IMPROVING SMALLHOLDER PRODUCTIVITY AND PROFITABILITY (ISPP)

ISPP aims to strengthen capacities of smallholder farmers to increase agricultural productivity, marketing and utilization of high value food crops in the semi-arid area of Kenya. These areas are characterized by exceptionally low farm productivity due to unreliable rainfall which disincentive investments in improved production methods.

In Kenya, significant political attention has been toward the improvement of food staples productivity, both to offset the rapidly increasing costs of food imports and to stimulate increased incomes and hence food security at the household level. However, many smallholder farmers, particularly in the semi-arid areas are unable to participate in the supported food staples value chains. Geographic barriers, including remoteness, and poor access to natural resources such as water limit, surplus production and market participation of smallholder farmers in these regions. To overcome these challenges, the Improving Smallholder Productivity and Profitability (ISPP) project is building smallholder farmers' skills in agricultural production, water management and in farming as a business in five semi-arid counties.

ISPP is increasing household food security and nutrition through improved access and efficient management of water, the use of climate-resilient agricultural practices and agribusiness promotion. The project will help improve productivity for 80,000 farming households.

Expanding agricultural productivity

In order to identify gaps in their knowledge about agriculture, ISPP involves target farmers in a participatory needs assessment to discuss their success with various crops, demand for water and irrigation, family nutrition needs, access to markets to sell their products, and their experience with applying for credit. In the process, farmers learn of innovative ways to maximize agricultural productivity, and make decisions about changing their farming practices to optimize their agricultural output. It builds on this experience by facilitating links (to agricultural extension agents, water user associations, farmers associations, commercial banks, other development activities, buyers and traders) engaged in related activities in the target counties.

Improving the nutritional status of women and children

The project trains farmers to grow and consume a diversity of high-value, nutritious crops. They learn the importance of maintaining vegetable gardens for home consumption and about appropriate food safety, preparation, preservation and storage practices. Linkages are facilitated with health extension agents to continue the learning process and improve household health.
Transitioning from subsistence to commercial farming

There are many commercialization constraints small-scale farmers face in Kenya including a fragmented link between production and marketing, a lack of understanding and planning based on market prices, or storage practices that are not in line with commercial approaches. Some smallholder farmers need to be supported in realizing their commercial farming ambitions, especially through more innovative collective action models that effectively and efficiently combine the strengths of the public and private sectors.

ISPP is supporting farmers to learn critical new skills in water harvesting, post-harvest handling of crops, pest management, climate resilient practices, how to develop a farm budget, a marketing strategy, and when to purchase crop insurance. Farmers are developing and honing their negotiation skills, and are capitalizing on benefits associated with collective action, to share crop storage expenses and to pool crops to negotiate higher prices with larger buyers.

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