

SAFE-World Project/Initiative Summary

Country: Kenya

Project/Initiative Title: ABLH

Nos. farmers: 2500

Hectares: 1000

Agro-Ecological Zone: VIII

Improvement types

1x	2x	3x	4	5x	6x	7	8x	9x
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A. Key Impacts

A1 – Productivity

	Before/Without	After/With	% change
Vegetables			New crop

D. Contact Point for Project/Initiative

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E. Project Narrative

The ABLH is supported by the UK Department for International Development and promotes business development through low cost methods of conservation-based farming that reduce poverty, improve rural people's livelihoods and boost rural economies. It works on the premise that systems of sustainable and productive land use can be developed largely with the existing skills, knowledge and social organisation of rural people. It facilitates the formation of self-help groups of farmers, promotes sustainable agriculture technologies to these groups, helps them to market the outputs, and helping them to find ways to process and pack produce so as to retain greater added-value. It is engaged in business development, supporting community factories, and developing certification schemes and farmers' own brands to give produce better returns in local and national markets.

The approach to sustainable agriculture is called 'near nil investment'. The basic principle is that poor rural families do not have the financial resources to invest in farm improvements. What they need are ways to boost productivity and income by making the best use of available human and natural resources. The technologies proven to work are concerned with

the regeneration and recycling of organic matter for soil management, and the use of natural pesticides such as neem. The aim is to find ways to maximise returns from these technologies, and then 'top-up' with externally-sourced fertilizers and pesticides where necessary and safe. Other low-investment resource-conserving technologies and practices are also made available to farmers, including beekeeping and agro-forestry. Most activities are currently focused on homegardens, though progress is also being made with field crops such as soya and sunflower.

Double dug beds combined with composting, green and animal manures improve the soil. A considerable investment in labour is required, but the better water holding capacity and higher organic matter means that these beds are more productive, more diverse and are able to sustain vegetable growth long into the dry season. Once this investment is made, little more has to be done for the next 4 to 6 seasons (2-3 years). Many vegetable and fruit crops are cultivated, including sukumawiki and other kales, onions, tomatoes, cabbage, passion fruit, pigeon peas, spinach, peppers, green beans and soya.

Self-help groups have found that their family food security has improved substantially since adopting conservation farming. Before, they had to use cash when they were short of food in the dry season to pay for maize and vegetables. They had to sell their labour, rely on remittances from family members working elsewhere in the country, or sell cash crops. They would have to do this at a time when food prices were high and labour and cash crop prices low. Many also relied on collecting wild foods from forests. But now, families have found that by working more on their own farms rather than selling labour to others, they are getting greater returns. They have found that investment on their own farms in natural capital pays better returns in food production. Casual hiring out of labour has virtually disappeared among SHG members. Children have been beneficiaries, as their health has improved through increased vegetable consumption and longer periods of available food. According to one review of 26 communities in eight Districts, 75% of households are now free from hunger during the year, and the proportion of households buying vegetables has fallen from 85% to 11%.

Source: Jim Cheadle, Jules Pretty; Pretty, 1997, 2000