



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Tanzanian Villagers Flourish, Fight Drought



Aliza Hasham

Mwele holds one of her three children, 2-year old Musa David Zoya, in her arms.

Living in dry, desert-like conditions isn't easy for people in the Mvumi village in the Dodoma Region of Tanzania. Extended periods of drought and limited water sources routinely lead to dry fields, parched plants and poor crop yields, creating hard times for farming families. Fortunately, the beneficiaries of the Feed the Future-supported Mwanzo Bora Nutrition Program are able to meet these challenges head on. "Mwanzo Bora" in Swahili means good start. The program aims to reduce maternal anemia and childhood stunting by 20 percent in five Tanzanian regions, focusing on pregnant and lactating women and children from birth to 24 months. The program tackles anemia across the country by providing nutritional education on the importance of breastfeeding and a diversified diet through several points of intervention, including community health workers who organize peer support groups and trainings in their respective villages. The workers cover everything from vegetable demonstration plots and raising animals for protein intake, to proper hygiene methods. The Mvumi village group is one of almost 2000 village groups the Mwanzo Bora program has reached since its inception in 2011, benefiting close to two million women across Tanzania.

Walking through this village, Mwanzo Bora community health worker Lucy Masaka points out that almost every other household has a sack garden, a small home garden, or a rabbit hutch. In a drought-prone village like this one, sack gardens – small gardens with vegetables planted in bag or sack, filled with soil and stones as a simplified vegetable growing method – are particularly useful. In just six months, Lucy has seen how several women who participated in Mwanzo Bora peer support groups have already adopted what they learned about home gardening techniques and their nutritional advantages. Led by individuals such as Lucy, the peer support groups meet every week to discuss nutrition for their children and how to overcome various nutritional challenges. Lucy's group is one of five such groups in the village, with approximately 12 members in each group.

In addition to small gardens, many of the women have also started raising small animals, such as rabbits, to supplement their food source. According to Lucy, eight rabbit hutches have already been built in the village since her training in February as a community health worker. In the spring of 2015, 1,128 households in the area adopted the use of either home gardens and/or keeping livestock for improved household nutrition in times of low agricultural productivity.

One of the women in the Lucy's peer support group, Mwele David Zoya, a mother of five, has been inspired to go above and beyond the Mwanzo Bora model. Besides keeping and maintaining several lush, green, vegetable sack gardens, she has tried a new approach of rearing guinea fowl as a source of protein instead of raising local chickens. Mwele says guinea fowl are less prone to diseases compared to chickens and produce an abundance of eggs.

"The guinea fowl produce so many eggs that sometimes we can't eat all of them. I sell the remaining eggs to others," Mwele said. This small income of selling guinea fowl eggs has given her and her family both nutritional and financial support.

"I was having a lot of difficulty getting food. There were times that I had no income at all, my children were very hungry, and my husband was not able to find work. But now, during those times, the money we receive from selling eggs helps me provide my children with the food we need. With the little money I earn, I can buy flour, as well as chilies and tomatoes, which I don't grow in my garden. This small income has reduced so much of the burden that I have as a mother trying to feed my children," Mwele explained.

Mwele has applied new techniques to maintain a thriving home garden even in times of drought. "On days when we do not find water, the little water that we have in storage, we use for bathing the kids and washing the utensils. Then we use that waste water to pour it into the sack garden, which needs very little water to keep the vegetables growing."

Mwele's passion for low-water usage gardening and her initiative of breeding guinea fowl is an inspiration for other Mvumi village group members. She proudly encourages other women by showing them her home garden and guinea fowl with hope that they too adopt this approach as they see how she has created her own financial income, as well as a nutritious solution for her family.

The Mwanzo Bora Nutrition Program (MBNP) is a five-year project funded by the U.S. Agency of International Development through the Feed the Future initiative. MBNP works in five regions in Tanzania and three districts in Zanzibar, helping communities reduce childhood stunting and maternal anemia.