

# COOKING SMARTER, FARMING BETTER

## How clean cooking and water conservation transformed Sharon's life.

In the gently dipping and rising landscape of Cherus, Uasin Gishu County, Sharon's routine had become difficult by the day. The first sound in her home every morning was the crackle of firewood, followed by low coughs as smoke from her traditional three stone jiko filled her small kitchen.

For years, this had become her normal. Her kitchen, dimly lit and its walls coated in soot demanded hours of her day and armfuls of firewood she had to gather from Cengalo forest, a considerable distance from her home. To prepare a day's meal, Sharon would burn nearly ten pieces of firewood, a burden she bore with the limited resources.

Outside her kitchen, a different kind of struggle awaited. Her land, was at the mercy of unpredictable rainfall. Water scarcity especially during the dry spells made it nearly impossible to grow more than maize, a crop that often succumbed to the harsh sun as well. When the maize failed, there was little harvest and with little harvest, little income and a threat to their food security. Despite the challenges, Sharon did not waver, she knew something had to change.

Her turning point came in May 2024 though the Eldoret-Iten Water Fund (EIWF) who came in with practical solutions. Through their support, she excavated a 50,000L capacity water pan on her farm to collect surface runoff and harvest rainwater. This simple but powerful structure turned water scarcity into water security. No longer relying on rain alone, Sharon made the bold decision to diversify the crops on her farm.



In picture:  
Sharon next to her cook stove

Now, beans, potatoes, cabbages and arrowroots line row after row on her farm alongside her maize. A land that barely held on had been leased a new life. Encouraged by this progress and inspired by the traditional knowledge of her community, the Ogiek people, Sharon added a beehive near the water pan, making use of the vibrant, blooming environment.

To make the most of her revived land, Sharon received further support from the EIWF in the form of nature-based solutions. She was supplied with Super Napier grass, *Grevillea* trees and avocado seedlings. She planted the *Grevillea* around her farm to provide shade and mulch and intercropped the avocado with her crops. The Super Napier, fast growing and protein rich fodder was used to stabilize her grass strips.

*“We use the Super Napier to feed our cows and to prevent soil from being washed down into the water pan when it rains”* explains Sharon’s husband, Paul Sang.



With her land thriving and confidence restored, Sharon’s transformation shifted to her kitchen. Through continued support from the EIWF, she was provided with training and materials for the construction of an Improved Cook Stove (ICS), a more energy efficient and sustainable jiko.

Unlike the traditional jiko, Sharon now uses only three pieces of firewood each day. Her kitchen is smoke free and her meals come together in minutes. *“The jiko saves me time when cooking and I’m not worried about my children being in the kitchen because the fire is contained”* Sharon says with a smile.

What started as a simple shift in her farm and kitchen has become a sustainable movement, one that is helping women in her community to cook smarter, conserve the forest and create new income opportunities!

