

DOWN to EARTH

Emmanuel International UK News
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The IMARIKA project in Iringa, Tanzania



The project title, 'imarika' is a Swahili word meaning 'to be strengthened' and is also an acronym for 'imarisha mazingira, riziki, na kanisa' - meaning 'to strengthen environments, livelihoods and the church'.

The IMARIKA project establishes village development groups in poor rural areas in Iringa region, Tanzania. Simple things are bringing some amazing blessings. Here are a few highlights from this year.

Village Community Banking (VICOBA)

Every village group where we are operating runs a VICOBA (Village Community Banking) program. Some groups have recently completed the yearly cycle and have started another cycle. When the Lupembelwasenga group completed its first round of savings

they had total shares of TZS84,000,000 (£28,000) for 35 group members. This encouraged many more people to start asking to join the group. Members now include the chairman of the village and village executive officer after seeing how well the group has operated.

In Utengule, Stulida Nyagi was 18 years old when she joined the IMARIKA group. In 2019, and she took a VICOBA loan of £300. She was able to increase stock in her shop, and from that profit she started maize farming. Her field yielded 10 tons



Stulida Nyagi

of maize which sold for £3,000. She has since used some of this money to grow 2 acres of tomatoes which have sold for £1,550, so from a loan of £300 just 4 years ago she has been able to earn £4,550. Stulida is using the money to pay her children's school fees and she continues to improve her business. She is proud to be a member of the Utengule group, as she says it has been a great blessing to her family.

Conservation Agriculture

IMARIKA groups are taught how to look after the soil to retain moisture, fertilize it with manure, compost, and green manures. The Mlowa group has done a great job in this respect, together cultivating 22 acres of groundnuts and harvesting 86 sacks (worth TZS5,590,000 (£1,860)).

Kising'a village group member Vicent Mtisi says organic farming training has helped him to improve his crop yields. Before training he harvested 20 bags of maize, but now using conservation agriculture principles he harvests 40 to



Vicent Mtisi

50 bags of maize. Vicent took a loan of £400 from VICOBA and started a shop business with half of it and invested the rest in his farming. Currently, Vicent has grown papayas which are very productive, some of which he sells and some his family eat. He feels blessed as a result of the training received through the IMARIKA group.



Nelson Nzilano

Nelson Nzilano, a member of the Mlowa group, says he is now motivated to farm better, especially from what he learned from nearby Mafuluto group, who cultivated sesame crops in 2022. He was growing sunflowers and groundnuts but when he visited the Mafuluto group he saw the benefit of growing sesame. He now thinks that the way his sesame has grown so well, he can pay his son's university fee after selling the produce.

Tree planting

As the word IMARIKA means strengthening the environment, the economy, and matters of faith for the community, IMARIKA has a strategy of planting trees in the community to reduce the epidemic of environmental damage. Here in Iringa every year many acres are cut down, so the IMARIKA groups are proud to make some small restoration of the lost forests. In 2024 we have the goal of planting 30,000 trees. At the time of writing, work has already started to plant fruit and other trees in Izazi, Utengule, and Lupembelwasenga groups.

Other groups have prepared their nurseries for tree planting.

Ibumu secondary school IMARIKA project

The IMARIKA project has developed a partnership with the Ibumu secondary school. We have been teaching the students particularly about environmental care, conservation agriculture and tree planting. They now have more than 800 avocado trees planted in the school grounds and some are already bearing fruit. Students have been taught how to graft fruit seedlings and the students demonstrated grafting on the environment day in the district. Did you know that grafting a (small) branch from a mature tree onto new root stock makes for a quicker fruiting tree?



We are also encouraged that the secondary school teachers in Ibumu asked for VICOBA training having seen the benefits it is bringing to village groups, so they have now formed their own group in school.

Emmanuel International IMARIKA team in Iringa

To enable the IMARIKA groups to develop and become strong, project manager Ibrahimu Abdul and project officer Jesca Mgingba meet with the groups weekly to start with, training them in how to run effective VICOBA meetings. Then, as each group moves into entrepreneurial and other

activities, they can visit less frequently and conduct appropriate training, and continue to encourage and advise each group. It is hard work and means Ibrahimu and Jesca have to do a lot of travelling each week, but seeing the way the IMARIKA groups bless the local villagers is a great motivator for them. We are encouraged that nowadays IMARIKA has been the catalyst for the development of faith change in society. Our groups are formed socially without religious discrimination, so we have Muslims, Christians and others. With this combination, God has blessed the work, and we teach about God from the bible. A big IMARIKA groups networking meeting in August involved teaching of entrepreneurship, the teaching of psychology, and the word of God. In these teachings, Muslims and Christians collaborate to learn and there are good discussions of spiritual teachings.

*Article by Jesca Mgingba
Photos by Ibrahimu Abdul*

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