

## Value Addition, the silver bullet in Agribusiness

*My experience during the Rural Outreach Programme (ROP) ISFM/SLM Value Addition Trade Fair and Exhibition in Mbale, Vihiga County-KENYA on July 20, 2018*



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Rural Outreach Programme (ROP) has been implementing its second phase of the Alliance for Green Revolution Africa (AGRA) funded Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM) project in Vihiga and Kakamega counties, Western Kenya.

The project focused on scaling up the smallholder incomes, and food security and nutrition through multi-grain multiplication of staple food crops. To that regard, ROP collaborated with the AGRA to plan for an open value addition and nutrition exhibition day for farmers, stakeholders and partners to display their products and services, share knowledge, network and explore market opportunities. The function took place in Vihiga–Mbale Municipal grounds on July 20, 2018. The theme was ***“Taking soil fertility management technology to scale using value addition approach through strengthening smallholder farmers in value addition by linking them to profitable markets and financial institutions”***. Over 750 farmers attended the Trade Fair with 40 farmer groups exhibiting various ISFM farming techniques and resultant products trained on



*Figure 1: Myself taking a closer look at the organic fertilizer processed by Ichinga Farmers Group from Hamisi Sub-County in Vihiga.*

by ROP extension officers. On display were the various value addition techniques on crops such as soya, cassava, pumpkins, bananas, maize and potatoes.

Soil health is crucial in addressing sustainability aspects of agriculture. It is important that the issue was amongst the key focus areas during the trade fair. For the first time ever, ROP, in partnership with Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO-*Alupe*), in collaboration with The Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Agricultural Green Revolution Alliance for Africa (AGRA) set out to establish Integrated Soil Fertility Management/Sustainable Land Management (ISFM/SLM) in Western Kenya. The program introduced soya farming, a nutrients-dense pulse that establishes symbiotic relationship with the host crops in the farm (maize).

I was overwhelmed by the farmers' uptake of value added activities in Western Kenya. Farmers who displayed their products portrayed a wealth of knowledge and potent. However, they needed to work on packaging of their value added products. Prof. Ruth K Oniang'o, Founder of ROP, identified that the challenge of packaging was linked to lack of sufficient funds and technical support. According to Miller & Da Silva [2], there is need to support value chain development through policy interventions, institutions and services that will create an enabling business environment to leverage access to financial services in smallholder agriculture.

In my interaction with key agripreneurs from the region, I learnt that market penetration is still very low. Stella Mboyo from Liberation Community Development Initiative in Kakamega County stated that their market is largely local and within their county; they produce and sell Moringa Smoothies, and chia seeds that are rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Market penetration requires product launch and establishment of a brand that lasts. Branding includes packaging products in a way that would easily attract target customers. Margaret Amimo, Founding Director of BEDCA Enterprises

that deals with Banana value chain, reiterated similar problem; her market share was largely the local farmer markets and farm-gate customers.

I listened with admiration to Salim, a member of Ichinga farmers' group from Hamisi Sub-County in Vihiga explain to me systematic procedure of how they established



*Figure 2: Salim from Ichinga Farmers group pauses for a photo beside their products. They focus on Soya value addition and production of organic fertilizer*

their vermi-culture enterprise. The group was formed to boost market competitiveness. They faced challenges but understood how collective action, which according to Markelova *et al.*, [1], could help them address the problems or barriers to market access. Among other products, Ichinga farmers group produces organic fertilizer, which costs USD 25.00 a kilo and liquid version of the same that goes for USD 3.00 a liter. It was encouraging to learn that farmers popularly understood the need for agricultural sustainability, an aspect of ISFM/SLM model and that they adopted the grapevine communication system in spreading the “gospel”.

Farmers face the risk of exploitation in several ways: some with and some without their knowledge. This one occurs mostly in measurement of farm produce against price. A number of times potatoes farmers’ exploitation has been highlighted by mainstream media [4] and social media users in Kenya. Potatoes are often measured in 90 Kg sacks; however, farmers have been made to use modified sacks that carry more or less



*Figure 3: Farmers being exploited by brokers who stash between 100 and 180 kilogram bags of the potatoes and buy it for as little as Sh800 [4]*

than should be necessary. Indigenous vegetable farmers who crowd in the Western region of Kenya lack standardized measurement units for their produce in the market and, therefore, end up using bunches and heaps which may not be

accurate. The County Executive Committee Member in Charge of Agriculture observed that farmers in Vihiga County often faced losses due to excessive measurements and advised that such losses could be countered by use of Kilograms as opposed to bunches or heaps.

Professor Ruth Khasaya Oniang’o dedicated her life to improving health and nutrition of the rural communities through the organization she founded 30 years ago-Rural Outreach Program Africa (ROP). She championed and promoted cultivation and consumption of African Leafy Vegetables (ALVs) such as the African Nightshade (managu), amaranthus (terere), spider plant (saget) and slender leaf (mitoo) among other popular traditional vegetables [3]. It emerged that poor farming practices reduced production and eventually nutritive value of all crops, and so through partnerships, she breathed life into the farmers again.

*In its efforts to sustain income streams for rural families, ROP boosts agricultural production efficiency through improved and gender sensitive farm mechanization.*



Figure 6: ROP farmers design workshop (left), and jua kali metal worker (right)



Figure 7: ROP Prototypes of two of the technologies: the “double jembe” and the wheel hoe



Figure 4: Sketches of “ideal weeding tools” generated by farmer groups



Figure 5: Farmers testing prototypes

ROP has had an outreach to over 70,000 farmers in Kenya with practical professional guidance through different levels in the agriculture value chain. Farmers have been empowered and are now confident enough to train their fellow farmers. The seasoned nutrition Professor stated that indigenous vegetables have a medicinal value other than food use. She further identified that agricultural stakeholders have been focusing on increasing production per unit area and diversification of farming enterprises. “Now, more than ever, we need to encourage value addition” she added. Value addition increases shelf life of products and as well the producer income. Farmers earn more when they own most of the activities in the product chain rather than just selling raw products from farm.



Figure 8: Electric motor machine to aid value addition of Soya for rural farmers in Vihiga County-Kenya, procured by ROP



Figure 9: Prof. Oniang'o looks on as Louis David, an intern from Nantes, France, and Roselydah Awinja mix fortified soy flour for baking.

Prof. R. K. Oniang'o noted that women play a crucial role in feeding children and men in their families, hence their significance in promoting nutrition in their respective rural communities. The 2017 Africa Food Prize Laureate observed that smallholder farmers are the poorest, a population that mostly consists of women. “Women should be the main center of focus in order to tackle the problem of malnutrition in our society today” she stated. It is true that rural women need economic empowerment and training on family nutrition. ROP collaborated with the government of the day for the entire period of its existence to inspire and empower the rural farmers, especially youth and women, focusing on food and nutrition, how to be sustainable in agribusiness and value addition. Prof. Oniang'o concluded with a call for a multi-stakeholder partnership to work on packaging of value added products by the rural farmers.

The county leadership led by the His Excellency Dr. Wilberforce Otichillo, the governor of Vihiga County graced the trade fair and acknowledged the economic importance of indigenous crops and livestock. Farmers (producers) and consumers were encouraged to reconsider indigenous foods. Agribusiness trade fairs have been focusing on agriculture companies and mostly centered on types of seed crops, livestock breeds, agrochemicals, mechanization tools et cetera, from manufacturing entities while little has been done to bring the central focus on farmers' activities. ROP championed such a trade a fair, emphasizing entirely on farmer value added activities. The County boss was expressly impressed and promised to ensure regularization of such events, at least once every year to encourage knowledge transfer, opportunities for partnerships and market exploration. The Governor acknowledged that agribusiness should be the center of focus as a tool of economic empowerment. Since Kenya devolved agricultural function, county governments should be at the forefront of promoting value addition through training, market expansion, facilitating mechanization and infrastructural support. As such, they should be ready to learn from those knowledgeable about best practices and approach to improve the livelihood people.



*Figure 10: H.E. Dr. Otichilo (2nd left) and CECM Agriculture, Mr. Mbuni (3rd left) accompanied by Hon. Prof. Oniang'o of ROP (1st right) listen to ROP technician explain how the prototypes of two of the technologies: the "double jembe" and the wheel hoe work*

potential partners in market promotion, together with the Kenya National Chambers of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI). "In agribusiness one must look for markets", he

I was moved by the improvised fabricated hand tools for farming by engineering technicians with the involvement of ROP farmers; government needs to help in up scaling such initiatives and facilitating market expansion to reach out to more farmers. I was encouraged by the fact that the governor expressly admitted to have learnt more than he had expected and pledged facilitation of similar events in the future and invited

said. He was ready to join hands to facilitate markets for the farmer groups engaging in value addition. It was encouraging to note that the county government planned to utilize ICT facilities to establish an *online* marketing platform for Vihiga County to freely market her farmers. The county government was also planning to launch in the year 2019, an industrial park at Kaimosi where mass agricultural equipment production will be the center of focus.

## References

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