



iShamba, CIAT, and Murang'a County Partner to Support Farmers with Timely Agricultural Solutions

Agriculture is the backbone of Kenya's economy, with over 75% of the population involved in farming, many of whom are small-scale farmers. Yet, despite their vital role, these farmers face significant challenges in accessing the right information, resources, and support to optimize their yields and improve resilience. One of the key gaps lies in the ratio of extension officers to farmers, with estimates showing only one extension officer for every 1,500 farmers. This leaves many farmers struggling to access timely advice on weather, crop & livestock management, and market information which are all essential.

Muranga county, exemplifies these challenges. Agriculture accounts for about 60% of the county's economic activity, with more than 70 % of residents employed, either directly or indirectly, by the sector. The main farming systems include cash crop farming, mixed subsistence farming, livestock keeping, and fish farming, ranging from large-to-small-scale operations. However, several challenges limit agricultural productivity in Murang'a, including climate change impacts, high input costs, pest and diseases, post-harvest losses, poor road infrastructure, and shrinking land availability. To address these issues, there is a pressing need to support farmers by improving the dissemination of agricultural advisories in a timely and effective manner, helping them boost productivity and resilience.

These systems range from large- to small-scale. The county faces several challenges that limit its agricultural productivity. These challenges include climate change impacts, high prices, pests and diseases, post-production losses, poor road networks, and the decreasing availability of land. With these challenges, there is need for support assisting the farmers improve productivity through effective and timely dissemination of agricultural advisories.

In Murang'a County, under the support of the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, a new partnership between iShamba and the county government through the leadership of Dr. Kiringai Kamau, CECM for Devolution and External Linkages, is stepping up to bridge this gap.

Together, we are launching a localized agricultural advisory service that brings timely, relevant, and accurate information directly to farmers via SMS and a newly established call center at Murang'a University of Technology by February 2025. This initiative will not only empower farmers with critical knowledge but also involve university students, creating a unique learning opportunity to interact with farmers as part of their curriculum.

“This partnership is a testament to our commitment to fostering collaboration that benefits both our farmers and our youth. By empowering our farmers with the information they need to thrive, we can enhance food security and improve livelihoods in Murang'a County.”

— Dr. Kiringai Kamau, CECM Devolution and External Linkages

Access to Critical Agricultural Information

In a world where climate change is becoming increasingly unpredictable, access to accurate weather and agro-advisories is crucial than ever. Yet, most small-scale farmers in Kenya lack the necessary tools to respond effectively to these changes. Many are still dependent on traditional knowledge, which cannot always keep up with erratic weather patterns, pest and disease attacks, or fluctuating market prices.

- Only 30% of Kenyan farmers have access to agricultural extension services. (World bank report on agricultural productivity in Kenya.)
- Over 70% of farmers in rural areas lack access to up-to-date weather forecasts and advice on how to adjust farming practices accordingly. (World Economic Forum and IFAD)
- According to studies, farmers who receive regular weather and agronomic advisories through platforms like iShamba experience a 20-30% improvement in yields.

The need for more robust, scalable solutions is clear, and technology is the key to making this happen.

How iShamba is Making a Difference

Through this partnership, iShamba offers a cutting-edge mobile platform that provides Murang'a county farmers with essential information at the click of a button. Farmers can now receive localized timely advice on:

- Best farming practices for crops like Banana, Avocado, Mango, Indigenous Chicken & Dairy.

- Weather updates, empowering them to make informed decisions on planting, field management, and harvesting.
- Market prices on request, ensuring they can sell their produce at ideal times.
- The call center will further provide farmers with real-time responses to their questions.

The call center will also provide students with the opportunity to gain firsthand experience in agricultural advisory services.

iShamba's Proven Track Record

iShamba has reached over 530,000 farmers across Kenya, delivering critical information to improve farming practices. In collaboration with Shamba Shape Up, Kenya's leading agricultural TV show, iShamba has been instrumental in providing farmers with essential weather updates. Weather, often overlooked, plays a crucial role in farming success. Farmers who receive regular SMS weather updates from iShamba can better plan their activities, reducing losses and increasing productivity. An impact assessment by 6 Decibels found that farmers using iShamba's advisory services saw a 67% improvement in farm productivity and a 65% improvement in quality of life. iShamba continues to enhance its services to further support farmers across the country.

In collaboration with Shamba Shape Up, Kenya's leading agricultural TV show, we have been instrumental in delivering vital weather information to farmers across the country. Weather is often overlooked but remains one of the most significant determinants of farming success. Farmers who receive regular weather updates via iShamba SMS can better plan their agricultural activities, reducing losses and improving output.

Example SMS sent to farmers:

"We predict rain (12mm) in Kanyenyaini from now to 22 Aug. Remove any weeds & add manure to your fruit trees."

Collaborating for a Stronger Agricultural Future

While we have made significant strides, there is still much more that needs to be done. We envision a future where every small-scale farmer in Kenya has access to timely, accurate agricultural information, no matter where they are located. To make this vision a reality, collaboration with the government and other stakeholders is crucial. We encourage county governments across Kenya to follow in Murang'a's footsteps by localizing agricultural services and establishing call centers to support farmers.

The recommendations for the government are clear:

1. Expand extension services by integrating technology platforms like iShamba into every county to bridge the information gap.
2. Prioritize weather and agricultural advisory services, which are key to helping farmers make data-driven decisions.
3. Invest in agricultural education, allowing students to engage directly with farmers, creating a win-win for both learners and the agricultural sector.

This initiative is just the beginning of what we believe can be a transformative journey for Kenyan agriculture. By working together, we can build a future where relevant, timely, and accurate information is within every farmer's reach.

Stay connected with us at [iShamba's website](#) for updates on our progress and learn more about how we are shaping the future of farming in Kenya.