



Food Justice Project

Mapping Peasant Farmers Organizations And Needs



Itangine, Makueni

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Table of Contents

Item	Page No.
Abbreviations	3
Background	4
Issues affecting peasant farmers	4-9
Emerging questions	10
What are the farmers' needs and demands	11-12
Farm visit pictorials	13-14
Conclusions	15

Abbreviations

SACCO: Savings and Credit Cooperative

Background

Makueni County is located in the Eastern part of Kenya. It has a population of 884,527 people. The county lies 188kms from Nairobi city.

The mapping of farmers' organizations and needs was hosted by a mixture of **Mamamwiki** Links Society and other community members from Itangine ward in Makueni.

Why Fahamu, Why Peasant Farmers?

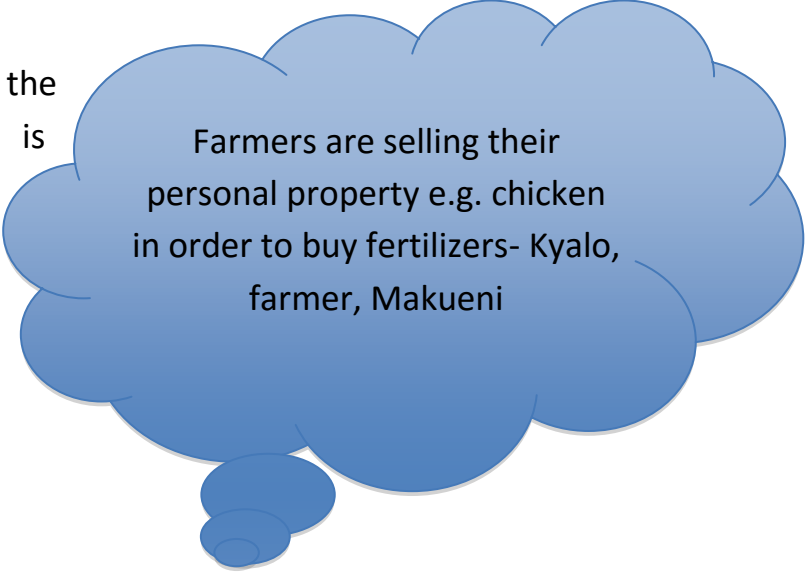
The aim of Fahamu's involvement in working with peasant farmers was explained as to build solidarity with the farmers going through various oppressions while at the same time interrogating the sources of these oppressions in a bid to strategize on ways to collectively challenge these oppressive forces and demand meaningful change in communities.

Recognition of Fahamu's work in West Africa (We Are the Solution) and the related success with rural women was cited as another reason for working with peasant farming community.

Issues affecting peasant farmers in Makueni

Asked what issues affect them, the farmers shared the following:

- Lack of power to control prices of their produce
- Rising costs of seeds
- Buying expired seeds from the local agrovet and this is related to lack of a monitoring system to ensure availability and stocking of quality seeds
- High costs of fertilizers



Farmers are selling their personal property e.g. chicken in order to buy fertilizers- Kyalo, farmer, Makueni



Deliberations on issues affecting farmers

- Lack of water in the region
- The County Government setting misplaced priorities in relation to agriculture
- Absence of up-to date information on agriculture
- Over-emphasis on agro-chemicals

Some priorities in the ministry of Agriculture are misplaced e.g.

The participants shared that the county government has been undertaking an “ Eat Fish Campaign” aimed at changing the community’s to start fish production through developing ponds, this is at the expense of other priority issues which affect the farmers such as access to water and seeds.

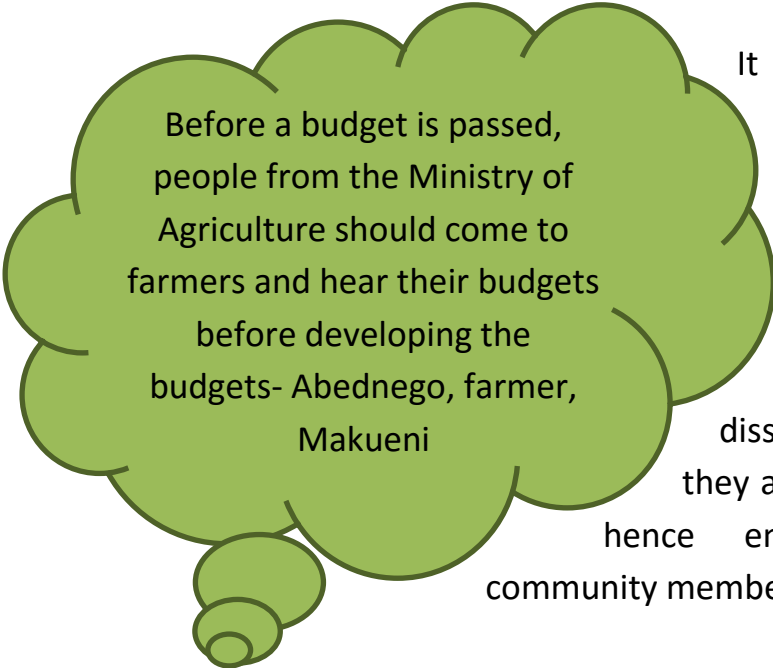
It was also shared that a few people were sensitized on terracing i.e. five (5) people per ward and no monitoring was done after the sensitization hence these community members ended up implementing the wrong things.

On access to water, the community members shared that the deputy governor asked the community members to build their own ponds in order to retain water within the homesteads had put a proposal in place but to date nothing has been done about it.

It was also shared that in many cases voices of peasant farmers are never heard and the priorities of farmers not taken into consideration and that those whose views are heard are well off farmers.

It was further shared that farmers are being exploited through sale of expired seeds which are packed and sold to the farmers at high prices.


Inability to access updated agricultural information was cited to be as a result of the distance from the country headquarters which ranges from between Kshs 200 -250, one way, thus many small holder farmers get excluded from agricultural decision making processes due to lack of information and the distance of their homes.



Before a budget is passed, people from the Ministry of Agriculture should come to farmers and hear their budgets before developing the budgets- Abednego, farmer, Makueni

It was shared that despite devolution, the structure is yet to be felt in the ward level and that the county government has refused to employ village elders who would be key in information dissemination on agriculture as they are located within the villages hence enabling reach as many community members as possible.

Furthermore, the community shared that they only access information during field days and the information they get is not from government, but from companies selling agro-chemicals, the farmers further remarked that the county had no control over the production of agro-chemicals.

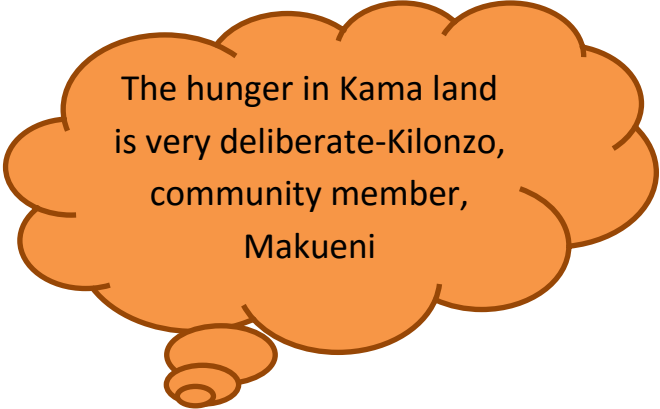


The government has been pushing for the establishment of farmers' cooperatives, but this is just a ploy for the government officers to appear to be working. Once these cooperatives are registered, there is not continuity-Kaleli, member Mamamwiki Links Society, Makueni

On cooperatives, it was shared that many farmers join cooperatives assuming that they will get ready markets for their produce, while in reality, they find themselves having to make contributions and they give up.

Moreover, it was mentioned that many people in Makueni do not understand what cooperatives are, although there has been attempts to have a fruit processing cooperative at Kalama which is deemed theoretical and there lacks adequate information about it.

It was also shared that introduction of cooperatives to smallholder farmers should be a gradual process e.g. from table banking to husker, to Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO) and then to a micro finance bank.



The hunger in Kama land is very deliberate-Kilonzo, community member, Makueni



Horticulture production in Makueni

On pesticides, it was observed that there have been incidences where counterfeit products have been sold to the farmers eg *dudu*¹ dust. Moreover, the farmers gave an example of the fruit fly which is causing havoc to their tomatoes and cabbages but due to high cost of the fruit fly trapper can (sold Kshs 450 sold by USAID) , many farmers cannot afford to buy the can then buy the pesticide at the same time.

On being cushioned from natural disasters by the county government, the farmers remarked that there is no compensation during disasters and secondly, although they have been informed about elnino, there is no effective disaster preparedness mechanisms that have been put in place that will address the plight of peasant farmers.

The farmers shared that they were unaware of various pieces of legislations eg the Crops Act 2013 and needed more information on the same. This was cited as a big challenge in that the area did not have

¹ Dudu is a Swahili term for insects

adequate agricultural extension services, while at the same time , these legislations would have negative impacts on small holder farmers.

As part of self sustainance , the farmers shared their desire to have a community based agrovets stocked with quality seeds and where they would also access advise on farming.

Emerging Questions

i) Have they ever got relief inputs?

The community got relief inputs in form of seeds, however, when they grew this seeds on their land, the seeds did not thrive. The farmers cite that they were bought for what the county government wanted not what the farmers wanted.

ii). Where do they get their seeds from?

From the local agrovets. Most of the seeds are from companies in the USA, which have local distributors e.g., Pioneer

iii). What challenges do they face with regards to seeds?

Some of the seeds bought from the agrovets end up wilting.



Discussion on land preparation processes

iv) Does the community have its seed bank system?

An organized seed banking system does not exist but households keep their indigenous seeds in granaries, which they share, and or exchange with each other. But the indigenous seeds are gradually getting extinct and many people now buy seeds from the agrovets.

v). What would be the best option to reach farmers with information at the grassroots?

Use of media, especially community radios will help farmer's access information because they will listen within their own homesteads.

What are the smallholder farmer's needs?

There should be an agreement between farmers and agrovets that if seeds bought fail, the agrovets can be sued- Kilonzo, farmer, Makueni

To have an assurance in terms of seeds (that the seeds will thrive when planted)

- Knowledge on how to harvest water
- To be able to access fishing ponds plastics at subsidized prices
- Access to updated information on agriculture
- Links to enable them market their produce

• “ If I don't have food, how will ICT and tourism help me” –John Singa, farmer, Makueni

- Farmers to get fishing ponds plastics at subsidized prices
- An information depository hub for sharing on past learning on issues affecting farmers
- Linkages to cooperatives and information on how cooperatives work
- Access to information amongst farmers i.e. agricultural education
- To start a farmers cooperative at the grassroots to enable collective selling
- Subsidies for farm inputs

There is no *posho* mill in Makueni, the only one is in Kitui. The county uses unga from other regions. Maize is bought from Makueni at Kshs 40 and brought backpacked at Kshs 120

- Seek partners who support

farmers for financial support and farm inputs

- Value addition to farm produce e.g. maize milling in bulk then selling to the final consumers

Peasant Farmer's demands

- Subsidies on agricultural inputs e.g. fertilizers, land preparation (tractors)
- Knowledge building on how cooperatives work including how to run them at the grassroots
- Price controls /price differentials for various grades of mangoes
- The county government to come closer to the farmers (consultation) in terms of prioritization of issues and consultations on issues of agriculture in the county

As farmers, we can store our own seeds and start our own companies selling indigenous seeds .We sell seeds at Kshs 20 at Kilala market but when these seeds get packed, they are sold to us at Kshs 300- Abednego, Farmer, Makueni

Farm visit pictorials



Cattle rearing



Horticultural production



Goat rearing

What Fahamu can do in support of the farmers?

- Lobby for subsidies on farm inputs for farmers
- Lobby for price standardization for mangoes at the County level
- Identification of other like-minded organizations to provide support in terms of farm inputs

Conclusions

It can be concluded that the visit was a good opportunity for understanding how farmers in Makueni engage in farming practices, challenges they face and how they have attempted to address some of their challenges, how they engage in agricultural processes at county level and what gaps exist in this engagements. The visit further provided space for analysis of what key demands the farmers had in a bid to improve peasant farming in their locality.