



Food Justice Project

Mapping Farmers' Needs and Organisations



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Abbreviations

GPA: Growth Partners Africa

AFC: Agricultural Finance Corporation

INOGOF: Innovative Group of Organic Farmers

COFCO: Central Organic Farmers and Consumers Organisation

CSB: Community Seed Bank

WAS: We Are the Solution

SACDEP: Sustainable Agriculture Community Development Programmes

Background

Fahamu, in collaboration with Growth Partners Africa (GPA), organised a one-day visit to Gatundu North Constituency to identify farmers' organisations and their needs. Gatundu North lies within Kiambu County and has four wards: Chania, Githobokoni, Gituamba and Mang'u. The main economic activity in the area is agriculture, comprising of tea and coffee farming, dairy cattle rearing, poultry keeping and horticulture. Gatundu North is located 51 km from Nairobi city.

The exercise brought together 32 participants (18 females and 14 males). The represented farming groups were Kwaheri, Gituamba B, Innovative Group of Organic Farmers (INOGOF), Mwea DK, Gatuanyaga, Kawira, Magumu and Gatukanyu.

The mapping exercise undertaken as part of our Food Justice Project, which aimed to identify farmer organisations, explores strategies farmers use to build solidarity within and without agro communities to shape food production systems.

The initiative further aims at:

- providing spaces for communities to interrogate systems that continue to impoverish their lives;
- enabling community advocates to improve the conditions of their food;
- enhancing collaboration amongst stakeholders for cross learning and organising aimed at improving the systems and structures that relate to food production;
- building alliances among grassroots communities for continued discussions about food and other injustices;
- enabling communities to dismantle oppressive structures and effectively counter food-oppressive regimes and other related social injustices; and
- establishing sustainable, functional community-based learning centres within communities.

Emerging Issues in Farming

During the session, the farmers discussed various emerging issues with farming practices. The farmers shared the key principles they would use based on good agricultural practices involving soil, composting and seeds.

The principles were:

- Bio-intensive agriculture
- Permaculture
- Farming God's Way
- Agro-ecology

The farmers shared that they get their seeds from Agro-vets and that the seeds come from corporates like Syngenta and Monsanto. The farmers remarked that the price of seeds was going up gradually over the years, e.g. in 2012 1 kg of maize was sold at Kshs 300 compared to Kshs 450 in 2015.

It was also noted that small-scale farmers had small portions of land to till and family members provided the majority of labour. In addition, the farmers remarked that purchasing seeds from the Kenya Seed Company was cheaper than buying from Syngenta and Monsanto.

It was deliberated that the new push for biotechnology in Kenya would result in biologically engineered food and Agro-vets have started registering people who buy their produce. It was mentioned that under the new law farmers would be compelled to give their contact details, to be shared with crop investors, so that they can be tracked easily.

Bio Intensive Agriculture vs. Push for Fertilizers

It was observed that the newly introduced fertilizer laws encouraged more usage of fertilizers. Comparatively, it was noted that 10 years ago, each farmer was using 10 kg of fertilizer per acre compared to the 30 kg of fertilizer they use today.

In Tanzania and Uganda, it was noted that farmers still use 9 kg of fertilizer per acre and their

'Why is the vice president of Kenya telling farmers to use more fertilizer instead of water and mulch? People end up going to hospitals because they are consuming what they do not know.'

Bronze Irene, organic farming student from Uganda

yields are more compared to Kenya. As a result, it was concluded that fertilizers do not solve the problem of low crop yields. In addition, it was observed that government projects on food security such as *Njaa¹ Marufuku* encouraged farmers to buy more fertilizers.

Permaculture

Permaculture is the process of assessing the natural state of an environment, in terms of weed growth, soil type, rainfall patterns, etc., to determine what crops can be sustainably produced. Essentially, the principle adopted in permaculture is growing what nature tells the farmer to grow.

Farming God's Way

This farming method was explained as farming using Godly principles, dating back to the Garden of Eden, where man co-existed with nature and land was covered with vegetation. The focus of this type of farming is mulching in order to retain moisture in the crops. This method of farming was said to be practiced in Njambini and Kijabe and is an organic form of farming.

Agro-ecology

Agro-ecology was described as combining scientific inquiry with place-based knowledge and experimentation. The emphasis of agro-ecology was noted to highlight the innovations in technology that are data intensive, low cost, ecologically sound and practical.

The Falsehoods of Climate-Smart Agriculture

It was deliberated that Climate-Smart Agriculture is an inactive being imposed on farmers and was being falsely touted as a solution to food insecurity without adequate information about its effects on crop production elements, soil fertility, cost implications and over reliance on chemicals.

It was discussed that Climate-Smart Agriculture has been associated with 'helping farmers':

- become professional growers;
- broaden science-based knowledge;
- facilitate access to quality inputs;
- link smallholders to markets in profitable ways; and
- add value to rural communities and sustainably improve food security.

¹ *Njaa Marufuku* refers to freedom from hunger; it's an initiative proposed by the Kenyan government through

It was observed that the argument on the benefits of Climate-Smart Agriculture is of no relevance to peasant farmers as it puts emphasis on the purchase of certified seeds, results in the emergence of institutions that exploit farmers such as Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC) and criminalises ownership and multiplication of indigenous seeds through seed bank systems.

What Do Peasant Farmers Want?

Informed by the discussion, the farmers shared what they wanted:

- Repeal of laws that criminalise small-scale farmers.
- Social mobilization of small-scale farmers and strengthening existing collectives e.g. COFCO.
- Amplify farmers' voices on issues that affect them.

'As communities, the deficit that we face is a lack of updated information; if we lack information, we will remain at the same level.'

Ruchu, Kwaheri Small-Scale Farmers Association

'As farmers, we need to come together and get organised. The other challenge affecting farmers is the feeling of inferiority, this makes their voices muted.'

Peter Kihenjo, small-scale producer, Gatundu

Organising and Peasant Farming

A discussion ensued on seeking solutions to address what affects farmers. Citing their work at both an individual level and as a group, the participants shared that agriculture is a political issue, and if they are to meet the political class to discuss their issues and enable change, they have to be organised. The farmers also noted that through their umbrella network, Central Organic Farmers and Consumers Organisation (COFCO), which has a membership of 5000 farmers across the nation, they must have a strategic agenda outlined in order for their voices to be heard.

Furthermore, between January and August 2015, there have been clarion calls for Climate-Smart Agriculture in which traditional agricultural systems are bound to undergo a lot of changes. This is a key element as to why the farmers need to organise to counter the various forces keen on criminalising peasant agriculture.

'Mbegu zetu haki zetu, mbegu zetu urithi wetu.'

Martha Kihara, Innovative Group of Organic Farmers

Lastly, the farmers were of the opinion that they should start thinking about establishing Community Seed Bank (CSB) systems and structures that are beneficial for seed fairs and advocacy. During such advocacy events, it was mentioned that the focus should be on seeds as rights (*Mbegu zetu haki zetu*²) and seeds as legacies (*Mbegu zetu urithi wetu*³).

Fahamu and Food Justice Struggles Amongst Peasant Farmers

It was shared that Fahamu recognises the rights of farmers and identifies and analyses who the oppressors of farmers are through community discussions. These oppressors include trade, economic systems and markets. It was further mentioned that farmers used to grow crops through cooperatives but this resulted in low earnings. Essentially, Fahamu recognises that organising farmers is not only a way to form an alliance, but also to identify who are the allies and who are the opponents.

The corporate capture of seeds highlighted that six companies who include Du Pont, Syngenta and Monsanto are controlling seeds in the whole African continent. The farmers' significant rights were then deliberated and include right to land and right to seeds.

Fahamu's We Are The Solution (WAS) project in West Africa was defined as organising to connect rural women farmers during international forums within the African Union (AU) on matters such as seed laws. It was further shared that in West Africa, as a result of the WAS initiative, many countries are changing their agricultural laws.

² *Mbegu zetu haki zetu* means our seeds, our rights.

³ *Mbegu zetu urithi wetu* means our seeds, our inheritance.

Farmers discussed the need to influence agro-ecology in Kenya, especially at county level. In addition, it was mentioned that representation of farmers should include people who are aware of farmers' needs and those who can relate to their issues. The focus on sharing intergenerational information was emphasised as well as noting that diversity is crucial and should be used in sharing emerging issues that affect small-scale farmers.

'The solution to the farmers' challenges should be more home grown.'

Dr Daniel Maingi, Growth Partners Africa

Site Visit One: Kwaheri Small-Scale Farmers Association

Kwaheri Small-Scale Farmers Association is a member of the Central Organic Farmers and Consumers Organisation (COFCO), an umbrella network bringing together 5000 farmers across Kenya. The members of Kwaheri Small-Scale Farmers Association are all organic farmers who focus on food and food rights.

It was shared that all the group members undertake collective farming as a family, with family members contributing through labour. The land sizes are small, ranging from 0.5 to 2 acres per farmer, resulting in small-scale produce. On the marketing of produce, it was shared that the main objective is production for own consumption (subsistence farming), and any surplus is sold at the local market.

Kwaheri Small-Scale Farmers Association was established as a result of ineffective farming skills amongst farmers and a lack of skills in harvesting water. The group's initial activity was to build, purchase and construct water tanks for members to harvest rainwater; their initial farming activity was kitchen gardening. Currently the group has 30 members, each owning their own water tank.

It was further shared that the group has enhanced its knowledge and skills through training courses organised by the Sustainable Agriculture Community Development Programmes (SACDEP) organisation and that their main aim was to shift from conventional farming to organic farming.

Vegetable Growing in Gatundu North-Kiambu: Emerging Questions

a). What are the benefits of organic farming?

Organic farming uses less chemicals, makes use of seed banks (resulting in a higher availability of seeds), produces healthy crops and is cheaper for the farmer as only mulch, manure and water are used.

b). What challenges do organic farmers face?

The greatest problem is the market; many consumers, even restaurants, prefer farm produce that has been grown using chemicals because they are bigger in size. Another challenge they face is certification: each farmer has to pay Kshs 16,000 a year to get a certificate; this is very expensive for farmers.

c). How do they control pests?

They use plants to control pests. These plants are cut and stored in water for duration of time before the water is mixed with clean water and sprayed. This does not kill pests but repels them to other places. In organic farming, the principle is environmental friendliness, hence farmers refrain from killing pests.

Site Visit Two: Dairy Farming and Crop Production

In Mwea DK, we visited a smallholder farmer who, in addition to growing crops, also keeps dairy livestock. The farmer shared that they grow their crops by the riverbank, which helps their produce to thrive the whole year, round. The farmer also mentioned that they produce organic crops; unfortunately, there is no market for their organic food crops due to the lack of information amongst consumers on the benefits of organic food and their preference for chemically produced crops.

Small-scale dairy farming



Intercropping Amongst Peasant Farmers

On cattle rearing, it was shared that due to limited land, a paddocking system is encouraged with pasture being given to the animals within their designated place.



Site Visit Three: Organic Farming

The farmer collaborates with Growth Partners Africa, in the farming method adopted, which means the production depends entirely on mulch and water. The crops are not sprayed using any type of chemical and the system of land tilling was shared as double digging. It was observed that this system has been beneficial to crop growth and that adequate availability of water also enables the crops to thrive.

Chemical-free Sukuma wiki⁴



⁴ *Sukuma wiki* is the Swahili word for colewort, similar to kale.

Sharing the process for organic production of lettuce



Organic farming in Gatundu North



Identified Farmers Needs

Informed by the field visits, the following needs were identified:

- Lack of markets.
- Consumer preference for chemically produced products.
- Lack of adequate information amongst the farmers on emerging issues that relate to smallholder agriculture (e.g. seed laws).
- Lack of consumer information on dangers of chemically grown farm produce.
- The need to get organised to strengthen farmers' voices.

Conclusions

Based on the interactive session with smallholder farmers, it can be concluded that the visit provided an opportunity for gaining knowledge on how peasant farmers carry out their farming activities, identifying existing farming groups in Gatundu and enabling discussions on the challenges facing farmers as experienced by the farmers themselves.