

## **LIVING OUR DREAM: FROM DISTRESSED PASTORALISTS TO SUCCESSFUL FARMERS BY CARE Kenya**

“Our farm is now a business, we have opened a bank account with a local bank (Equity) and already banked Kshs. 11,000 and we have another Kshs. 20,000 from the sales of water melons which we will bank soon. We are slowly realizing our dream” Mohamed Ibrahim Farah, chairman, Kone Self Help Farming Group.

Kone is a village situated in Mbalambala division, 130km North of Garissa District; an economic hub of Kenya’s North Eastern province. It is inhabited by former Somali pastoralists who settled along the Tana River in 2005.

After losing their livestock to chronic drought, the Kone community decided to take up farming as an alternative means of livelihood. They set up a farming group called Kone Farmers Self Help Group (KFSHG) and identified a place beside the river to establish a five acre farm.

With no agricultural experience, the group solicited for information on how they could register as a Community Based Organization (CBO) in order to get recognition from the Government of Kenya and other international and local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in the arid and semi-arid areas of North Eastern Kenya.

The group, comprising of 48 members was registered in 2005 with the Department of Social Services in Garissa town



**Members of the group**

With assistance from Arid Lands Regional Management Program (ALRMP - a government department coordinating development assistance in the region) and other NGOs they received a two piston water pump, farming tools and pipes. They then cleared the land and planted bananas, mangoes, pawpaw, water melons and maize on a trial basis.

Several organizations also came to their aid with Action against Hunger (AAH) providing the group with seeds, ALLPRO (ASAL-based Livestock Livelihoods Programme) helping build water canals and the Kenya Red Cross Society providing farming tools such as hoes, pangas, rakes, and wheelbarrows. Initially the harvest was purely for subsistence purposes and was divided amongst the 48 members.

In January 2009 CARE International in Kenya worked with the group to train them on institutional capacity building. This training covered group formation and cohesion, leadership, conflict management and resource mobilization.

“When we started the farm, we had very little knowledge of how to organize our group in order to make it cohesive. When CARE Kenya intervened, we identified institutional capacity building as our basic need. We received training for which we are very grateful. We now have a vision for our group” says Mohamed Ibrahim Farah the chairman of the group.

In April 2009, the group was introduced to beekeeping skills, honey handling and record keeping, followed by a one week agricultural training in crop production techniques and setting up of nurseries.

CARE also conducted training on business management skills which included topics such as costing and pricing, business planning, basic marketing and recordkeeping. This led to some group members starting six small businesses within the village; these include four home-based shops selling assorted household items, a hotel and a tailoring shop. Some mentioned that their confidence to diversify their income stream and start new ventures had been boosted as a result of the workshop.

Although the majority of the group members are men (43 of the 48), their wives are actively involved in the development of the farm and other enterprises.

The women are in the process of forming two women’s groups while the youth have also formed a group, all as a result of the training.

These groups will also be involved in farming activities once the farm is expanded. The members reckoned that the business management skills training opened their eyes and they now considered the farm a potential business. From the recent harvest of maize and water melons, the group made their first produce sales in Balambala and Garissa towns.

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Apart from Business Development Service training, CARE also hired a consultant to train the group in beekeeping and provided the group with 10 Langstroth hives for demonstration in May 2009. In less than 4 weeks, the bees have colonized 3 of the 10 hives and they are expecting their first honey harvest in October. (The group is very happy with the CARE assistance). The demand of honey in Garissa is very high and the current produce does not meet the demand. Honey Care (A honey processing company in the country) promised to buy all the honey produced by KFSHG when they decide to sell.

The group is faced with the challenge of falling water levels of the canal. However to solve this they are now clearing the river to remove silt. They have also had wild animals destroying their crops. However, ALRMP together with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) are in the process of installing a solar-powered electric fence to protect the farm. This will protect their crops from destruction by wildlife especially elephants that have trampled their crops and uprooted some of their pawpaw and banana plants.

CARE is currently training the group in farming techniques and the members have learnt a lot regarding the production of maize, water melons and making of nurseries. They emphasized that they never had any farming training and are grateful to program.

“CARE has motivated us; we can no longer afford to sleep. Each of us is working hard. I even slept on the farm last night, guarding the crops against the wild animals.” Said Mohamed filled with determination.

The group's vision is to expand the farm and improve the living standards of their members, first priority being the improvement of their housing which is in a bad state.

They also hope they can start supplying food to Garissa and other small towns in the District to increase their incomes and improve their living standards further. "We had lost not only our animals but also hope, but now we have regained it and we are slowly realizing our dreams and improving our living standards".