



Empowering youth and transforming communities in Kenya through job creation and nutritious high-Iron and Zinc beans and products

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Background information

Kenya imports up to 30% of beans consumed annually from the neighbouring countries (mainly Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda), implying a significant export of jobs from the bean value chain in Kenya.

The low adoption of improved bean innovations including biofortified high iron and zinc beans (HIB), low yields, and unstructured bean markets make it difficult for processors to get enough grain for processing. In the realization of this challenge, in 2021 the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (Alliance) and Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO) through Pan-Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA | [The Pan-Africa Bean Research Alliance](#)) in a consortium led by Cherubet Company Ltd (Cherubet Foods), a processor based in Nairobi and which included Abosi Top Hill Farmers' Cooperative Society Ltd and Kaplomboi Rotu Farmers' Cooperative Society Ltd both from Bomet County and later Crop Soko Ltd[1] sought to address this gap. Under a project dubbed "the Nutritious Bean Products for Decent Employment for Youth[2] in Kenya (NBP-DEYK) project," funded by the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE), the consortium focused on empowering youth

especially young women, through sustainable employment opportunities by leveraging on the potential of high iron and zinc beans (HIB) in production, aggregation, sale, processing and consumption of the grain and processed bean products. What ensued was a journey of innovation, resilience, and community-driven development.

Collaborative Success

The success of the project was attributed to the existing synergy among the partners. The Alliance and KALRO through PABRA was fundamental in bringing expertise in agricultural research and development, while Cherubet Foods served as a primary buyer and processor of HIB grain (Nyota and Angaza) and distributor of processed products and thus providing market to the farmers. The farmer cooperatives, Abosi Top Hill and Kaplomboi Rotu, were pivotal in driving implementation. including mobilizing farmers for capacity development, grain production, aggregation (including cleaning, sorting and bagging) and fostering local community engagement.

Through the two cooperative societies, the project established demonstration plots and organized field days to

[1] Crop Soko Ltd connects smallholder farmers from several counties in Kenya to formal functioning markets
[2] Youth/young people as used in this article represents individuals in the age bracket of 15-35

to engage farmers, including youth and women.

Creation and improvement of Job Opportunities for Women and Youth

Periodic reports have shown significant insights into job creation and improvement of existing ones for the youth, especially young women at various levels. Created jobs refer to the jobs offered to the youth for the first time as a result of the project activities. Improved jobs refer to the existing jobs whose conditions of delivery were improved through capacity building. The areas of capacity building included but not limited to:

- (i) training on good agronomic practices and record keeping at the farm level;
- (ii) streamlining bean procurement from farm to factory through producer – processor linkages and negotiations;
- (iii) support with development and implementation of 11 policies for improved operations at Cherubet Foods covering among others human resources, financial management and procurement;
- (iv) proper documentation of job status for staff and;
- (v) sales and marketing support services for staff at the retail outlets for processed products.

The project’s goals for creation and improvement of jobs, targeted a combined total of at least 500 job opportunities, including 120 jobs created and 380 improved jobs and an overall improvement of work conditions to ensure inclusive economic impact. Various capacity building activities, such as development of 11 policies to support governance and operations at Cherubet Foods, monitoring and evaluation, integration of human-centered design (HCD), and sales and marketing support, were put in place in enhancing the project’s operational efficiency, creating the products’ market pull and thus triggering interest of young people to grain production and marketing. In addition, capacity building contributed to compliance with CFYE requirements and ultimate achievement of set targets. The ongoing human resources, sales, and marketing support activities are hawkers and kiosk operators, expected to further bolster the beneficiary businesses and their impact.

By the end of 2024, the project reports showed that Cherubet Foods had 110 new jobs (86 female and 24 male) – all youth, representing 92% success rate against the target. Additionally, the project supported the improvement of 500 existing jobs among farmers, kiosk operators, motorbike riders, and aggregation managers, with 434 held by youth (279 female and 155 male) and 66 by non-youth as shown in Figure 1. In addition, Cherubet Foods has experienced increased business turnover among hawkers and kiosk operators, reflecting the impact of young people and women engaged in selling processed bean products, including uji (porridge), githeri special (cooked mixture of maize and beans) and other value-added bean-based

products distributed by hawkers and kiosk operators, in addition to supermarket retail outlets, all which are rich in iron and zinc. As shown in Table 1, sales by kiosk operators amounted to 26.8 metric tons (MT) of products, while hawkers, who are essential in last-mile distribution, sold an average of 223.4 MT. Supermarket retail outlets accounted for 3 MT. In total, over 253 MT of products were sold, with a combined turnover of KES 10 million up from just over KES 110,000 by end of 2022. These figures not only highlight the increasing market demand for nutritious iron and zinc rich bean-based products but also demonstrate how the growing enterprise is expanding employment opportunities, particularly for youth and women involved in sales and distribution.

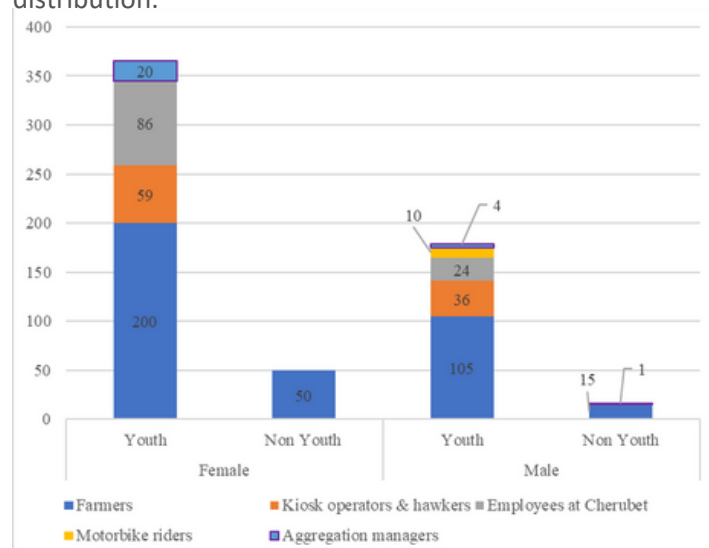


Figure 1: Created and Improved jobs at Cherubet Foods by end of 2024

Category	MT	Value (KES)
Kiosk operators	26,804	959,360
Hawkers	223,378	8,920,160
Supermarkets	3,045	120,600
Totals	253,227	10,000,120

Table 1: Cherubet Foods 2024 business turnover

In addition to job opportunities, the project has achieved remarkable agricultural production growth. Taking a case of Abosi Top Hill FCS in Abosi-Ndanai Ward, Bomet County, from 2022 to 2023, the number of farmers engaged increased from 97 to 269 representing a 177% rise. Acreage also expanded significantly from 64.9 to 256.6 acres, approximately 300% increase as shown in Figure 2. These gains translated to a 25% increase in volume of sales to Cherubet Foods, reaching 28.4 metric tonnes in 2023, with a corresponding rise in overall sales revenue from KES 1.8 million to over KES 3.2 million, reflecting a 79% growth in a period of just over one year. Notably, these reported sales figures reflect only the amounts off-taken by Cherubet Foods, while additional produce was either retained for household consumption or sold through other sales channels. This increase in production and income (which continued to grow in 2024) highlights the project's potential

to sustain economic and social impact and transforming livelihoods especially for the youth in the coming years. Further the latest reports show that, Abosi Top Hill FCS continues to attract new membership of farmers majority of whom have an interest in bean production.

As of February 2025, the number of farmers stood at 624 up from 269 by end of 2023. Among them, 468 were women and 156 were men. In terms of age distribution, 321 were youth (243 young women) as shown in Figure 3. This interest can be attributed to business growth associated with production, sale and consumption of the high iron and zinc beans, which has contributed to creation of jobs, improved livelihoods and resilience especially among women.

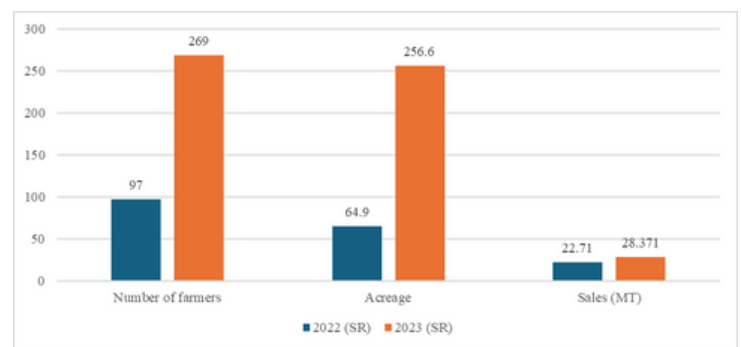


Figure 2: Number of farmers, acreage, and sales growth: 2022 – 2023 at Abosi Top Hill FCS (Note: Reported sales figures reflect only the amounts off-taken by Cherubet Foods. It doesn't include other sales)

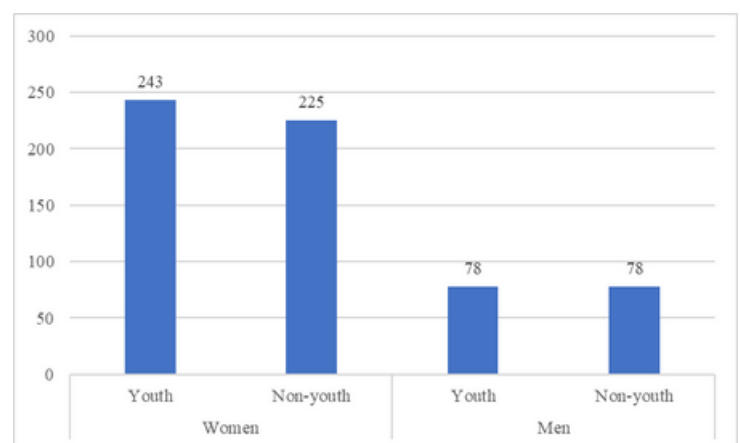


Figure 3: Abosi Top Hill FCS membership segregation by February 2025

The reports also show that by end of 2024, the project’s impact on youth employment is significant, with 60% of jobs being taken by young women and 29% by young men, underscoring a strong commitment to youth and women inclusivity (89% of youth cumulatively). Non-youth roles accounted for 11% of all positions, with women occupying 8% of these roles and men 3% as shown in Figure 4.

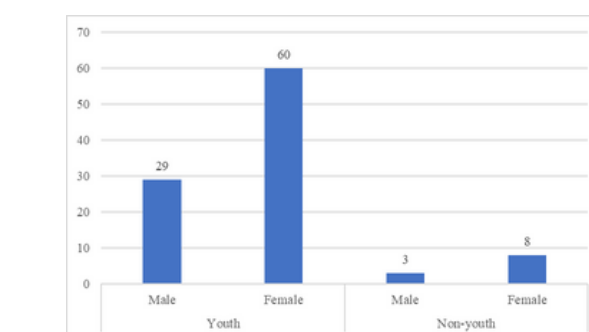


Figure 4: Jobs created and improved by gender and age group by 2024

Enhancing farmer Resilience, Economic Growth, and Sustainable Agricultural Practices

At the local level, the project continued to support the cooperatives in improving the existing jobs, through training on good agricultural practices, record keeping and market linkages among others for improved grain production and sales for improved livelihoods (Frame 1).

By the end of year 1 of the project a total of 468 farmers were involved in bean production during the long rains season of March to June 2023. While there were recorded challenges such as the high cost of inputs, scarcity of seeds of preferred bean varieties (Angaza and Nyota), unpredictable weather conditions, and pests and diseases, there were opportunities for growth. Particularly, there were efforts to strengthen resilience of the farmers, through facilitation to access spray pumps and multi-crop threshers from CIAT. At Cherubet Foods, the installation of retort packaging equipment (Frame 2) supported by the project is poised to significantly contribute to the creation of more jobs at the processing end as well at the marketing and distribution end, once it is fully operational. As a result, by embracing new bean varieties and adopting sustainable farming practices, farmers not only increased their income but also contributed to the economic growth of the region.



Frame 1. A section of farmers being trained on record keeping

Beyond job creation, the project is poised to make a lasting impact on economic growth and social development within Bomet County, where malnutrition levels were standing at 36% in 2021 —notably above the national average of 26% (County Government of Bomet), by encouraging integration and utilization of the HIB through school feeding programmes and maternal health care programmes.

By empowering youth and enhancing livelihoods, the initiative aims to improve income levels and access to nutritious food, supporting both individual well-being and community resilience.

Additionally, the project's emphasis on sustainable agricultural practices encourages environmental stewardship among local farmers. With the support of the County Government of Bomet and as the initiative continues to expand, these efforts are expected to shape healthier, more sustainable communities, fostering a shared commitment to a prosperous future for Bomet County.



Frame 2. Parts of retort packaging equipment installation at Cherubet Foods

Prospects

As we reflect on past achievement (92% for jobs created and over 100% jobs improved), we remain committed to the journey ahead. Building on the successes of the project, we envision a future where youth empowerment and community development go hand in hand. By harnessing the power of innovation, technology, and inclusive partnerships, we strive to expand the reach and impact of our initiatives, ensuring that every member of society is empowered through creation of decent jobs which guarantee a prosperous future for youth and women.

Acknowledgements

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