

Your Environment

—with Lukas Ng'asike



Drought pushes Turkana herders to farming

Farmers receive high value seeds and technical expertise to boost harvest

Achwa Ikwachiyo, a widow and mother of seven, regarded with a sense of hopelessness the dusk embracing her Lokitaung village in Turkana North Sub-county. Fate and weather had conspired to hand her a tattered life. A devastating drought wiped out all her livestock, leaving her impoverished. Left with nothing, Achwa awaited a miracle.

That miracle came through her decision to abandon traditional livestock rearing for farming. "My ambition is to turn my life into success," says a joyful Achwa, "crop farming has always been my dream. It's a flourishing and rewarding economic activity in the region compared to livestock, which perish during drought."

Recently, church officials from World Relief-Kenya visited her and she took them to her farm, 5km from her home.

At the Lomareng farm in Lokitaung, a group of women were tilling, weeding and planting along seasonal River Kachoda. Achwa and 30 other pastoralist women are showing the way to those still sticking to cattle rearing despite the devastating effects of drought that leave them poorer as the years go by. The women use drip irrigation



The women tend to their water melons. INSET: Achwa Ikwachiyo chews cowpeas leaves believed to be medicine for poor eyesight. [PHOTOS: LUKAS NG'ASIKE / STANDARD]

to water melon, onions, *sukuma wiki*, tomatoes, maize and cowpeas.

"We earn a living from the farm. These crops, especially the sweet water melon, fetch us a good income that gives us our daily bread," says Achwa.

She says cowpea leaves are medicinal – people chew them to sharpen their night vision.

"We have never gone to the hospital because of eyesight problems. In fact, we treat most villagers with night blindness when they visit our farm. It is a miracle crop as it heals instantly," she says.

Chairman of the Lomareng farm David Epuyo says the farm has boosted the locals' economic livelihoods. "We want to remove

the over-dependence on relief food. We can grow our own food and feed the rest of Kenya. All we need now is more water to succeed," says Epuyo.

Epuyo says several pastoralists are willing to farm since the region has potential to produce food through irrigation.

Farmers are reaping big from water melons. A kilo of the sweet fruit fetches Sh100 and a farmer can harvest hundreds of kilograms at one go.

A similar farm in Manalong'oria near Lokitaung town has also been put under drip irrigation. Several pastoralists continue to enroll in the farm following biting drought in the region. Lokitaung senior chief Paul Lobolia says the farmers have

benefited from the crop farming techniques that the church has initiated in the region.

"We have a chunk of fertile land that can be put under irrigation. If more land is farmed, then our farmers would help achieve food security in the region. We want to end the situation where people die from hunger in the region," says Lobolia.

World Relief gives the farmers high value seeds, constructs green houses, digs shallow wells and provides technical expertise. Their input has borne fruit.

Paul Amodoi from the organisation says more than 2,500 households have benefited from the project and it is intending to increase the number of beneficiaries to ensure the region becomes a food-secure zone.