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## Farmers in Vihiga county, Kenya, transform their food system through multi-sectoral and multi-actor collaborations

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### Abstract

Since 2014, the Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT is working in Vihiga County with different stakeholders. An integrated community-based approach was developed whereby communities, guided by researchers, extension workers and County representatives were taken through a series of workshops to co-analyse baseline data on dietary intakes and available agrobiodiversity, followed by identification of barriers and co-creation of local solutions. As a result, community action plans (CAP) for increased farm, market and diet diversity were developed and implemented whereby trainings on kitchen gardens focusing on traditional leafy vegetables (TLV) production, poultry keeping and door to door nutrition counseling were provided by local NGOs, agriculture extension workers in collaboration with trained Community Health Volunteers. Impact evaluation conducted after one year of implementing the CAPs showed that women's and children's dietary diversity scores significantly improved in intervention compared to comparison communities. Despite encouraging results farmers' access to TLV seeds was a major bottleneck whereby desired TLV species/varieties were not available from the formal sector while from the informal sector seed quality was disappointing. Hence, 300 community members formed a community-based organisation (CBO) and established a community seed bank (CSB) where 41 TLV, 50 bean, 26 sorghum and 9 millet varieties were conserved by end of 2023, besides a mother block of 20 fruit tree species. The CSB has since grown into a training and information exchange center, offering platform for business case development. Between 2021 and 2023, the 300 CBO members reached out with seeds and/or trainings on agroecological practices to 8500 fellow farmers, of whom 85 % claim to have diversified their farms, 75 % improved their diets and their incomes. Meanwhile stunting in the County has gone down from 23.5 % in 2014 to 16.6 % in 2022 due to the multiple actor and multisectoral efforts. Realizing the positive impact on biodiversity conservation, diet quality, and nutrition, the County Government formed a core committee with members from departments of Health, Agriculture and Environment to develop a multisectoral agroecology policy. The Alliance is now guiding this process together with the Intersectoral Forum for Agrobiodiversity and Agroecology (ISFAA) and PELUM.

**Keywords:** Agroecology, co-creation, community seed bank, food system, food system transformation, Kenya, multi-sector approach