

## **Saving Lake Naivasha – Hellen’s Story**

Lake Naivasha is a beautiful lake in the Rift Valley of Kenya. Unfortunately, for many years Naivasha has been shrinking, and its waters have become more polluted.

Hellen Njeri Kagotho is one Kenyan farmer who is working to turn things around for Naivasha, while at the same time building a better life for her family.

Hellen is a single mother of seven and is the head of her household. She grows potatoes and raises cows for milk on her farm. Her land lies along the Malewa River, the main river that feeds Lake Naivasha.

In 2008, Hellen learned about a new program being started in her area – Payment for Environmental Services (PES). The program, a partnership between CARE International and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), was teaching farmers like her how to use sustainable farming practices that would both improve their crop yields and reduce the environmental impact that agriculture has on the waters flowing past their farms into Lake Naivasha. The program also gives financial incentives to farmers for using these practices.

Hellen learned to plant Napier grass strips along contours marked for her by CARE staff to stop soil erosion. She uses the grass to feed her cows. She learned to plough along the contour lines instead of ploughing across them which leads to loss of the fertile top soil.

“I also planted trees for fodder and fruits. The fodder trees have provided feed for my cows and in future I will harvest valued timber from the others,” says Hellen.

The change in farming methods also brought a physical benefit. “I no longer experience back pains which used to come about by digging downwards. I now plough horizontally. I advise my colleagues in this area to do the same if they want to avoid physical damage to their backs which is a common phenomena in this area.”

Hellen’s life has changed: she is one of the few participating women farmers and her changed farm landscape has earned her great recognition in the village while the livelihood status of her family of eight has improved as a result of enhanced farm productivity.

“I am able to make enough money for my family and myself through selling milk and potatoes whose production has climbed steeply.”

Meanwhile, down the river, Lake Naivasha is benefitting from cleaner water, thanks to Hellen and her fellow farmers.