

‘FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND’

How Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools are bridging the nutritional gap in Kakuma

“In the last three months, the children have made over ten thousand shillings from the sale of kales, brinjals, spinach, tomatoes, capsicum and carrots to the neighbouring communities. Besides, the school has also been using the same plots to feed the children themselves”, says a proud Ekal Lochi. A teacher at Kalobeyei Boarding Primary School, Mr. Lochi, who is also the JFFLS facilitator at the school, proudly displays the children’s own farm records of the returns of their farming efforts at the school. The profits, he explains, are used for their upkeep in case of sickness and to pay for examinations.

“The school can now afford to feed the children on a balanced diet”, says a beaming Sylvia Lokorian, the Headmistress. “Some of these children had never seen green vegetables in their lives, but thanks to JFFLS, they have even learned to prepare them properly during cooking demonstrations which are carried out during the science classes”. This skill of washing and cooking is seen in action when the school prepares and serves vegetables at meal times. The children are also encouraged to replicate their knowhow back at home when they close school for the holidays.

Just like fruits, vegetables contain good amounts of vitamins and minerals. They are also home for many antioxidants that help protect the human body from diseases and help boost immunity. Vegetables are also packed with dietary fiber that is good for digestion and preventing cardio-vascular diseases. Kales are a major source of iron, which prevents anaemia, and the antioxidants there in protect against prostate and colon cancers. The potassium-rich spinach and kales also prevent irregular heart beats and high blood pressure. Mpatio Namoru,



Mpatio Namoru happily pumps water for irrigating their crop—the children have learned to work together in carrying out of different tasks irrespective of gender

a standard four pupil knows her vegetables well “Eating *sukuma wiki* helps keep us healthy and so we don’t spend money going to the hospital all the way in Kakuma town”, she quips. Fresh vegetables like carrots and tomatoes have large stores of Vitamin A which keeps our skin healthy, promote our eye sight and general growth .

Sylvia confides that she has noticed significant changes in the children since the introduction of the JFFLS programme in the school. “Apart from the obvious health benefits derived from eating fresh vegetables, the children have developed ownership for their plots which they protect jealously. This has made them very responsible and has developed self-drive. There is now more cooperation because the boys and girls operate together and it is easy to see leaders emerge from the activities they undertake such as pumping water for watering their farms. Academically, the students have also sharpened their skills due to the practical application of their knowledge, thanks to the programme.”

The shiny ceremonial ornaments glint in the sun complementing the bright colours that is the hallmark of this renown choir known to excel in the national music festivals. As the JFFLS choir prepares to sing, the choir master, Victor Longes patiently arranges the seventeen boys and thirteen girls to form a semi-circle. As the chair of the Greens JFFLS whose motto is 'for double protection', he knows that the whole team depends on him for leadership. The choir belts out a catchy tune in the Turkana language that integrates pastoral livelihoods with farming. The song loosely translates to

*We are praying for the best crop
That will allow us to rear livestock
And therefore get wealth from our farms*

*We are praising the crop
That has brought us an education
And this has made us more informed*

John Ekuom, a standard six pupil who is a member of 'Unity', one of the six groups in the Greens JFFLS, has also learned about the dangers of experimenting with



The group leaders prepare vegetables picked from their own garden—

the nutritional value added by the vegetables have greatly boosted the general health of the pupils in the school as well as the neighboring community

drugs. He is very excited about the prospect of making money from JFFLS projects because he is now able to afford paying for examinations as well as basic medicine through the joint kitty financed by their sales but managed by the school. He and four other group members proudly display the capsicum crop growing in their plot. "During the schools holidays, I will show my parents how to practice crop spacing on our farm and how grow to identify crop-friendly insects", says Ekuom. Biological pest control is the second principle of Integrated Pest Management, an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that the pupils learn in JFFLS.

"The agents of change are the children. When there is any new idea, the parents are more likely to follow what their children advise," adds John Kaissa, the project coordinator. John, an official from the Lutheran World Federation, the NGO implementing the project, says that the children who have gone to school have been teaching their parents on any new innovations they learn. John explains another benefit from the project, "Although most domestic chores are carried out by women in the Turkana community, the JFFLS activities encourage the carrying out of different tasks irrespective of gender."

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