Organic Farming Has Saved My Soils

Elizabeth Karanja with her Cow that supplies her Manure

Domain of change (Project): *Outreach*
When did the change happen*: Since 2012.*
Name of storyteller *Elizabeth Karanja*
Role of storyteller: *Farmer*
Date of recording: *2nd of November 2018*
Interviewer: *Hudson Wereh*

"Soils constitute the foundation for agricultural development, essential ecosystem functions and food security and hence are key to sustaining life on Earth." With these words, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared the International Year of Soils (IYS) three years ago turning our attention to a crucial resource that sustains farming, and life, but which has been very much neglected in dominant agricultural thinking and practice. Neglected soils have serious consequences on our production.

Elizabeth Karanja was a victim of neglected soils until 2012 when she decided to switch to organic farming. Elizabeth says she was experiencing diminishing returns per unit of fertilizer, forcing farmers to apply more and more each season. This, she was told was due to lack of soil organic matter and thus the soil's incapacity to sustain soil life and retain water and nutrients. *"Francis advised me that to improve my degraded soils, I needed to start farming organically and abandon my use of chemical fertilizers*." Said Elizabeth.

Since 2012, Elizabeth has been using organic farming methods on her farm. She attributes the vast knowledge and skills she has acquired to Biovision Africa Trust through its community information worker Mr. Francis Maina. Francis Maina is an outreach CIW based in Gilgil and trains farmers in the region. He encourages farmers to adopt new, improved methods of farming, using a variety of methods to reach them i.e. organizing study groups for farmers, 'farmer field days', demonstrations, lectures and information materials.

Elizabeth Weighing Beans before Selling right on her farm.

Since shifting to organic farming, Elizabeth says she has improved her soils and her yields have increased. She no longer spends money on fertilizers and also, she prepares her own seeds. Together with her group members they were trained on how to prepare their own seeds and they have established a seed bank. Of all the changes she has had, Elizabeth is most proud of the changes she has realized in her soils. This she attributes to her use of manure.

Elizabeth's experience provides a taste of encouraging potential of agroecology in nourishing our soils. This BvAT's www.infonet-biovision.org database has a collection of carefully researched soil management practices that can improve our soils' health. And the benefits are both local – food security and resilience for farming communities – and global – with contributions to climate change adaptation and mitigation. With agroecology we can build soils for life!

Story by Hudson Wereh