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Farmers boost yields, income with small-scale irrigation systems (International Water Management Institute)

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There's a saying in the Gursum sub-district of Ethiopia's Oromia region: "No pond, no wife." Farmers in this region collect rainwater in ponds created with large plastic sheets. It's a simple but effective way to harvest and store water for their crops. The technology was introduced in Gursum a decade ago and has changed the sub-district in more ways than one. Men farmers without ponds are said to have difficulty finding a wife!

The story of the "No pond, no wife" sub-district was published in a new report by the International Water Management Institute. The report looked at the irrigation practices of farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. It found that farmers who are tired of waiting for large irrigation schemes are taking matters into their own hands. These farmers are increasingly using small-scale irrigation systems to increase their production.

Small-scale irrigation systems such as motor pumps and rainwater ponds are owned by individual farmers, farmer groups, or by communities. They provide a safety net against erratic rainfall, allowing farmers to irrigate their crops at key growing stages. They also allow farmers to grow crops during the dry season. The impact on yields and income can be dramatic.

Veronica Sianchenga says her life was transformed by a simple pump and irrigation kit. She farms a small plot of land in rural Zambia. In her community, rainfall and surface water are only available for a few months of the year. Investing in a pump has enabled her to access groundwater year-round.

Ms. Sianchenga now grows tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants. The proceeds from selling vegetables have enabled her to build a new house and send her children to school. And while men farmers in Ethiopia find that irrigation systems help attract a spouse, women in her community see different benefits. "We women are no longer relying on our husbands," Ms. Sianchenga notes. "We are able to do our own projects. We now eat better and grow better."

The study found that 20 per cent of small-scale farmers in Zambia now grow vegetables in the dry season. These farmers earn about one-third more income than those who grow only rain-fed crops.
According to the report, small-scale irrigation is well established in South Asia and gaining ground in sub-Saharan Africa.

Other examples of small-scale irrigation include tube wells and community-managed river diversions.

Meredith Giordano co-ordinated the study for the International Water Management Institute. She explains: "Despite constraints, such as high upfront costs and poorly developed supply chains, small-scale farmers across Africa and Asia have moved ahead using their own resources to finance and install irrigation technologies. It's clear that farmers themselves are driving this trend."

In fact, there are areas where small, farmer-driven irrigation schemes are now more important than large public schemes. In Ghana, for example, small-scale irrigation systems cover 25 times more agricultural land than public ones.

The International Water Management Institute sees great potential for small-scale irrigation to improve the incomes of farmers across sub-Saharan Africa. According to the report, investments in motorized pumps could benefit millions, helping farmers in the region net up to 22 billion US dollars per year.

2 Responses to "Farmers boost yields, income with small-scale irrigation systems (International Water Management Institute)"

1. *George Olupot* Says:
   September 5th, 2012 at 7:40 am

   Very good innovation. The farmers in Teso region in Uganda should take up this kind of practise. The Teso region soils are among the best in Uganda for production of high value crops like Tomatoes, cabbages, peppers, passion fruits, pineaples, mangoes, oranges, watermelons. The sweetness of the fruits grown in the Teso region is deeper than the sweetness of fruits from other regions of Uganda. This gives the Teso region fruits first position in the East African markets.

   Besides that there are many water sources in Teso. Swamps after every 3-4kms, spring wells(in every swamp) that freely discherge water day and night every day january to December, underground water, rain water that drops in sixs or more months of every year.

   This type of innovation should be seen as one of the not many opportunities the Teso farmers have for improving their lives. The leaders of Teso will be looked at as bright persons if they practically got down to supporting the farmers acquire this innovation.

   Stakeholders in the effort to improve farming in the region eg NAADS, NGOs, political leaders, children of the region living and working overseas promote this innovation seriously.

2. *Alachu Davies* Says:
   September 9th, 2012 at 7:05 am

   This is agreat innovation whats is its cost am sure it is will be of great help and how can one get this technology?????

Leave a Reply

Name (required)