

Incomes

50% of the famers Excellent Development works with are subsistence farmers who rely entirely on their farms for income. The rest have at least one member of the family employed locally or in towns and cities who bring or send money home once a month. After basic necessities are bought, such as salt, sugar, soap, tea, paraffin etc. a family's prime income focus is to raise secondary school fees for their children. Farmers need to create a sustainable food source and income from their farms.

Simon, Excellent Development co-founder - *'The philosophy of EXD in terms of income generation is to make sure that farmers keep control of their own destiny. When people grow coffee, where they have to put a lot of time and money into growing the crop, when they don't even know whether they're going to get the money at the end and they certainly don't know what price they're going to get for it, and they know that there's only place that they have to sell it, doesn't give anybody any pride or ability to control their own lives. One of the other things is that it's vital that actually preventing yourself from spending money is just as important as earning money. Because they amount to the same thing.'*

Excellent encourage farmers to focus their income generating activities on growing more of the food they eat – instead of just two or three crops – and selling any surpluses. Selling can be done locally, so this leaves the farmer in control of what to sell and at what price.

Prof. Mugambi, University of Nairobi - *'If we are going to eradicate poverty in Africa, then we must encourage African countries to produce what they consume and consume what they produce.'*

Sand dams enable farmers to look at diversifying into vegetables – improving nutrition and providing income generating opportunities.

Charles Muendo, farmer - *'I had no any plan of planting anything like tomatoes, because thinking of planting tomatoes without sand dam, it was a day dream. But when Excellent Development came and showed the sites and we constructed that sand dam is when my mind started waking up. First time, I planted 140 plants that we ate around here and the community were coming to buy some more of them. Next, I planted 350, but last one, that's when I got something'*

'What did you get?'

'2,800 Kenyan shillings. Whereby I used to take the tomatoes to school, where my child is schooling, then it was counted as money, because that tomato is cooked at school.'

An example of how successful this can be is Kola market in Machakos district.

Prof. Mugambi, University of Nairobi - *'25 years ago it was an open market and there was hardly anything to sell. Every Friday, like today, there is a great deal of produce that is coming from here and this community has learnt to produce what they consume and consume what they produce. What they produce, if they consume and there is a surplus they export, and if there is a deficit, they import. That is what basic economics is all about.'*

Farmers also have opportunities to improve incomes through increased egg, milk and meat production. Most communities are very lucky if they can afford to eat meat once a week, as they need to sell livestock for income. Fodder from trees reduces the cost of feeding livestock and improves milk yields. Excellent has also helped the poorer communities establish a sustainable goat improvement programme with a breed of goat which provides four time the milk yield of local goats.

One group started life as a bee-keeping project, which, through Excellent Development's workshops and exchanges has helped other groups to take up the challenge of producing honey – both healthy and income generating! Excellent trains them and provides modern bee-hives to increase yields. In the longer term, farmers can focus on cash crops which also improve health and conservation in the local community...

Simon, Excellent Development co-founder - *'Once people are able to satisfy their immediate needs for water and food, they can start looking at the ways in which they can earn incomes. Once of those ways is medicinal trees.'*

So, if farmers have enough food and water – they then have time to develop an income and the cycle of poverty can be broken. Sometimes the simplest solutions are the most effective.