

## **My Experience With Kari PLEC Team As A Farmer**

### **Bernard Njeru Reuben**

I am a farmer from Nduuri village Kagaari North Location, Embu District in Eastern Province (Kenya)

I am married to one wife with four children, two boys and two girls. I am a mixed subsistence farmer in a five acres piece of land situated at the slopes of Kirimiri hill, near Runyenjes Municipal Council Town. I have about 1000 grown up coffee stems in the farm, some mango trees, avocados and macadamia trees. I also grow food crops like maize, beans, yams, bananas and sweet potatoes among others. I also keep about four dairy cattle's and a few milk goats of torgen burg breed.

The PLEC project team found me in the middle of grafting my old coffee stems with Ruiru 11 variety. The reason for doing this was to avoid:-

- 1) Serious dropping of coffee berries during cold weather. (C.B.D)
- 2) Serious dropping of coffee leaves during the leaf rust epidemic seasons which occur twice a year during dry seasons.
- 3) To reduce the high cost in fighting the above fungi diseases.
- 4) To incur expenses of uprooting the old coffee stems in the farm and digging new holes to plant Ruiru seedlings.
- 5) Also to avoid cost of buying Ruiru 11 seedlings @ Ksh 15.00 per plant.
- 6) Waiting for three to four years for the new plants to mature and produce effectively.

Therefore, I had decided to take my time and do the grafting. The KARI PLEC team found me working on the above and I thank them for encouraging me to continue and for assisting me with polythene paper tube, which have helped me in the work. Currently I have about three hundred productive grafted stems among the five hundred stems I had worked on and I am still continuing.

Nduuri community like other Kenyan communities have over reliance on foreign kinds of vegetables, food crops, cash crops like coffee and wood trees. This is as a result of assimilation of European culture and way of living.

Time has taught us when we compare ourselves with our ancestors who were healthier, stronger and well nourished persons, we find that it was because of the kind of foods they used to eat which included herbal medicine from the collection of the vegetables, root tubers and fruits. This kept them free from most tropical diseases together with their livestock.

It is unfortunate that most of these local indigenous vegetation has slowly disappeared from our environments.

Since the introduction of PLEC Project in Nduuri in 1998, the farmers in the area have learnt a lot from KARI through informal education on the need to preserve our indigenous food crops, especially root tubers like yams, sweet potatoes, cassava, vegetables, bananas, etc. They have also learnt the seriousness in using animal and compost pit manure in the farms to improve the long gone soil texture through overuse and soil erosion in our small holder farms. They have also emphasized the seriousness in terracing and planting grass on the terraces to prevent soil erosion.

The method of approach used by KARI on PLEC Project of:

- a) First learning from farmers usual way of farming.
- b) Reasoning together and working together has been very encouraging to the farmers.

It created a very friendly atmosphere because the farmers were able to learn through seeing, touching, doing and where possible tasting and moreover visiting other local and distant farmers.

This has greatly helped farmers to understand where they have been going wrong where they are right and where to improve for more production leading to better earnings.

I personally have learnt from other farmers that Miraa growing can be a viable farming business within my area. From other farmers we have visited especially at Kigumo in Kyeni Location Embu District we visited a farmer with a very steep and barren land whom after experiencing many difficulties had discovered that mango trees could do well there. He planted about 1000 mango trees which earns him hundreds of thousands

of shillings during the mango high peak season. Today he is very comfortable with his family in his good stone house.

He told us that to avoid soil erosion in this steep farm, he had to dig terraces where he only slashes the growing bushes to keep his mango plantation clean.

We visited another farm in chuka (Meru South District) with quite small piece of land who learnt to dig a borehole around his homestead. Today he is managing a big nursery farm for flowers and fruit seedlings where he is the managing director and sales manager and one of his sons is the farm manager. They sell their seedlings both within the local town market and outside. The family seems to be very settled by skillfully managing the farm and generating a good income through self initiative.

Today great change can be realized in our farm management because we have learnt a lot from other farmers as well as being friendly with the natural vegetation within our environment since it is directly or indirectly beneficial to us as farmers in Nduuri.

Through PLEC team we farmers in Nduuri have been able to identify our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in farming through group discussions and farmer to farmer visitations. In this spirit farmers now can be able to eradicate poverty and have self sustainability with both market and domestic food.

It is our sincere prayer as farmers in this area (Nduuri) that PLEC Project be let to continue because we feel there is much more we need to learn from them.