

Irrigation Technology Changes Women's Agribusiness Dreams

Garissa County, Kenya, February 2018— Fifty-six-year-old Habiba sits with four other women under a mango tree at their farm. Habiba is a widow: her husband died in 2013 after a long illness, leaving her to provide for their 10 children. Just before Habiba's husband passed, however, she teamed up with other women with similar challenges (ailing spouses, poverty, etc.) to form the GarGar Women's Group. Now, Habiba has a source of income.

The GarGar Women's Group has 15 members. They own on a farm located 20 kilometers away from Garissa, the capital of Garissa County in Northern Kenya.

Kenya RAPID as a “technology game changer!”

Before Kenya RAPID intervention, GarGar Women's Group depended on open earth canals to channel water to the farm. This technology proved expensive to maintain, leading to low crop production compared to the capital invested. The cost of pumping water was also high due to an increased water demand. Kenya RAPID introduced an improved technology of closed canals, leading to efficiency in water flow, reduced unnecessary seepage, and reduced hours of water pumping with relative reduced water abstraction from the river Tana.



Closed Canals distribution Box
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“My husband sustained injuries from a motorbike accident. He is disabled and can't work because his hands were affected. He was the bread winner for this family. Before joining this group I had challenges in educating my children; at times, my children were sent home for school fees, it was painful seeing them stay at home while their peers were busy learning.” **29 year old Medina Moge**

Medina Moge, another member of the group, is married with 8 children. Her husband is disabled due to injuries he sustained from a motorbike accident. This means that Medina bears sole responsibility of providing for and educating her children. Before joining the GarGar Women's Group, on most days she could only provide dinner and sometimes breakfast for her family. *“Ever since joining this group I get some income to pay school fees for my children,”* Moge said. *“I help sell mangoes and vegetables for the group and earn a commission. I'm now able to prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner because I get vegetable and fruits from this farm.”*

Habiba and Medina are not alone in their stories. The members of the GarGar Women's Group all share a similar history, and face a more economically empowered future through the initiation of the farming project. *“It's better when I'm busy doing something rather than just sitting idle. Whatever little I get makes a difference; especially when mangoes are in season I benefit more”* Medina said.

25 Acre farm land:
Crops in the farm include
Mangoes, lemons, bananas,
tomatoes, water and sweet melon,
kales, onions, sorghum, Sudan
grass.

Their initial farming method had adopted earth canals that proved futile due to heavy water wastage to ground seepage and trans-evaporation.



Habiba Hire Aden ©CARE/Job. M

“Farming is prosperous in Garissa. If we had started earlier with appropriate technology, most of these women could be wealthy. The problem is that we started with a small water pump engine that only covered a very small area in the farm. During heavy rains the floods wreak havoc, affecting our crops. Beehives were also swept away after the Tana river bank outbursts. Our sales depend on which vegetables or fruits are in season; for instance, we expect to harvest lime this season. This week we got KES 9,000 (\$90) from the lime harvest. Mangoes didn’t do well this season but we expect a bumper harvest in the next one.”
Habiba Hire Aden.

“Before Kenya RAPID, we spent 25 liters (worth KES 2,250 = \$22.50) of diesel daily to pump water for irrigating. The open earth canals couldn’t hold water sustainably to serve the whole farm. We didn’t even have an idea that a new technology would solve our problems,” Habiba said. The group is now spending less than 10 liters of diesel a day (worth KES 1,000 = \$10.)

The new irrigation facility means more than 20 households continue to depend on the GarGar farm for food, clothing and shelter. The need to reduce the cost of irrigation has enabled the group to invest in clearing more land to expand crop production. Habiba said, ***“If we can secure a pickup truck we will be able to get competitive prices for our produce because currently we mainly trade at the farm gate. It will also help other members who had challenges shuttling between their homes in Garissa town and the farm to rejoin the group. We also have plans to expand the land but we need financial support to clear the Mathenge weed then reclaim the land to plant more vegetables.”***