

## **USAID/OFDA Garden Projects Grow a More Secure Future in Bakool, Somalia**

Dry vegetation and sandy patches mark the descent to the Bakool airstrip in central Somalia where drought has left the landscape dotted with abandoned wells and boreholes. Drought conditions have strained existing water and food sources, exacerbating malnutrition in the region, particularly among children, and increasing competition among pastoralists dependent on the limited available water for the survival of their livestock and livelihoods.



*Dhanawe Women's Group members gather to tend to community kitchen garden. Photo courtesy of ADRA.*

USAID/OFDA's support of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Emergency Water and Livelihood Support Project (EWLSP) helps alleviate the strain by increasing potable water resources and introducing supplementary income-generating activities. ADRA's vegetable garden program plays a central role in ADRA's response efforts. The garden program focuses on improving nutrition by supplementing diets with vitamin-rich vegetables grown in community gardens. The program also augments household incomes through the sale of vegetables, helping families afford to pay for basic needs and health services. The project engages local women's groups and benefits more than 34,000 people in Bakool.

Prior to ADRA's intervention, several villagers had planted sorghum as a strategy to diversify income sources. However, sorghum provides limited additional nutritional value to the nomadic diet, which is comprised mainly of milk, pasta, rice, meat, and bread made from sorghum flour. The garden program was designed to fill existing nutritional gaps, in addition to serving as a supplemental source of income for women and households.

In the villages of Faarak, Dhanawe, Garasweyne, and Tawakal, ADRA trained more than 100 women on land preparation, planting, irrigation, seed selection, and soil fertility practices. The program also provides management and marketing training and distributes start-up materials, including seeds and tools. Subsequent gardens at Mor Hagare, El Laheli, Rhabdhure, El Berde, Wasila, Ouliyo, and Huduro villages have followed, benefiting hundreds of additional women in Bakool Region.



*A child is fed on a meal prepared with vegetables from one of the kitchen gardens. Photo courtesy of ADRA.*

vitamin and nutrient-rich vegetables, including spinach, kale, peas, carrots, tomatoes, onions, and peppers, significantly improves the diet and nutrition levels of children and families in the communities.

In addition, surplus vegetables are sold in local markets generating an average of five to seven dollars per week. Although proceeds from the sale of most vegetables are limited to the harvesting period, the money made from sales represents a significant sum for women who have no other source of income and enables them to purchase additional needed household supplies, food stocks, and health care services for their children and families.

Participants are applying entrepreneurial skills acquired through ADRA training to improve their small businesses. In several cases, beneficiaries are now growing vegetables expressly for commercial use. According to a member of the Dhanawe Women's Group, "We now look forward to having our own enterprises and being able to support our families comfortably."

Another member of Dhanawe Women's Group, Amino Muqtar Gudow, age 50, highlights the contribution to household incomes and self-esteem that the project has yielded. "I am very grateful for this project because I now see hope of harvesting my vegetables, selling them in the market, and making enough money. We are now able to make some savings and feed our families better from the produce from the gardens. I never had any source of income before this and I appreciate the work done by the project to help us realize our potential. We sell our produce in the market and this has really improved our self esteem."

The program works with local women's groups to support the cultivation of fast-maturing vegetables on small collective farms that average 50 x 40 meters. The gardens are irrigated year-round with water from wells rehabilitated under EWLSP which enables multiple harvests per year and maximizes crop output and program impact.

Most of the vegetables harvested are used to feed the families of participating mothers, who in addition to land management and crop husbandry, receive training in nutrition and how to prepare newly-introduced varieties of vegetables. Incorporating a range of



*Meals prepared with vegetables from one of the kitchen gardens established under the program. Photo courtesy of ADRA.*