



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/disabled-youth-proud-be-self-reliant>

Disabled Youth Proud to be Self-Reliant

John Nyanjui is 28 years old and mentally challenged. As the time to graduate from school approached, he worried he would have had nowhere to go. Having come from a poor background, jobless, and living in a society that can stigmatize people who are different, Nyanjui was uncertain about his future.

Youth unemployment is a growing problem that constitutes 70 percent of total unemployment in Kenya, according to the Africa Economic Outlook. Nyanjui would need to compete in an already stretched job market.

Despite his mental condition, Nyanjui is energetic and able; before graduating he discovered a new interest that turned his fortunes around. As part of vocational training, he and some of his friends learned gardening skills by helping with a newly-launched school garden. With this new skill, Nyanjui managed to land himself a permanent job on the farm, providing vocational training to a new generation of students.

This is all thanks to the USAID-funded Nutrition Kitchen Garden Program launched in early 2012 at Maria Magdalena Catholic Parish School in Thika. The school cares for the special needs of 110 mentally handicapped children between 15 and 29 years and aims to help students to be independent adults by equipping them with skills like masonry, beading and tailoring.

The kitchen garden program is implemented by a Kenyan non-governmental organization, Real Impact. It has helped the school to start and run a fully-fledged garden where Nyanjui and his colleagues have been cultivating cabbages, pumpkin, fruit trees, bananas, sweet potatoes, carrots, amaranth, bananas, onions, and a variety of vegetables.

As part of the U.S Government's Feed the Future program, Real Impact targets marginalized groups like women and the youth and helps them to become self-employed and financially independent to eliminate malnutrition and the need for relief food.

Disability is not inability

Mentally handicapped children are vulnerable; many of them suffer from abandonment, abuse and exclusion from society. The Kenya Government Policy Framework for Education estimates that 25 percent of the over 3 million people with special needs in Kenya are children of school-going age. Only 12 percent of these children have been properly assessed with only 3 percent of them having any access to care and rehabilitation services. As a result, they also have few prospects of employment or skill-acquisition for self-reliance. This means that they often remain dependent with a low quality of life—all the more reason why Nyanjui cannot hide his joy.

"I am very grateful for this job because I can now prove to everyone that disability is not inability. Now I can meet my own needs and even send something back home every now and then," he says.

Thirty two of his peers have also found new hope through this USAID initiative. Through the gardening skills acquired they can now find employment or cultivate their own gardens for food and income.

This article originally [appeared](#) on the USAID Mission Kenya website.