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STORIES
COMING UP



When Tradition Meets Transformation: Chief Nalubamba Champions Agroecology in Zambia



Airwaves for Kalomo Radio Bring Agroecology to the People



Sowing Seeds of Change in Kenyan Schools

By John Macharia, Abbot Ntwali

In the heart of Makueni County, Kenya, a quiet yet profound transformation is taking root –literally. At Kivai Comprehensive School, the sound of morning bells now blends with the rustle of leaves, the rhythm of hoes hitting soil, and the laughter of students tending to rows of amaranth, cowpeas, and kale.

What began in July 2024 as a simple school policy to use vacant land for growing indigenous crops has blossomed into a vibrant initiative that is reshaping how communities think about food, education, and sustainability. With the support of SCOPE Kenya and its local partner Katoloni Mission CBO, Kivai Comprehensive is now a model of how school-based gardening can nourish both minds and bodies, while reconnecting youth with the traditional food systems of their ancestors.

A GARDEN GROWS IN KIVAI

The shift began after the My Food is African campaign, a continental initiative led by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), was introduced to the school through SCOPE Kenya. The campaign champions agroecology, indigenous knowledge, and food

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sovereignty by encouraging schools, communities, and policymakers to embrace local, sustainable food systems. Inspired by the campaign, Kivai Comprehensive’s administration embraced the idea of school gardening with a twist: not just any crops, but indigenous, drought-resistant varieties known for their nutritional value and cultural importance. Dedicating school land to grow these crops, the school aimed to feed its learners, reduce reliance on purchased foods, and teach students practical agricultural skills rooted in tradition.

Today, those gardens provide daily meals for 120 learners, supplying fresh greens and grains that are incorporated into the school’s feeding program. “We’ve gone from importing vegetables from the market to harvesting them from our backyard,” said a school staff member. “It’s healthier, cheaper, and more meaningful.”

EDUCATION MEETS CULTIVATION

But the gardens are not just for nourishment – they’re for learning. Every day, students participate in planting, watering, and weeding as part of a new hands-on agroecology curriculum that teaches them about soil health, composting, biodiversity, and the value of traditional crops. Teachers have integrated the gardens into science, home economics, and environmental studies. Students learn how photosynthesis works

by watching plants grow. They understand the concept of food chains by observing insects and birds that visit the garden. They explore climate resilience through discussions on how indigenous crops survive drought conditions better than exotic species.

This approach has also sparked behavioural changes among students. “When children are involved in growing their food, they’re more likely to appreciate and eat it,” says one teacher. “Now they ask for traditional vegetables by name.”

The impact on discipline and attendance has also been notable. Engaging in gardening has provided students with a sense of responsibility, teamwork, and pride. School administrators report reduced cases of absenteeism and indiscipline as learners become more involved in the garden routines.

EXPANDING THE ROOTS

The success at Kivai has quickly spread. Two neighbouring schools – Miwani Primary and Katheka Kai Secondary – have since adopted similar gardening practices, influenced by Kivai’s model. Inspired by what they saw during exchange visits and peer school dialogues, their administrations have carved out land for cultivation and initiated feeding programs using the produce.

SCOPE Kenya’s August 2024 three-day sensitisation campaign

FROM THE EDITOR

This story captures a quiet revolution unfolding in Kenya’s Makueni County, where school gardens are sprouting not just crops, but transformation. At a time when Africa’s food systems face increasing threats from climate change, imported diets, and industrial agriculture, this article shines a light on a grassroots response that is deeply rooted in tradition and agroecological resilience.

Documenting the journey of Kivai Comprehensive School and its ripple effect offers a compelling look at how policy, pedagogy, and practice can converge to revive indigenous knowledge, nourish young minds and bodies, and restore community food sovereignty. What stands out is the agency of learners, teachers, and parents in redefining what education and sustainability can look like when grounded in local realities.

This article reminds us that the seeds of change often begin in the smallest of plots and that school gardens can become powerful spaces of learning, empowerment, and ecological justice.

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Warmly,

Abbot



played a key role in scaling up this movement. Through interactive workshops with teachers, learners, and parents, the organisation showcased the benefits of organic food production, particularly how it combats hunger, reduces food costs, enhances biodiversity, and promotes self-reliance.

“This is not charity – it’s empowerment,” says a SCOPE Kenya National Coordinator. “We’re building capacity for schools and communities to sustain themselves.”

A COMMUNITY RECONNECTED

Perhaps one of the most remarkable effects of the school gardens is how they have bridged generations and connected communities. Parents, many of whom had abandoned traditional farming techniques, are now visiting the school to learn from their children. Some have started home gardens using indigenous seeds shared by the school, while others have formed local self-help groups to exchange farming tips and preserve heirloom crop varieties.

In a region often affected by erratic rainfall and food insecurity, these gardens represent more than meals – they are lifelines. They promote climate-resilient agriculture, reduce dependency on

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imported seeds and food, and revive long-neglected food cultures.

SCOPE Kenya, together with Katoloni CBO, continues to support schools and communities by offering training in permaculture, seed saving, and natural pest control. Their approach is participatory, rooted in respect for local knowledge and a belief that agroecology is as much about values as it is about vegetables.

A POLICY WITH LASTING IMPACT

The school management’s decision to institutionalise indigenous gardening is now viewed as a pioneering policy model in the region. County education officers who visited the schools have expressed interest in promoting similar initiatives across other schools in Makueni. There are even discussions of integrating agroecology into the county’s education development plans.

For the students, it’s an education that feeds both body and mind. For the community, it’s a return to resilience. For Kenya, it’s a growing movement rooted in soil, tradition, and hope.

And at the centre of it all is a simple school garden – bursting with greens, teeming with life, and powered by the belief that African food can shape Africa’s future.