsibility of the farmers to come out of their comfort zones, work as a team and seek support from the government and its partners.

Some of the existing policies that affects farmers directly include;

- I. Quality assurance policy.
- II. Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020.
- III. Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020.
- IV. Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020
- V. Finance policy which influence the level and stability of input and output price of end product. Source of funds for budgeting.
- VI. Environment/climate change consideration policy which monitors what kind of farming one is involved in is it friendly or has negative impact to the public.
- VII. Policy on empowerment of small-scale farmers.

In conclusion, Fredrick, urged the farmers to consider the government as its partner, keep record of their work, ensure efficiency and honest in their practice; appreciate the efforts by the government; Look for information by attending Government training and meetings on agro-economy and most importantly rest and have time to reinvestment after long hours of working.

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Pictorial



“You have a life away from farming”

Closing - Ernest Njinga IVTGF's CEO expounded that the foundation has laid out mechanism to engage with key stakeholders within the community and it would ensure forums as this would continue so as to support local farmers. He urged the farmers to ensure they work together, market their produce and also support those in need of their expertise.

Recommendations

As a commitment to continue with the discussion and follow up on some of the issues that emerged from the meeting, the farmers came up with six strong points as recommendation and way forward. These are;

1. The need for generation of knowledge on the right practices, techniques that the farmers should be trained on. This may include knowledge on the right seeds, costing and market value
2. Awareness creation on existing policies, programs and other guidelines by the government (county and national).
3. Acknowledging local farmer. The county government can come up with a program to acknowledge experienced local farmers and support them for advancement of their work.
4. The county government should provide certified seeds and farm inputs at fair price to promote sustainability.
5. Grants for local farmers - The county government should share or create possible funding opportunities to support farmers contribute to their livelihood and long-term solutions in the agricultural sector.
6. Form working groups and work closely with each promote learning and exchange of lessons, experience, opportunities and challenges.



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