

# Wamama Pamoja: Empowering women through agriculture and income generation to enhance household nutrition in Busia, Western Kenya

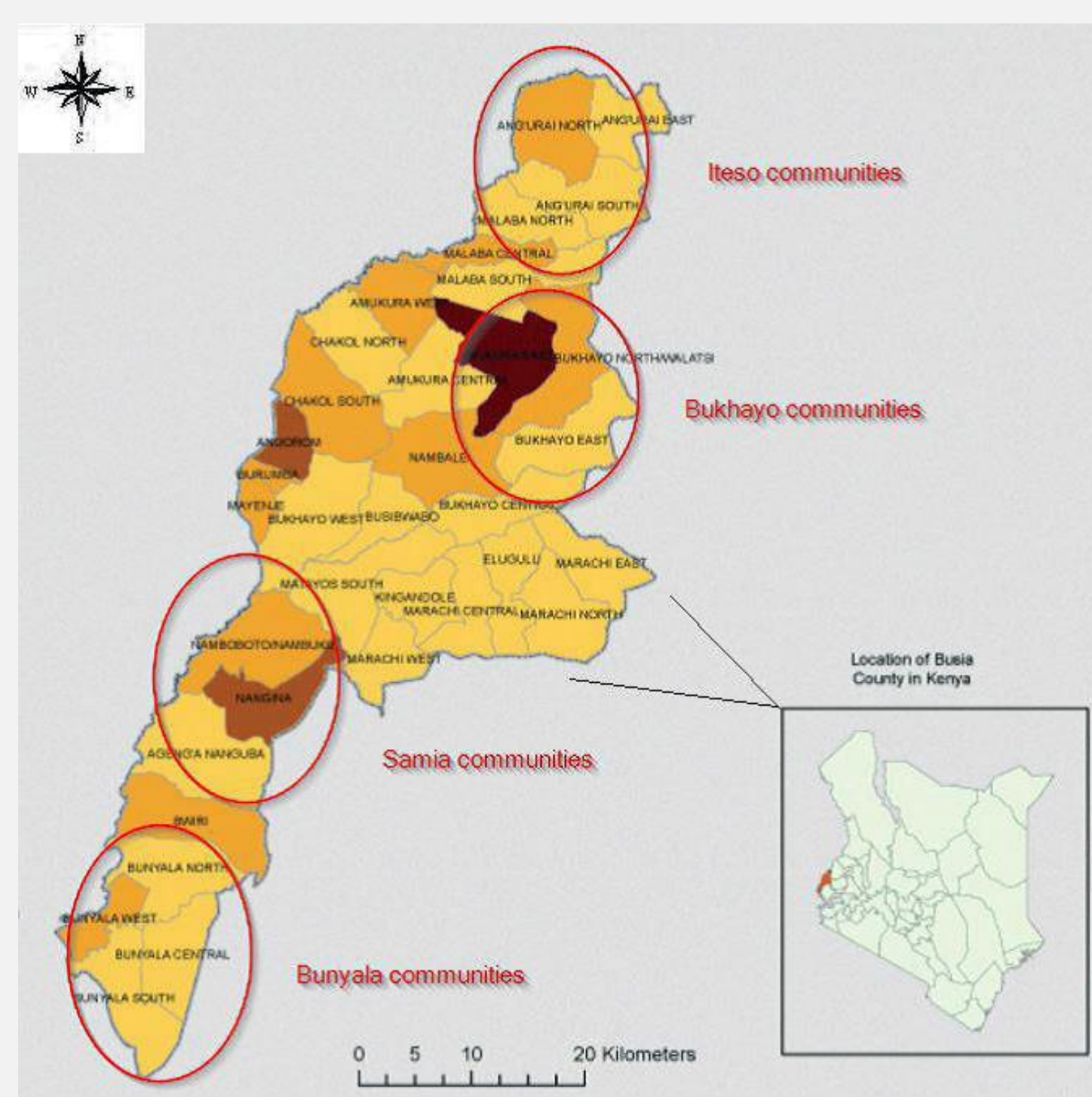
Alessandra Grasso<sup>a</sup>, Judith A. O. Owiti, Ann Y. McDermott<sup>a</sup>, Victor Wasike<sup>b</sup>, Teresa Borelli<sup>c</sup>, Hannah Gentle<sup>c</sup>, Peter Amila, Danny Hunter<sup>c</sup>

## Introduction

Women living in resource-poor settings in Kenya are at high risk of malnutrition because the diets they consume lack diversity despite Western Kenya being rich in agricultural biodiversity. On average, women consume only four out of the ten recommended food groups, while small children consume three out of seven. Stunting is a serious problem – 28% of children are affected. Different forms of malnutrition also exist in the caregivers – 8% are underweight while 18% are overweight with 7% classed as obese.

*Wamama Pamoja* (Mothers Together) Municipality (WPM) Women's Group is a group of marginalized women - living with HIV/AIDS, handicapped, widowed or orphaned- in Busia County, Kenya working towards improving household nutrition by:

- integrating biodiversity for food and nutrition into household gardens for dietary diversity
- producing and selling homemade nutrition-rich sesame seed and peanut butter mixture for income generation
- building entrepreneurial capacity of fellow women around Busia County.



Currently, Bioversity International is implementing the Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition (BFN) Project in four districts in Busia County, Kenya



## Aim of Approach

1. To build the capacity of women and self-help groups to practice home gardening technologies, such as mandala and keyhole gardens (permaculture circular, raised garden beds), and sustainably grow and utilize an array of nutritious local foods.
2. To foster an enabling market environment to better promote local nutritious crops and link smallholders to markets.
3. To influence current government sector policies to integrate nutrition-sensitive objectives into their programmes, thus enabling smallholder farmers and vulnerable individuals, such as WPM, to gain further support for their home grown products, advance living standards, and improve community health.



## Project Implementation/Intervention Design

WPM has established a demonstration plot where extension workers from the Ministry of Agriculture and research institutions come to teach the women different methods of growing food crops in a healthy and sustainable way. In addition to food crops, WPM also raise rabbits, dairy cows and indigenous chicken for a varied diet and as a source of income.

WPM received financial and technical support from *Women and Girls Empowerment*, a Dutch non-governmental organization, to buy raw groundnut (peanuts) and simsim (sesame seeds) and start the production of their very own brand of sesame seed-peanut butter mixture.



## Progress Outcomes

Through micro-finance schemes, financial and technical support from local government and non-governmental organizations, *Wamama Pamoja* women have been able to introduce more variety to home gardens and purchase and process peanut and sesame seed into a butter mixture.

Bioversity International is working with entrepreneurial farmers in Busia County to enhance the enabling environment to better promote local nutritious crops and link smallholders to markets. With support from the Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition (BFN) Project, Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO), the Departments of Agriculture, Health and Education and Sustainable Income Generating Investment (SINGI) community-based organization, progress is being made in promoting local nutrition-sensitive policies that would enable smallholder farmers and vulnerable individuals, such as WPM Women Group, to further develop their sesame seed and peanut butter initiative.

BFN pilot studies are underway to build smallholder farmers' capacity in the sustainable production of nutrient-rich crops and strengthen their capacity to respond to market demands for these crops from institutional markets, such as local schools and clinics.

## Constraints & Challenges

Current challenges that prevent market penetration for WPM Peanut Butter Mixture are: i) inadequate technical and human capacity; ii) limited funds and iii) high quality and food safety standards that need to be met. Building capacity, fostering demand for nutritious local foods and integrating nutrition-sensitive objectives in current government sector policies would also enhance the capacity of smallholder farmers and vulnerable individuals, such as WPM Women's Group, to better respond to market demands.

## Implications for East Africa

*"When women are empowered and can claim their rights and access to land, leadership, opportunities and choices economies grow, food security is enhanced and prospects are improved for current and future generations"*.  
Michelle Bachelet - Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women<sup>1</sup>

- Research shows that 70% of agricultural work on small scale farms is done by women, yet their productivity is stifled due to inequitable access to productive resources and services as compared to men.<sup>2</sup>
- Building the capacity of women to produce a variety of nutrient-rich foods utilizing advanced methods would increase household and community food and nutrition security.



***WPM Peanut Butter Mixture is rich in proteins, healthy fats, minerals and vitamins, and could do wonders for school-aged children.***

## References

1. <http://www.wfo-oma.com/women-in-agriculture/articles/the-role-of-rural-women-in-agriculture.html>
2. <http://leisafrica.org/call-for-articles/women-and-agro-ecology-the-strongest-link/>

## Author affiliations

- a Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health  
b Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organization  
c Bioversity International

Contact Information:  
Alessandra Grasso  
acgrasso28@gmail.com

[www.b4fn.org](http://www.b4fn.org)

[www.bioversityinternational.org](http://www.bioversityinternational.org)