

# Pipe project fights hunger in West Pokot as women embrace simple tech

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Selly Mwou holding a plastic container that drips water into one of the PVC pipes in her garden. The project is supported by the University of Nairobi and Swedish agencies.



By [Isaiah Esipisu](#)

In Kitalaposho village, West Pokot County, Dr David Jakinda Otieno – a Senior lecturer at the University of Nairobi – is on his phone supervising a PhD student via zoom. At the same time, local farmers are gathered waiting for a lecture.

The region is largely dry but Dr Jakinda and his team have been teaching farmers – mostly women – alternative means of livelihoods that can withstand the climate crisis.

“This project is in collaboration with the Swedish University of Agriculture and other research agencies. It support improvement of pastoralists livelihoods through training,” he said.

On the outskirts of Kapenguria town, Selly Mwou can now produce vegetables from her backyard garden using vertically arranged PVC pipes with an improvised simple drip irrigation technique.

“We learnt this from Mabanga Agricultural Training Centre in Bungoma,” she said.

“We sat down as a group and improvised on the drip system using locally available materials.”

A few metres from her house, the mother of five has set up an indigenous chicken unit and improvised feeders.

“Animals are our main source of our livelihood but they all belong to the man of the house. With poultry and vegetable pipes, we have something to be proud of as women,” she said.

To grow vegetables one needs pipes that are four to eight inches in diameter.

Holes are then made in a pipe and soil mixed with organic manure is introduced.

The pipe is sunk vertically in the ground. The hole is a foot deep. A plastic container with a small hole at the bottom releasing a drop of water every two seconds is placed on top of the pipe.

“My main duty is to ensure there is water in the container, refilled after two days,” Mwou said.

The pipes will keep the soil moist all the time, given that very little evaporation taking place.

There is no need of weeding because the holes can only accommodate the crop introduced by the farmer.

A farmer can introduce liquid fertilisers through the drips.

According to Mwou, a four-foot pipe can easily accommodate 15 sukuma wiki plants, enough vegetables to feed a family of five two times a week

In Kitalaposhu Village, Monica Akuto, another farmer who has drawn lessons from the University lecturers, is also keeping poultry.

She has a fish pond and grows different types of indigenous vegetables too.

“These farm exchanges and visits have opened our eyes,” said Akuto.

“Initially, all the family bills were to be settled by my husband. But today, I sell vegetables to neighbours and fellow villagers. My chickens lay eggs daily and the pond is another source of income. I don’t have to keep asking my husband for money”

According to Dr Jakinda, the University of Nairobi chose West Pokot for the project because it a semi arid county prone to drought and famine.

Some areas in the region have not seen rain for the last two years.

“Whenever you hear about West Pokot in the mainstream and social media, it about cattle rustling, hunger and the distribution of relief food by government officials or NGOs,” Dr Jakinda said.

It is because of this that we chose to work with the county government to build farmers’ capacity. There should be local solutions to local problems,” the lecturer said during his visit to the village.

West Pokot County Director of Livestock Production Paul Loruchongor said farmers tend to learn faster and better when they visit their colleagues in different areas.

“The peer learning approach has proved to be very effective. We have witnessed families diversify their diets and sources of income. They are indeed developing resilience to the tough climatic conditions,” he said.

“We will continue encouraging farmers in West Pokot County to invest more in aquaculture. Farmers here have already demonstrated to all that it is possible and can earn them good money.”

Loruchongor said the devolved government is encouraging irrigation and diversification so as to beat the dependence on relief food.

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