
Developing “Farming as a Business” in Kenya

Farming is the backbone of Kenya’s economy. It accounts for 65% of the country’s foreign currency earnings and employs about 80% of the population. The scale of operations remains small, however, with 75% of the marketed crops grown in smallholder family farms. Until about 10 years ago, farmers had no choice but to sell their crops to middlemen at prices set by the latter, and their incomes were inadequate. To address this issue, since 2006 Japan has been cooperating with Kenya in implementation of the Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment Promotion (SHEP) approach, which aims to increase farmers’ incomes.

Arisa Kikuchi, an employee of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on the front lines of SHEP implementation in Kenya, explains that the approach aims to develop local farmers’ capabilities so as to transform their activities into “farming as a business.” The first key element of this approach is to hold gatherings to bring farmers together with people in the horticultural industry. Through such meetings, farmers become able to understand the market actors’ needs and expand their network. This helps them to select suitable buyers for their produce and to buy seeds and fertilizer at lower prices through group purchasing.

The second key element of the approach is to conduct market surveys by groups of farmers to determine which crops would be more marketable. Having information about demand in the market allows farmers to make more concretely informed decisions about what to plant in the next growing season. Kikuchi notes: “In other projects, market surveys are commonly conducted by consultants, but in the SHEP approach the focus is on survey activities conducted by farmers themselves. This requires the provision of detailed support, which is the core of Japan’s technical assistance, and it’s essential as a means of making the SHEP approach take root locally and become sustainable.”

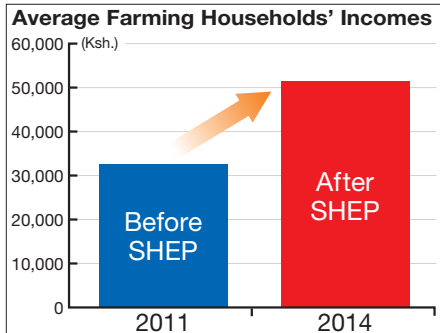
The gender training conducted as part of the SHEP approach is an important means of raising farmers’ incomes. In many Kenyan farming households, males tend to handle the decision making about what to plant and what to buy; relatively few couples discuss such matters and decide jointly. “Gender training sessions lead to more discussion between husbands and wives, with husbands becoming more likely to share the chores previously handled mainly by their wives and to consult with their wives when deciding what equipment they should buy. When a couple buys a water tank at the wife’s request, her water-drawing burden is lightened, and she can devote the saved time to farming, which leads to more income.”

These activities have been steadily producing results. From 2011 to 2014 the real horticultural incomes of the targeted farming households rose by 58%. And people report that their lives have improved, saying, for example, that they have become able to send their children to a private middle school or that they used their earnings to start a new business. Kenyan government authorities have recognized that the SHEP approach is effective in increasing farmers’ incomes, and from 2010 to 2015 it was implemented in 33 out of the nation’s 47 counties.

Africa’s population is expected to double to 2.4 billion by 2050. With the continent’s future in mind, Kikuchi expresses her determination: “Developing manufacturing industry is important in terms of creating jobs and achieving economic growth, but for many African countries farming continues to be a key sector employing the largest number of people. I hope to be involved in activities that will support the livelihoods of smallhold farmers, who account for large shares of countries’ populations, by further extending the establishment of “farming as a business.”



1. Kikuchi organizes training aimed at extending the SHEP approach to various African countries, together with SHEP Team members consisting of government officials in Kenya and JICA experts.
2. A local market: Through SHEP activities farmers developed direct connections with the market and became able to choose buyers offering higher prices rather than relying just on middlemen.
3. At gender training sessions for farming couples, husbands and wives are asked to write down the contents of their spending and of their everyday chores so as to make this information visible. The attitudes of husbands reportedly change as they focus on achieving the couple's shared goal of increasing their income.
4. Real horticultural income per farmer increased by 58% from 2011 to 2014.



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Source: Data collected by SHEP Team by interviewing farmers and extension officers.
Notes: Figures have been adjusted for consumer price inflation. 10,000 Kenyan shillings = approx. USD 120 as of March 2014.

Arisa Kikuchi

Completed graduate studies in agriculture. As she studied the connections between farmers and markets, she aimed to become involved in international cooperation activities based on agriculture. In 2009 she joined JICA, where she initially worked in the area of South Asian farming and rural development. From 2014 to 2016 she was stationed in Kenya, where she conducted activities as a project expert promoting the SHEP approach.

