



Developing Village-based Advisors to improve food security

What is the Village-based Advisors Food Security Project?

The Village-based Advisors Food Security project is improving productivity by promoting good farming practices among smallholder farmers, with the larger goal of increasing their food security and resilience to environmental shocks. The project identifies keen, hard-working farmers at the village level and develops them into “agro-entrepreneurs”, called Village-based Advisors who provide inputs (such as improved seed), services (such as livestock vaccination) and advice on good farming practices to their community. These micro-businesses offer the double benefit of creating rural employment opportunities and building a sustainable system for delivering agricultural technologies.

The project is part of the U.S. Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative, also known as “Feed the Future”, which seeks to address the root causes of hunger and poverty and create conditions where food assistance is no longer necessary.



Photo: FIPS Africa

Young agro-entrepreneur Concilia Anyango vaccinating a chicken against the deadly Newcastle disease

Project Duration and Budget

March 2012 – March 2017

\$2,000,000

Who implements the Village-based Advisors Food Security Project?

Farm Input Promotions Africa (FIPS-Africa)

www.fipsafrica.org

Where does the Village-based Advisors Food Security Project work?

The project works in Siaya, Busia, Embu, Kitui, Machakos, and Makueni counties.

What does the Village-based Advisors Food Security Project do?

The project is working to mitigate the negative effects of climate change on Kenya’s smallholder farmers by increasing their use of improved varieties of crops and inputs like fertilizer; building their understanding of and ability to implement good soil and water management techniques, and providing better access to poultry vaccination.

The model relies on the use of “Village-based Advisors” (VBAs) who earn an income through the provision of improved inputs, advice and services to their fellow farmers. Unlike traditional group-based approaches, VBAs have a target to work with every farmer in their community, meaning thousands of farmers can be reached quickly and cost-effectively. The project builds on the entrepreneurialism and community spirit common among smallholder farmers.

FIPS-Africa is a pioneer of the ‘small pack’ approach – where inputs such as seed are distributed to farmers in small quantities. This allows farmers to experiment on their own farm at a low cost and with minimal risk. Farmers are more likely to adopt if they have seen something work first.

How will the Village-based Advisors Food Security Project make a difference?

By June 2012, the project had trained over 100 VBAs who distributed over 34,000 small packs of seed of improved varieties of key staple crops to farmers and established nearly 4,000 multiplication sites for drought tolerant root tuber crops.

By March 2013, the following additional achievements are expected:

- 1,800 demonstration plots for improved soil and water management or seed priming established
- 9,000 households growing improved varieties of root tuber crops
- 56,000 more small packs of maize and drought-tolerant crops distributed to VBAs for promotion or demonstration
- 4,500 small commercial packs of improved farm inputs (crops, fertilizers etc.) sold

- 400,000 chickens vaccinated
- 900 animals of improved breeds disseminated to VBAs to upgrade the local livestock

What key challenges does the Village-based Advisors Food Security Project face?

Finding the right people to be VBAs can be challenging. Ideal VBAs are farmers who are entrepreneurial, hard-working, and influential change agents who are keen to help their community. In some areas, the project works with the local administration to choose appropriate people who are respected by their communities.

Accessing sufficient quantities of seed of improved varieties and livestock can be a problem as demand often exceeds supply – particularly for crops with little or no private sector involvement. The project mitigates this through a loan system, where farmers repay the VBA in-kind at the end of the season, in a ratio of 2:1 or 3:1. The VBA then returns seeds, cuttings or animals to the project – meaning that more farmers can be reached.

Village-based Advisors Food Security Project in action

Dorcas Nyangasi of Emuhaya is 22-years-old and successfully self-employed. Like many young people in rural areas, Dorcas had trouble finding work when she finished school: “My mother thought I was depressed because they could not afford my college, or lonely because most of my friends were leaving the village. But the real reason was that I needed something to do.”

Dorcas’s life was transformed when Farm Input Promotions-Africa (FIPS-Africa) trained her to be a Village-based Advisor (VBA), providing agricultural inputs, services and advice on good farming practices to smallholder farmers in her village. As well as distributing seed, Dorcas sells vegetable and tree seedlings from her nurseries and vaccinates poultry against Newcastle disease, which used to devastate local flocks. After two-and-a-half years of being her own boss, Dorcas has more than 2,000 farmers buying her inputs and services. She explains, “within the first four months I noticed that I could make more money when I approached more farmers, so I expanded my operations to three more villages.”

Dorcas’ hard work is not only improving her own livelihood – it helps the other farmers in her community too. “I am happy because I have helped my village rise above the problem of hunger, there is poultry in abundance, and we have surplus sweet potatoes and cassava to sell,” she says.

Photo: FIPS Africa



Dorcas Nyangasi has changed her life and is serving her community through her work as a Village-Based Advisor.

For more information:

Dr. Paul Seward, Managing Director
Farm Input Promotions-Africa
Tel: +254 (0) 724 700 007
Email: fipsafrica@yahoo.com

Samson Okumu, AOR
USAID/Kenya
Agriculture, Business and Environment Office
Tel: +254 208 622 2245
Email: sokumu@usaid.gov

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