Community-Based Development of Agricultural Activities Aiming to Improve Dietary Diversity in Western Kenya

Julia Boedecker¹, Céline Termote¹, Gina Kennedy¹
¹ Bioversity International

Overview
This research examines the suitability of community-based participatory workshops for developing agricultural activities in order to diversify diets. It represents the second part of a project that consists of a diagnostic phase documenting agricultural biodiversity and nutrition (phase I), participatory development of activities to improve nutrition (phase II) and participatory implementation of the activities (phase III). The study is part of the Humidtropics and Agriculture for Nutrition and Health CGIAR Research Programs.

Methodology
A series of six participatory workshops was carried out in five sub-locations of Vihiga County in Western Kenya. The workshops aimed to raise awareness on nutrition, to discuss the results of the diagnostic phase (phase I) and to identify and plan community activities to improve nutrition. Per sub-location, 36 men and women were selected to participate in the workshops (180 participants in total).

The participatory community workshops

Results
In order to diversify diets in their communities, all sub-locations decided to plant vegetables and legumes and to raise poultry. The participants developed community action plans specifying how these activities are going to be realised. In addition, they chose local funding mechanisms to finance the actions and developed a budget. The groups also succeeded in organising an event to officially kick-off their activities and thereby reaching out to other community members.

Discussion
Except for one less successful sub-location, the workshop groups well developed agricultural activities for improved nutrition. Harmony within the group was a crucial factor for good performance. Sensitivity to group dynamics is thus very important for participatory development of community activities. It was observed that the continuous workshops built trust between researchers and participants and that ownership was developed among the groups. These findings are in line with similar studies on participatory intervention development in Africa. Other related projects in low-income countries stress the importance of community-based approaches in improving nutrition and livelihood outcomes.

Conclusion
A community-based approach in form of participatory workshops is well suited for developing agricultural activities in order to diversify diets in Western Kenya.