

# Climate-Smart Farming Saves Pastoralists from Ravages of Drought



Frequent droughts in Wajir County have significantly threatened the viability of pastoralism. The nomadic life that the pastoralists once cherished, has become an ordeal because pasture and water are scarce leading to loss of their livestock. As the dangers of overdependence on pastoralism become evident, the need for the residents to look beyond livestock has become apparent.

The expansive county, the second largest in Kenya, covering an area of 56,773 km<sup>2</sup> receives about 63.91 millimetres (2.52 inches) of precipitation translating to 84.75 days of rain annually. In light of the severe drought conditions prevailing in the county that has a population of 781,263, pastoralism may not be tenable.

Faced with realities of the harsh climatic conditions in the area, a 49-year-old pastoralist, Ali Billow Hassan, made a bold step by gradually shifting from traditional pastoralism to crop husbandry. The budding farmer, and a father of 11 children, from Wajir East Sub-County, has now embarked on agricultural production to sustain his family.

## Why farming for a pastoralist?

Hassan ventured into crop growing for both food security and as a source of income. Out of his 80 acres of land, slightly over two acres have been dedicated to agribusiness for the last eight months earning him about one million Kenya shillings from the sale of farm produce.



Hassan attending to his thriving spinach crop.

The jubilant Hassan will ever be grateful to WASDA for facilitating a three-month training session on climate-smart farming that has completely changed his life for the better despite persistent drought in the area. The pastoralist turned farmer was among 20 other pastoralists out of 97 aspirants, who were lucky to benefit from training that took place from October to December 2023.

The training was supported by a three-month drought intervention project funded by Action Deutschland Hilft through Johanniter International and implemented by WASDA. The project targeted poor and vulnerable farmers in Wajir East and Wajir South sub-counties.

The 20 farmers, including Hassan, received training in farm management systems, record keeping, climate-smart farming, three months cash relief and assorted certified seeds. Climate-smart farming defies the odds of drought effects as it employs techniques such as drip irrigation, growing of climate-resilient seeds, crop rotation, mulching, planting of cover crops and minimal to no tillage of land. The project aimed at achieving improved adoption of climate-smart agricultural production to increase incomes and food security for farmers.

“Poverty occasioned by recurrent droughts that decimate our livestock has forced us to think beyond pastoralism. Droughts are also disruptive as they make us to migrate with our livestock in search of water and pasture. Crop farming is one of the solutions to drought-induced poverty,” Hassan states.

In addition to training, WASDA also supported the farmers with seeds and facilitated extension officers from the Department of Agriculture to make on-farm visits for further advice. The 20 farmers also received KES. 8,450 each for three consecutive months to enable them endure the drought effects before crops were ready.

The collaboration with the County Department of Agriculture to provide further on-farm training and mentoring will be crucial for the dissemination of climate-smart agriculture knowledge and use of technologies such as drip irrigation, solar installation, planting of climate-smart seeds for quality yields by small-scale farmers and agro-pastoralists.



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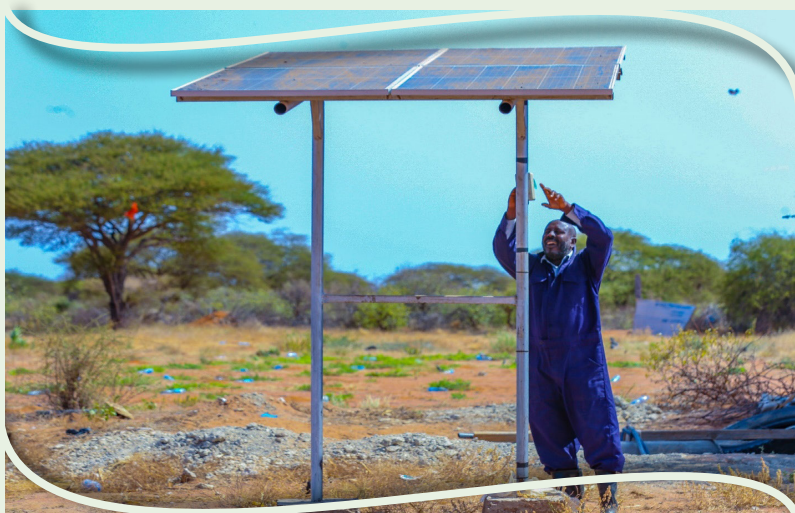


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For the last eight months, Hassan has specialised in growing spinach; kales; maize, onions, pulse; cow peas; hay; pawpaw; water melons, coriander and okra and confesses that the yields have been impressive.

WASDA's Food Security and Livelihood Officer, Mohamed Ugas, states that farmers faced various challenges including huge costs incurred while using diesel-powered generators to pump water for irrigation. "To alleviate the problem, we have now introduced solar- powered generators bringing down the production cost. This has so far enabled farmers to increase acreage under farming to realise maximum productivity," Ugas said.



*Hassan inspects his solar system.*

generate clean energy which is cheaper and more environment-friendly. He has significantly cut the cost of farming by eliminating the daily expenditure of KES 500 he used to buy diesel for the generator.

Hassan used the money accrued from sale of farm produce to address his immediate family needs such as food stuff, school fees and re-investing the rest on the farm. He sold about 1,000 watermelons that fetched KES 400,000 while onions and maize earned him KES 300,000 and KES 80,000 respectively.



*Hassan and Ugas harvesting okra.*

Hassan has invested in a shallow well whose water is piped to an elevated tank from where it flows by gravity to his farm for irrigation purposes. This has been made possible after he recently acquired solar panels that



*A water tank donated by WASDA through Johanniter International support.*

## Future outlook

Majority of the farmers supported by the project are now successful. They have maintained a steady supply of agricultural produce to Wajir town and its environs. "We hope that WASDA will continue supporting us. We are no longer poor but we appeal for further support to enable us gain firmer feet as farmers," Hassan says. His ambition is to be a leading producer and supplier of onions in the entire county of Wajir and beyond. He also plans to expand the acreage under crop production and establish a greenhouse with the ultimate aim of creating employment opportunities for the youth in the area.



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