

AGRA Impact Series



Innovation Platform Approach Improves Agricultural Prospects for Farmers in Western Kenya

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The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and its partners have successfully deployed an innovation platform that contributes to a strengthened agricultural environment in Western Kenya.

An innovation platform is a group of individuals from different backgrounds and interests, who come together to solve common problems. Innovation platforms allow members to identify opportunities and design strategies for achieving their goals.

In Kakamega, the AGRA-supported innovation platform brought together farmers, traders, researchers and government officials to address the encroachment of the Kakamega Forest that is now linked to the declining agricultural environment in Kakamega, Vihiga and Nandi, the three counties surrounding the forest.

Researchers discovered that the tropical rainforest was becoming impoverished as a result of unsustainable land use by communities around it. In fact, residents were increasingly advancing into the forest for food, herbs and timber, which they would then sell in markets for sustenance.

“The result of this uncontrolled exploitation was a reduction in agricultural productivity as the lands around the forest remained neglected and the climate changed unfavorably,” said George Ayaga, the senior research principal and center director at the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO).



With the situation getting critical, AGRA, together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and KALRO, designed and deployed an innovation platform to spearhead sustainable land management (SLM) strategies in the region.

In the program, farmers neighboring the forest were organized into 10 micro-catchments, which are essentially community-based associations intended to educate members on how to increase agricultural production without damaging the environment.

“The micro-catchments have been instrumental forums in the sensitization and training of farmers on SLM. This is in addition to serving as active centers for championing market-capturing techniques such as value addition and the collective negotiation of prices,” said Dr. Abednego Kiwia, AGRA’s associate program officer.

Initially, the IP focused on promoting the adoption of improved agricultural production technologies. Later, it transformed to support the introduction of new and high-value crops such as indigenous vegetables, which have now become the main value-chain crops on the platform.

“Working as groups within a micro catchment, the members freely generate information for enhancing conservation while at the same time increasing food production,” said Dr. Kiwia.

At the local level, the IP helps identify the benefits of active membership in the protection of the landscape and not just a focus on individual farm activities. In essence, the local micro catchments

serve as independent innovation platforms through which the analysis and interpretation of the challenges facing the community were itemized and prioritized.

“Through the local IPs, farmers are able to see the need to conserve the environment beyond their farming activities as it would affect them as well,” said AGRA’s resilience officer, Assan Ng’ombe

The sustainability measures that the IP has put in place include the diversification of the value chains, starting with finger millet before expanding to dairy, poultry, maize, bananas and horticultural crops (such as pumpkin and water melon).

For better market prices, the IP allows members to collectively negotiate the price of inputs. This is in addition to giving them stronger bargaining power when selling their produce.

“By pooling their produce and selling as a group, in the early years of the IP, the farmers sold the finger millet, a popular cereal crop in the region, at an attractive KES200 per kg. The prices are slightly lower now but still above average,” said Kiwia.

The support provided by AGRA and its partners runs until the end of 2021, but the Kakamega IP is now self-sustaining and will continue operating in complete autonomy under the management of member farmers.