



Women NBCEs in rural areas are pillars for sustainable development



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About this publication

This is one of the series of brochures aimed at experience sharing on ARCOS NBCEs Programme. Other case studies produced include:

- Community Managed Tree Nursery Centers for Water, Energy and Food Security
- Building Community Ownership and Institutional Development
- Nature Based Village as a model for transformation towards sustainable community development
- Nature Based Community Enterprises as means to create jobs for youth
- Using water hyacinth to improve livelihoods and restore freshwater ecosystems
- The benefits of market-oriented agriculture to women
- Sustainable Energy Access in Rwanda's Rural Areas

About ARCOS Network

Established in 1995, the Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS Network) is an non-governemntal organisation working with NGOs, Governments, Community-Based Organisations and the Private Sector, established in 1995 with the Mission "To enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources through the promotion of collaborative conservation action for nature and people". ARCOS has programmes extending in the Albertine Rift region, Africa Great Lakes and African Mountains.

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ARCOS Strategic Areas 2016-2020 at a glance



1. Introduction

This case study documents Women Nature Based Community Enterprises (NBCE) in rural areas, and their significance for sustainable development. As a women's work is often seen as worthless, even if they carry out tasks in a family labour context, they usually are not able to earn their own income and hence make their own decisions.

Taking into consideration two different women NBCEs in Rwanda, this case study is pointing to the necessity of women's involvement and their gain of bargaining power for sustainable development.

2. THE CHALLENGE

Since a woman's work is intangible, it is seen as worthless for the economy (Marçal, 2015). The UNDP¹ (1995) however estimates women's unpaid labour output at one-third of the global GDP of \$23 trillion, receiving a much smaller share of goods and services produced by total labour, compared to what they contribute.

Linking this with the challenges of rural areas in most East African countries (in our case Rwanda), deforestation and no access to clean water leads women to spend more additional time on unpaid work i.e. collecting firewood

and fetching water (Nankhuni, 2004). The FAO² (2011) has calculated that time savings from unpaid work reducing infrastructure for water collection and food preparation is equivalent on average to 466 thousand and 4,590 thousand full-time jobs respectively. Looking at the challenges those regions face, "[there] has been little if any agricultural intensification [in some areas]. Instead, agriculture has grown through extensification—bringing more land under cultivation. This has led to environmental problems of a different kind—mainly the degradation and loss of forests, wetlands, soils, and pastures." (The World Bank, 2008) This in turn leads to less fertile soil and cultivatable land.

Recent research is pointing to the importance and the role of women in rural development, especially female leadership which leads to more investment (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). Investing in building the capability of rural women raises aspirations, increases education for children as well as more equal time-use in households (Beaman, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2012).

1 United Nations Development Program

2 The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

3. ARCOS' Response



As already suggested by the World Bank, (2008), “Overcoming environmental problems in agriculture requires a good understanding of private incentives of individual resource users and ways to manage resources more successfully from society’s point of view.” In agreement with the statement, ARCOS Network’s overall goal is to promote sustainable development through empowering community-based enterprises and enhancing sound management of environment.

Through its leading line “Partnering for improved livelihoods and environmental sustainability” of its Nature Based Community Enterprises Programme (NBCEs), the long-term aim is to sustain community development at household

and community organization level while strengthening their nature based enterprises and building networks.

The NBCEs Programme is one of the programmes through which ARCOS channels its collaborative actions with various stakeholders. Once a partner is chosen e.g. a cooperative, a Sustainability Agreement (SA) is signed between ARCOS, its partner communities and local government authorities. The SA is a performance and benefit based contract between all collaborators, comprising the activities aiming to integrate sustainable actions, enhance environmental resilience and promote community development.

It is done through the empowerment of community business enterprises and building the experience-sharing networks between different community groups.

To achieve this goal of sustainable development and enhancing sound environmental management so as to build socio-economic landscape where people and nature are in balance; ARCOS has developed an integrated implementation approach named “BEST Approach” with four key areas as explained in the following section:

a. ARCOS Network Approach and Goals:

ARCOS’ community development programme adopts a holistic understanding of the socio-ecological system and helps the community to build vision of success based on sustainability principles and rooted in the cultural heritage. ARCOS works with Nature Based Community Enterprises (NBCEs) through a model structured around four but interrelated components that make the situation more approachable.

The BEST Approach (ARCOS 2015) focuses on four key areas:

B: Building leadership and sustainable institutions. Cooperative management, governance, setting targets and work plans, gender and youth inclusiveness.

E: Enhancing environmental resilience. Promoting Community Based Adaptation through sustainable agriculture, enhancement and protection of soil and water ecosystems and biodiversity, forest landscape restoration, ecosystem-based adaptation, promotion of green energy technologies.

S: Sustainable business solutions. Assisting NBCEs in business planning, value addition, private sector engagement, market linkages and quality certification.

T: Transforming and inspiring others. ARCOS and empowered NBCEs focus on Nature Based Villages (NBVs), demonstration sites in integrating sustainable environment and livelihoods practices. This is supported through a Nature Based Community Fund (NBCF) established to foster sustainability actions in each NBV through community loans, incentives and activities of common benefits. ARCOS also promotes community to community exchange through training workshops, exhibitions and exchange visits where communities share knowledge and experience and learn by doing.

4. Implementation and Process

In this case ARCOS picked two women cooperatives to partner with and is helping them grow sustainably and thereby empower them and improve their livelihoods. JYAMBERE MUNYARWANDA is a women's cooperative with 313 members in Rutsiro district, striving to improve livelihoods of vulnerable people, especially women and youth through sustainable agricultural practices and promoting culture values and natural heritage conservation in agricultural areas.

The other, KAKIKA is a farmers cooperative which was created in 2016, consisting of 118 members, of which 96 % are women. KAKIKA operates in Kabungeri Village of Nyamugali Sector, and is active in horticulture and animal husbandry.

Good governance and leadership are key for a cooperative to grow and increase income. Since ARCOS started to partner with JYAMBERE MUNYARWANDA, the first thing was to support the cooperative to put in place a vigorous governance and leadership system. The cooperative is now managed by an executive committee composed of a president, vice-president, secretary and two advisors. There is a General Assembly held every quarter, and it can only take place with a minimum of two thirds of

all members, reassuring involvement of all members. After receiving a series of trainings in cooperative management, business development, environmental conservation (i.e. landscape restoration) and tree nursery development, the members of Jyambere Munyarwanda were supported to get seeds. They bought xxxha of land and were provided with 25 pigs for manure and increased income. The cooperative has taken lead in transforming one selected Village, Kabisasa Village, through awareness raising and producing and planting of 20,000 seedlings to stabilize the soil, practice erosion control measures and increase soil fertility as well as food security.

As a newly established cooperative, KAKIKA has undergone a series of trainings as same as mentioned above for Jyambere Munyarwanda. However, more regular support is being provided to build a strong governance as the cooperative grows. Research shows that building capabilities to achieve freedoms and therefore development is an important tool (Sen, 1999). Offering opportunities makes people use their capabilities in return (Nussbaum, 2001). Established Farmer Field School have shown that environmental training and capability training are an effective means but even more so for women whose benefits were even greater than that of men when having access to the same output (DAVIS et al., 2011). Through ARCOS' support, the

cooperative bought 5 hectares of land and 26 goats for which a shelter was built to support their farming activities thorough manure provision as well as increasing the cooperative's income. The area where KAKIKA operates, Kirehe District, experiences prolonged dry season. Thus, an irrigation system, using solar power to pump water from the Akagera river, was developed so as to make the cultivation possible through proper irrigation.

5. Achievements and Impact

At JAMBERE MUNYARWANDA about 60 jobs are created every year through farming activities, livestock rearing, nursery development etc. In addition, investment increased and their income portfolio diversified due to the inclusion of livestock rearing and crop production which generates manure as well as income. Hence the annual turn-over increased from RWF 500,000 to about RWF 2,000,000.

Moreover, the establishment of an internal loan and credit and incentive scheme [Nature Based Community Fund (NBCF)] in the villages gives the members the opportunity to easily access small loans, where they would face constraints. This offers them the possibility to invest into small businesses, pay health insurance and pay for their children's education. However, already being able to have their own income



from agriculture activities empowers the women, according to their own testimonies. They explain that through the cooperative they are able to express their thoughts, ideas and exchange knowledge and have the feeling that someone is listening to them, where before they were mainly only performing domestic tasks.

On top of it all, cooperative members promote sustainable practices in their area of operation, where for instance over 50 hectares of land were restored through soil and water management practices and sustainable agriculture as well as the development of a tree nursery bed with 25,000 trees targeting to plant 40,000. Through this, they are also mainly conserving local and indigenous seeds and species e.g. beans, maize, sorghum and millet. Moreover the cooperative has a traditional cultural troop, developing their traditional arts that promote Rwandan culture.

As mentioned earlier, KAKIKA is facing long and severe dry seasons, making agriculture almost impossible. Therefore it was crucial to work on that issue first, through irrigation and by applying good practices including organic farming, agroforestry, erosion control, the productivity has considerably increased from an average of 1 ton to 5 tons of vegetables per season.

As a result the cooperative members

now see agriculture as a development opportunity.

Moreover, through the Nature Based Community Fund, which offers small loans and credits and award best performers, they have the opportunity to invest in agriculture as well as their community enterprises and inspire and lead transformational change in one selected model village “Kabungeri Nature Based Village”.

The testimony of one member states that last year, she received a loan of RWF 200,000 which she then invested in 5 goats and the land lease. Through the increase of the number of owned goats, from 6 to 8, only them being worth RWF 225,000 now. The establishment of an irrigation system and organic farming using goats’ manure helped to increase the tomatoe yield by 180 percent on the same land.

In addition about 15 hectare of farm land were restored and restoration activities are still going on.



6. LESSONS LEARNED

Taking into account the cooperative members testimonies and the outcome the cooperative has on their livelihood and especially income, all results show that the initiative is beneficial. They are also in line with Trommlerova et al's findings (2015), who found that self-reported capabilities are more important for empowerment than socio-economic ones, even though we are able to find both in the case of JAMBERE MUNYARWANDA and KAKIKA. Despite perceptions and social norms being hard

to change (World Bank, 2015), recent research finds that if rural women are trained they are being perceived as experts and even men then seek their advice (Johnson, Kovarik, Meinzen-Dick, Njuki, & Quisumbing, 2016). Exposure to a different lifestyle i.e. women as paid labour, contributor to household income and decision maker, is able to change mental models and aspirations of this and other groups (Jensen & Oster, 2009).



7. CHALLENGES AHEAD

Particularly, KAKIKA is facing challenges, because of its location. Continuous weather changes which affect agricultural activities are still a problem. For both cooperatives it is important to change prevailing behaviour and perceptions, not only concerning the role of women but also the importance of the environment towards their livelihoods.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Giving women the opportunity to participate in the labour market and in turn earn their own income is an important step in sustainable development. As research shows, not only women but also their environment i.e. community as a whole

and household members, benefit. This is done by changing and challenging existing social norms, mental models and old perceptions. Putting women in charge, offering them a voice, giving them a platform to express themselves in turn gives them acceptance and respect from their society and the other sex. Giving opportunities today will create even more opportunities for future generations.

Moreover, as seen before, women's decisions are often favourable for the rural people's livelihood. In other words, if they gain more bargaining power and are able to make more decisions they might be the best promoters for environmental conservation, once they understand its importance. Further information and impact on the livelihood of the people in women NBCE's are needed to prove this claim.



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