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By Henry Lyimo

Villagers in the Undulating Pare Mountains Turn to Vegetable Farming

When man controls nature it is often thought as mainly in fantasy, magic or traditional tales, but in Kilimanjaro Region it is different altogether. The Wapare control steep slopes of their mountainous landscape earning money from places earlier thought impossible.

Along the slopes of Pare mountain ranges in Same and Mwanga districts, peasants are making money, not from coffee and bananas, but from vegetables. They plant onions, tomatoes or cabbages off-season and sell the crop when the supply is low to fetch good money.

To the Wapare living on top of the mountains, life is changing for the better after the fall of coffee prices, their main cash crop, subjected them to abject poverty. They have turned to vegetable farming through irrigation.

But behind their success is a technical and financial support they receive from Traditional Irrigation & Environmental Development Organization (TIP), a non-government organization that assists them to improve their traditional irrigation system based on sustainable use of land and water resources.

About one year since the organization began helping the peasants in the two districts in 2003, the peasants are beaming with hope. To them, life has changed for the better.

"You'll see me parking a pick-up in five years time," says 44-year old Nzinyangwa Elieneza, a peasant at Vuchamandamwe village in Mwanga District.

Elieneza, a model farmer in the village, now dreams of buying a car after his earnings increased since he began planting vegetables in his farm.

With TIP support, he constructed terraces and improved traditional water harvesting techniques and drainage. He plants different types of vegetables three times a year and sells the crop to buyers from Mwanga, Moshi, Arusha and Dar es Salaam. He has bought himself a mobile phone this year, repaired his house and saved some amount of money.

About 1,800 farmers in Mwanga District have formed water user groups where they are helped in water and land conservation for improving traditional irrigation systems.

They have improved their traditional water reservoirs, known as ndiva and lined canals to the members of their groups where they allocate water to each member equally. The main methods of irrigation include sprinkler and horse water.

Another beneficiary of the project in the village is 63-year-old Emmanuel Juaeli Mbungu, who said he made 50,000/-last year after selling Irish potatoes, beans and cabbages.

Mbungu said he could have earned more but bad weather and lack of fertilizers affected his crop. He nonetheless has not despaired and believes he would make more money this year.

He said he attended farming training in Mwanga delivered by Agriculture Extension Officers in the district.

The list of farmers whose life has changed after the TIP intervention include Upendo Harold, (40), who says she had managed to contribute significantly into the welfare of the family.

"I bought a mattress for my children and I've been able to provide food for the family and save some money for future needs," Upendo said.

Upendo, whose husband is a primary school teacher, said she planted onions, tomatoes, cabbages and potatoes three times a year. To her, the project had come when other sources of income, particularly from coffee farming, were almost drying up.

Seif Lugela, (32), is a teacher at Msinga Primary School in the village. He has a vegetable garden as extra source of income and a place to spend his leisure time.

According to him, he plants onions, carrots, Irish potatoes and bananas and he earned 100,000/-last year from his three blocks of the vegetables.

In Same District, a total of 30,700 farmers have formed 187 water user groups to benefit from the TIP programme. Among them 17,700 are men and 13,000 women.

According to the District Executive Director, Hamisi Singano, a total of 20,400 farmers (including 14,400 men and 4,000 women) received training on Organizational Development and Gender, Soil and Water Conservation and water use efficiency.

He said crop production has more than doubled since the farmers joined the TIP programme last year. Onion production for instance had rose from 10 to 20 tonnes per hectare. Tomato production also rose from eight tones to 25 tonnes per hectare and ginger from eight to 20 tonnes per hectare.

Singano said a total of 2,300,000 tree seedlings have been raised and planted in several places in the district last year and about 60 per cent of them have survived.

He said 999 hectares of land have been conserved using various soil conservation measures. Same District has an arable land of 45,000 hectares out of which only 7,500 hectares are used for irrigation.

A model farmer in Mhero village in Chome Ward, Richard Msuya, (48), said he used to get only two bags of onions in his farm which measures a quarter an acre. The yields have risen to 20 bags after he jointed the TIP programme.

According to Msuya, known also in TIP jargon as a contact farmer, a bag of onion sells at 20,000/= off-season.

Msuya and his fellow farmers from 30 water user groups in Chome Ward have formed a catchment association and a Chome Catchment SACCOS.

According to TIP's Managing Director, Dr Ibrahim Kawa, the objective of the organization is to improve the standard of living of the communities in areas where they practise traditional irrigation.

TIP has earmarked small-scale farmers living in catchment areas of the traditional irrigation systems in Tanzania, he said.

Dr Kawa said TIP interventions in the areas are centered on participatory approach. The organizational development of water user groups begins with identification of a problem and ranking through a participatory manner.

TIP then conducts training courses with special emphasis on management and leadership skills, communication skills, gender balance in decision making, book-keeping, self reliance and legal aspects, registration of groups and the importance of having water rights.

TIP evolved from the Traditional Irrigation Improvement Programme under the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) and the Tanzania government.

It was registered as a non-governmental organization (NGO) in August 1999.

It provides technical and financial support to water user groups in Mwanga and Same districts of Kilimanjaro Region, Lushoto District in Tanga, Iringa District of Iringa Region, Mpwapwa, Dodoma Region and Kilosa District in Morogoro Region.