

Growing Big Through Passion Fruit



Working hand in hand with farmers

Sylvia Cherop is the kind of Office and Marketing Assistant any small enterprise dreams of: Self-confident and friendly, hard-working and professional, persuasive and warm-hearted. She has always had it in her, but it took training, trust and tenacity for the 35-year-old widow and mother of three young children to develop into the person she is now.

On the other side, The Mountain Borean is a textbook example of a local company, both as an employer and a marketer of fresh produce. One thousand five hundred smallholder farmers in Bungoma County are registered in their out-grower scheme, many of them organised in farmer groups for passion fruit, avocado and beekeeping. The Mountain Borean walks with them every step of the way, providing them with affordable inputs and technical advice, then, at the right time, aggregating and marketing their harvest at much better prices than they could achieve individually.

A good match

This is how Sylvia and The Mountain Borean got together: As a member of a youth group engaged with The Mountain Borean in Bungoma County, she first started planting and nursing passion fruit. The seedlings, agronomists' visits to their farms, the pooling of their harvests and finding a market for their fine produce were organised and provided by The Mountain Borean. This was made possible with the support of Agri-Jobs 4 Youth, who have the same goal of improving the skills of rural youth in the area, thus setting them up to start their own agri-food business or find employment in the agricultural sector. Through the partnership, a group of five young women and men were invited to participate in a short course on passion fruit farming and the agribusiness possibilities along the value chain at a local ATVET. Sylvia did not hesitate to take the opportunity. "I wanted the skills," says Sylvia. "As a young widow, I was barely able to feed my children or pay their school fees. I had to get out of my financially difficult situation and learn a trade that can help me come up as a woman."





Agri-Jobs 4 Youth Unlocking opportunities in the agricultural sector



The project catalyses private-sector-led job creation in order to enhance the livelihood opportunities for young people in the agri-food sector in Western Kenya. Inclusive cooperation models between priority value chain actors create additional employment.

Competency-based, performance-driven modular courses at ATVET institutions enhance young women's and men's skills and employment prospects.

Climbing the career ladder

During the short course at Sang'alo Institute of Science and Technology, the CEO of The Mountain Berean came to visit the trainees to check on their learning progress. Sylvia keenly answered all his questions, not knowing that it was his way of interviewing them for an internship at his company – which she promptly was offered. The two-month internship made it clear that Sylvia has a talent for finances, networking and organizational tasks, besides knowing passion fruit farming inside out. The Mountain Berean team was so happy with her work morale and results that Sylvia was subsequently employed. She has quickly grown into her new role of Sales and Marketing Manager for passion fruit and beehives, while also collaborating closely with the agronomists. Not a month has gone by where she didn't meet her sales goals for the passion fruit and beekeeping value chains.

In her free time, Sylvia does her own passion fruit farming. She has 50 plants, whose fruits she obviously sells through The Mountain Berean. Her harvest has more than doubled within the course of one year. "I have learned how to really take care of the plants. Also, I keep bees in several beehives on my farm which helps with the pollination and yield of the plants, besides giving me honey. My dream is to one day have a full acre with 700 passion fruit seedlings," shares Sylvia.

Giving back to the community

With all of her work, she still finds time to invest in her peers at the youth group. Every Saturday, she conducts training sessions with some of them, goes to their farms and advises them based on her skills and experience. She has taken over responsibility as the secretary of the group and inspires especially the young women to work hard and, step by step, do better.

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