

FIPS-Africa's campaign to improve cocoa tree management in Kyela district increases yields and improves farmers' livelihoods

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"Small-holder cocoa farmers in Kyela district have for a long time been price-takers and not price-givers, but I am happy we have maintained the quality but most importantly increased our cocoa yields by practising new farming techniques," says Gilbert Kisoro.

Kisoro of Kikusya village, Itope ward recalls that cocoa has been growing in Kyela since the early 1960's, when Cocoa was introduced to the country from Ghana. Many farmers planted cocoa trees hoping to mint money from growing the cash crop but this was not to be.

When Farm Input Promotions Africa (FIPS-Africa) first started work in Kyela in November 2010, farmers were facing severe challenges of pests, and diseases resulting from poor crop management. With funding from Irish Aid, FIPS-Africa established a network of 100 Village-based Advisors (VBAs) who live locally and offer a range of agricultural inputs, services and advice to all households in their Villages. They started a campaign to improve tree crop management which involved pruning the trees to let in air and light, the removal of diseased pods and the clearing of plant material from around the base of the trees.



Image: Gilbert Kisoro inspecting his cocoa pods. Kikusya village, Itope ward.

"After adopting cocoa pruning and cleaning in 2012, our production has more than doubled. Since prices have not increased in the recent past, the only way to improve our income has been to increase yield," she says.

She used to harvest 40 kg of cocoa beans a week before the pruning. With regular cleaning and pruning, the farmer now harvests 110 kg of cocoa beans every week.

"I am an example to many farmers around me. Sixteen of them are also getting the pruning services from the VBA, Mr. Sharifu Mwatandala, and they have also increased their production and income," she says.

Image: Martha Ngonya of Tenende village Mwaya ward showing her cocoa pods.



"I thought pruning and cleaning was a big joke but I gave the VBA the benefit of doubt and allowed him to prune and clean ten trees on my farm in December 2011. I was surprised to see that the trees started flowering from just above the ground, whereas before they would only flower on the upper branches," says Kisoro.

Like many other farmers in the village, he has now decided to improve his cocoa production to cushion against the low prices. In a week, he used to harvest a 10 kg bucket of cocoa beans from 50 trees.

After pruning, cleaning and removing diseased pods, in July 2012, he started harvesting 30 kg of cocoa beans from the trees. He now harvests 35 kg of the beans every week. He sells 1 kg for TZS 2,100 (USD 1) and uses the money to pay school fees for his daughter.

In the neighboring Tenende village in Mwaya ward, Martha Ngonya inherited 85 cocoa trees from her late father. Today the trees are the only source of income for the family of eight.

Leonard Zuberi has been struggling to make ends meet. He has no paying job and he lives with his family of five in Nkuyu village in Kyela town ward.

He heavily relied on income from cocoa, selling between 12-16 kg of beans every week. This could not sustain the needs of his family but he believed his trees could not produce more.

"I thought my problem was permanent because I could not expand my cocoa plantation due to land scarcity, but I later realized that pruning and cleaning would improve my cocoa production," he says.

He now harvests 45 kg of cocoa beans every week and he hopes to get more because some trees that had stopped producing are now flowering again.



Image: Leonard Zuberi inspects his cocoa pods after pruning.

In June 2013, the father of three bought 3,000 bricks worth TZS 750,000 (USD 500) with which he intends to build a new home. "My children now enjoy *Kitumbua*, a special traditionally-made doughnut, for breakfast".



Image: Miriam Mupopela of Itope village extracting cocoa beans from pods.

In the same village, Miriam Mupopela has a similar story. She says that "had it not been for the pruning and cleaning I would still be working in the rice fields to feed my family. Prices in this village are always determined by the buyers so cocoa is not a good source of income when production is low."

Cocoa was not producing much and she could only harvest 10 kg on the sixth day of the week. This left the mother of three idle and with no money.

The farmer says the phytosanitary campaign drastically increased her cocoa production. She now harvests 30 kg cocoa every three days. Even if the prices fall she can still earn an income .

"Increase in production has saved me the agony of being a farm labourer. I also have more time with my children and they find me at home, when they come back from school," she says.

Mupopela and her husband are currently saving the money they get from cocoa farming to construct a brick house.

"The whole village has adopted the FIPS-Africa's phyto-sanitation exercise because they have seen the results. The community was desperate for advice on cocoa farming. The only advice that the Buyers give is not to spray."



Image: Salum Nasur of Tenende village in Mwaya ward on his cocoa farm.

It is now three years since Salum Nasur learnt about pruning and cleaning to control infections on cocoa pods. Just three months after the pruning, his trees started flowering at the bottom of the trunk.

In July 2011, he collected twice the number of pods he used to collect every week. "I immediately started encouraging my neighbors to do the same because I feared that my trees would get infected again," says Nasur.

The excitement of seeing his trees revived made him pay attention to cocoa. He says he almost fenced off his farm to ensure that his pods were not stolen.

"I wanted to pick more pods to earn more, so I had to do everything to protect my trees. Buyers can only lower the prices that is why the farmers work hard to increase their production." He now harvests 50 kg beans in a week .

In Ipana village, Kyela ward, Humphrey Mwabulambo has expanded his rice farm from his income from cocoa. He was farming just an acre of land two years ago because he did not have the capacity to manage more.

"I did not have money to prepare my field. I was considering applying for a bank loan but again I did not have collateral. I was then approached by FIPS-Africa District Coordinator, Mr. Mwakitale who organized for pruning and cleaning by the VBAs," he says.

The December 2011 exercise saw the farmer's cocoa plantation pruned and cleaned in readiness for the flowering season. In the second week of July 2012 he harvested 45 kg of cocoa beans from 43 trees, whereas he used to harvest 18 kg a week.

"I sold 1 kg for TZS 2,200 (USD 1) and made TZS 99,000 (USD 66). I bought 50 kg of *Yara mila Cereal* fertilizer and 10 kg of TXD306 rice seed and expanded my rice field," he says.

The father of two also bought clothes for his wife and sons. Even though cocoa buyers never increase the buying price, he says, he is getting extra money because he harvests more cocoa.

Mwabulambo now employs 10 farm laborers to work on his rice fields during the planting and harvesting seasons and he pays them from cocoa farming. " They take home TZS 5,000 (USD 3) a day."

He is now food secure and earns more income from cocoa and rice farming.





Image: Vaileth Mwesu of Mbula village in Ipande ward holding pods on a tree that had stopped producing but flourished again after pruning and cleaning.



Image: Mwesu dries her cocoa beans in the sun.

Vaileth Mwesu has become a full time cocoa farmer. Before 2011, she would only pay attention to the trees during the July harvesting season because then, she says, "I would only harvest 10 kg a week from my 32 trees."

FIPS-Africa VBA, Mr. Smart Mwangalaba, demonstrated pruning in December 2011, and she had all her 32 trees pruned. "There was an acute shortage of information on cocoa farming in this village. We wanted to control pests and diseases and the only advice came from the buyers who told us that we should not spray. So everyone in my village allowed the VBA to prune," she says.

"All my trees had pods growing right from close to the roots. The number of diseased pods also decreased," says Mwangalaba. In July 2012, the small-holder farmer started harvesting 30 kg of cocoa from her farm. The increase in production made her pay more attention to the cocoa tree.

She now earns TZS 63,000 every week from her farm. "I can now balance my family's diet because I can afford foods that were out of my reach because they were too expensive before," she says. She eats meat and eggs twice a week and has also bought a 12 m plastic sheet for drying cocoa beans.



In the neighboring Mukuyu village, Abinduwile Mwaihake is planting new cocoa trees, in an area he had originally set aside for planting palm trees. The farmer changed his mind because he can now control pests and diseases without spraying.

Mwahihake is one of thousands of cocoa farmers who have been struggling to earn a living from cocoa farming but had their dreams ruined by a decline in production due to pests and diseases.

"My cocoa farm was an eyesore because trees either had grayish black dry pods or had dark spotted growing on them. However, things changed when FIPS-Africa started pruning in this village and for the first time in April 2012, I had clean pods growing on my trees," he says.

In his experience as a cocoa farmer he had never harvested 50 kg of beans per week but between June and August 2012 he did. "I was earning TZS 100,000 (USD 66) every week. I saved the money and renovated my house, paid school fees and bought my wife new clothes. This year I harvested up to 80 kg a week and that is why I am planting new trees," he said.



Image: Mrs. Lydia Ngosi of Ipana village in Kyela ward inspecting her cocoa pods

Mrs. Lydia Ngosi knew that cleaning and pruning could help control insects that caused her pods to dry up but she never knew how best to do it. She also knew that using a machete was not ideal because it could break the stem of the plant but she had no alternative. "I have been doing my best but I have never had the time and energy to prune all my 53 trees. I was relieved when FIPS-Africa started the exercise. The VBA charges us only TZS 200 (USD 0.1) for pruning each tree," she says.

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