

## Kenyan Millennium Village tests poverty-reduction goals

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Gaudencia, a Kenyan woman in her fifties, works barefoot preparing her fallow field for sowing corn. Until two years ago, she had no idea leaving the land untilled some seasons could reap a better harvest. "It was not enough to feed the whole family before. But now it is," she says, wiping beads of sweat off her forehead.

Gaudencia's village of Sauri, near Lake Victoria in the rolling hills of south-west Kenya, gives no hint of its international role in fighting extreme poverty, but it is the world's first Millennium Village.

As such, it benefits from advice and funding as part of a project begun in mid-2004 to test the Millennium Development Goals -- targets for reducing poverty by 2015, agreed on by all the countries of the world in 2000.

About 400 000 people in 80 villages in 10 African countries are now involved in the bid to show whether the much-hyped millennium targets are indeed achievable with human resources and investment.

Two years ago, Gaudencia started taking free farming lessons. She learned how to sow seeds in lines instead of scattering them randomly, why to leave fields fallow and how to use fertiliser.

After her last harvest, she had enough to sell a sack of corn for the first time in her life and made 1 200 shillings (about R122). It was a breakthrough, but still not enough to pay for schooling for two of her three children.

Her neighbour Edward Oyier, in his sixties, is a step ahead. He can now send the five orphans he looks after to school after earning 10 000 shillings (about R1 040) in 2006 for selling part of his harvest. It was a good sale for a resident of Sauri, where three-quarters of the population live on less than \$1 per day.

"I have surplus of food. Before, it [the harvest] was from hand to mouth. Now it is also going from hand to bank," Oyier says.

### Feeding children

As part of the millennium project, Oyier has to give part of his harvest to village schools, where results and attendance have improved since the creation of a free canteen.

"From 2005 to 2007, the number of pupils increased from 500 to 750. It is due to the feeding programme and the good performances of the school," says Joseph Lanyo, headmaster of the Bar Sauri Primary School. "Before, children were sleepy because of empty stomachs."

The school has risen in a district ranking from 198th place out of 390 in 1999 to ninth place in 2006.

"We're looking forward to clinching the first position. It's our prayer," says Lanyo, laughing, as dozens of children in blue-and-white uniforms queued in red soil at the

outside canteen for dishes of peas and cabbages.

Nearby, two cows chew grass next to the playground. They were bought for the project, and their milk feeds the youngest children at the school.

Despite the programme, Sauri clearly needs further improvements. About 100 children fill up a leaky classroom in the nursery school. Another is deserted because it has no roof.

"I would have liked the Millennium [Village project] to improve the facilities," especially the school, says village elder Martin Onando. But he accepts that the project cannot solve all their problems and recognises that it helps everyone in the community in some way.

### **Battling malaria**

The project has provided mosquito nets to about 5 000 Sauri inhabitants, while a clinic offering free care and medicine has also opened.

Food production has tripled in three years and malaria has dropped by 75% in the past year, says Glenn Denning, director of the Millennium Development Goals centre for East and Southern Africa. "Everybody is able to produce and to eat. Vandalism cases have reduced drastically. Right now, there can be a whole week where no kids miss school because of malaria. I attribute that to the mosquito nets and the drugs."

Now it is up to the Kenyan government to maintain the improvements that have been achieved, he said.

"The government has to make its own contribution. It is a big myth to say that the private sector will do the job. A private sector cannot flourish without good infrastructures and good schools," Denning says. "If, in five years, people are more healthy, the water is clear, you reduce pressure on health services."

But he added that donors will need to continue to give their support on a decreasing basis for many years to come.

About 1 300 people have moved to Sauri in the past two years to join those already benefiting from the village's success, according to Patrick Mutuo, the project's coordinator.

There are now plans to join with neighbouring villages to create a Millennium District, if they can gather extra funding, he says. -- Sapa-AFP