

Florence's story

Florence Muthama (pictured) is a member of the Wikwatyo wa Mativo self-help group in southeast Kenya. The 32-year-old mother of three has a small farm where she grows crops to feed and support her family, including her two grandchildren who also live with her.

Florence lives in a region of Kenya where food and water shortages are all too common. Here, she explains the challenge the community would face in search of water, particularly during the dry seasons when the nearby river would run completely dry.

“Life used to be very difficult. After the rainy seasons the river would soon dry up, so we had to trek long distances in pursuit of water, and we had to dig very deep scoop holes to find water.”



Florence Muthama

Florence recalls how she would regularly have to spend up to six hours at the busy water point.

“By the time I got back home, I was too worn out to engage in any other activities, but I had to conduct them as my children were too young and they relied on me. For the sake of my children, I had to do this every day. I wanted to give them a comfortable life.”

Farming is a key part of community life and critical to their livelihoods. Yet the effects of climate change were having a significant impact on their ability to grow enough food.

“We relied on the rains to farm but over the years the rains have been getting increasingly unreliable. In the dry seasons most of our crops would wither and die because there was no water in the area. At times we would only harvest one bag of maize and have to depend on it for the rest of the year, and we would be starving because the rest of the food in our granaries would run out.”

In 2017, tired of the ongoing food and water shortages and the challenges that came with it, members of the community came together to form the Wikwatyo wa Mativo SHG. Florence said:

“I joined the group because I wanted a better future for my children, and I believed that together, we could join efforts to solve the challenges that we faced. Having witnessed the impact of sand dams in other villages and the promising future it could have, I wanted to be a part of the group and participate in a sand dam project which would change our lives.”

The group approached the Africa Sand Dam Foundation (ASDF – our partner in southeast Kenya) for support, and have since gone on to construct two sand dams, ensuring a year-round source of clean water for the entire community. SHG members also took part in climate-smart agriculture training, helping them to grow a variety of crops on their farms to ensure a sustainable source of food and income.

“We were taught about establishing kitchen gardens where we can plant various crops to boost our diets. This has been helpful to me and I have managed to plant kales, spinach, and onions. Now there is no hunger in my family – we always have food to eat!”

As part of their tailored programme of support, SHG members received a selection of drought-resistant seeds and were taught how to establish and maintain a community seed bank, to help ensure the community always have access to quality seeds. Florence said:

“We received seeds from ASDF which we have been planting, harvesting and redistributing, and then returning seeds to our bank. We always have food at our granary store now; to eat at home, to sell, and for planting. A percentage of harvests is shared among the group members, and the remainder is stored for planting in the next season.”

But it's not just on their farms where community members have noticed a difference.

“The local environment has also really changed. Whether it's the rainy or dry season, it is always green, and no longer dry and bare. Pasture also grows by itself now, which was hardly possible before.”

Florence expressed her happiness and pride with what she, alongside her fellow members of the Wikwatyo wa Mativo SHG have been able to achieve together.

“Since taking part in our sand dam projects, my life has changed a lot and I feel like we are living a better life. My living standards have really improved. Initially, getting money was difficult. But now it's easier as I can sell vegetables from my farm and earn an income to steer the progress of my life and that of my children.”



Florence's grandchildren, Mary (left) and Brian (right)