

## **Future Agricultures Consortium**

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### **Journalism competition 2012: Young People, Farming and Food**

**Runner up (print)**

### **Healthy Learning: Creating opportunities for experiential education among school children**

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Duncan Mutembei is a hero, at least to those who have interacted with him as he undertakes various activities within his school compound.

At only 13 years, Duncan can confidently explain to teachers, parents, district education field officers, fellow pupils and other guests who frequently visit his school about various Healthy Learning projects. During this particular visit, he explains to students from Ohio State University in the United States how to prepare organic manure, “You cut the leaves and mix them with the soil and cover them and they give you manure. Therefore instead of buying the fertilizer in the shops you can make some for yourself using leaves from trees,” says Duncan.

He knows all about tree planting and agroforestry, kitchen gardening techniques such as crop mulching, water harvesting and alternative sources of energy such as biogas. His comprehension of local environmental problems and their solutions excites many people. At his school, he is at the forefront of activities that relate to agriculture and environmental conservation. He is an active member of the 4k club that implements various Healthy Learning projects. The 4k's stand for 'Kuungana' which means to unite, 'Kufanya' which means to do, 'Kusaidia' means to help and the last K stands for Kenya. Many schools in Kenya have 4K clubs that aim to teach children sustainable agricultural techniques through school projects such as demonstration gardens and poultry keeping.

Duncan schools at Ngenia Primary School in Laikipia Central district. He is one out of approximately 20,000 pupils in 30 schools in arid and semi-arid areas already benefiting from the Healthy Learning Programme (HLP). This programme is closely linked to the Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP) which organizes partners to support holistic education in Kenya.

Implemented jointly by the Ministry of Education, the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation & Technical Assistance and the World Agroforestry Centre, the HLP utilizes an integrated approach correlating learning activities in schools with food, nutrition, health and environmental issues in schools. The programme focuses on making learning practical and experiential while equipping learners with practical skills on various life issues.

Agricultural and environmental education has been a key component of the programme. This was necessitated by the fact that the schools are located in arid and semi-arid areas where availability of food is a challenge. The programme therefore purposes to educate learners on sustainable agricultural techniques and provides them with an opportunity to undertake small learning projects.

Such projects include kitchen gardens, fruit tree orchards, school woodlots, livestock keeping and rain water harvesting among others. As pupils take part in the implementation of the projects they acquire skills and knowledge on sustainable agriculture.

In most schools, pupils implement the projects as members of clubs or as part of their classes where they maintain class projects. This has ensured that all pupils who take part in Healthy Learning acquire vital skills. In the four years that the programme has been ongoing, schools have been found to be important entry points into the community. Pupils have transferred knowledge gained at school to their homes. Some pupils have established gardens at home.

In Kajiado Central district, Primary Boys Boarding School (PBBS) is also implementing the Healthy Learning Programme. PBBS has successfully undertaken a livestock rearing project. Through this project the school community, including the pupils, has learnt how to profitably keep livestock by buying and selling steers at the right time. The school has also implemented an environmental conservation project. To date, pupils, parents and the teachers have planted more than 3,000 indigenous trees including Acacia, Neem, Casuarina, Spectabilis, Bottle Brush and Grevillia. Each pupil plants and maintains a tree. Perhaps to show the change in attitude

towards environmental conservation “students will voluntarily share their water ration during drought periods with their tree because they know the importance of trees and the need for them to survive” says Flora Omulama, a teacher at PBBS.

Another school in Kathiani district has been quite successful in teaching pupils agricultural skills. Though situated on only 2.5 Hectares of land, and with a student population of 460, Kaliluni Primary School views its agroforestry project as the most successful Healthy Learning activity. A teacher at the school attributes this to the fact that pupils are able to practice whatever concepts taught in class through the projects. Through the school’s agroforestry club, pupils are quite knowledgeable on uses of trees, importance of agroforestry and environmental conservation. The pupils grow vegetables together with fertilizer trees on the school land. They have also started tree nurseries and labeled trees in their school. Throughout the school are ‘talking walls’ that remind pupils about aspects of environmental conservation.

Undertaking agricultural and environmental education in schools is not an easy task. Although the programme offers training for teachers, parents and district education officers, collaboration from all stakeholders is important. Healthy Learning encourages schools to partner with relevant ministries such as the Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock and Environment to benefit from assistance ranging from technical advice, material (tree seedlings, water tanks) and financial support. Without such support, most schools would not know what species of trees to plant for their climate or what vegetables to grow “All we can do is test one crop and see if it works and if it doesn’t, we get another one” says Tom Sande, a teacher at Iparakuo Primary School in Magadi. This demonstrates the importance of technical support as the schools engage in agriculture and environmental education.

Healthy Learning Programme dates back to 2008 when 25 primary schools in five arid and semi-arid districts were purposively selected to serve as model schools. A baseline survey conducted within the same period showed the need to improve the link between school feeding, agricultural, nutritional and environmental activities to classroom teaching. Five more schools have since been included into the programme in 2009 thereby raising the number of beneficiary schools to 30.

In the current phase (2011 - 2013), the HLP is focusing on scaling up and sharing of lessons learnt. This will be possible through establishment of partnerships with like-minded

organizations. Already parents, pupils and teachers in the 30 schools are engaging in exchange visits to learn from each other. It is envisioned that in 2012, each of the 30 schools will be used as demonstration and learning sites for three to five neighboring schools hence increasing the number of schools to 150. Such schools will be mentored and supported to take up Healthy Learning and engage in agricultural and environmental education. "Seeking funding for the endeavor remains our biggest challenge. All in all, it can be done" says Paul Bottelberge, Healthy Programme Coordinator.

More Information on the programme

<http://www.vvob.be/kenya/?q=healthylearning>

<http://www.healthylearningprogramme.blogspot.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Healthy-Learning-Programme/195652420468377?sk=wall>