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The Impact of Strategic Initiatives and Community Engagement on the Success and Failure of Apiculture Projects in Kitui County.

County:	Kitui County		
Sector/s:	Agriculture	Sub-sector/Theme:	Apiculture
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Target Audience:	Counties		
Authors (contacts and their institutions can be included as well)	Nzei Mwende- Program Assistant Maarifa Centre		
Resource Persons (include their designations)	Esther Mutunga- Kamaki Co-operative Manager Peninah Nzula – County Agribusiness Officer Dennis Muthoka – Co-operative officer Job Kimanthi Daniel- Vice Chairperson Kamaki Farmers' Cooperative Society LTD Thomas Mutambuki – Plant Operator Kamaki Cooperative Society LTD Fritis Kamala Mutisya – Extension Officer Kamaki Cooperative Society LTD		

Introduction

Apiculture is the scientific term for beekeeping which involves the management and cultivation of bees to harvest honey, beeswax, pollen and other bee-related products.

Kenya has an annual honey production rate of 100,000 metric tons. This thriving industry not only contributes substantially to the agricultural sector but also sustains the well-being of numerous farmers who depend on beekeeping for their livelihood.

Situated in the former Eastern Province, Kitui County spans an area of 30,496 square kilometers and is home to 1,136,187 people. Capitalizing on its extensive land resource and climatic condition, the County has demonstrated notable success in beekeeping. Initially, the practice was geared towards domestic consumption as a cost-effective alternative to purchasing sugar, substituting it with locally produced honey.

With the advent of devolution, Kitui County is now strategically harnessing the potential of beekeeping and apiculture. This shift aims to transform the perception of apiculture, positioning it as a viable contributor to the County's economy and a means of enhancing the livelihoods of farmers.

The County Government has strategically intensified its efforts by actively supporting beekeepers through comprehensive training programs, provision of essential equipment and establishment of diverse marketing strategies. In the 2015/2016 financial year, the County strategically cushioned farmers to focus on the business aspect of apiculture by inaugurating 16 honey processing plants. Among these, the Kamaki Farmers' Cooperative Society stands out as the only facility that has prospered and experienced significant advancement, thanks to robust community support and the effective leadership demonstrated by its managers.

Annually, the County produces 30% of its honey through the Kamaki Farmers' Cooperative Society. With over 940 members, this cooperative society has significantly improved the lives of women and youth residing in these wards.



Apiculture in Kitui County



Kamaki Farmer's Cooperative Society



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Implementation of the practice

- Prior to devolution, farmers experienced challenges in honey marketing, with a kilogram of honey selling at Ksh50. Lack of awareness regarding the quality of honey for external consumption led to issues such as harvesting unripe honey and blending it with sweeteners to enhance marketability.
- In response to these challenges, farmers from Mwangeni, Tiva River and Athi collaborated to establish a Community-Based Organization (CBO) called Mwangeni Rural Development, with a primary goal to collectively market and sell all their agricultural produce as a group.
- With the onset of devolution in 2014, the County Government of Kitui initiated the construction of 16 Honey Processing Plants. However, due to effective leadership skills and community ownership of the project, only the Kamaki Cooperative Society plant in Ikutha has managed to sustain itself.
- By 2018, the Kamaki Farmers' Cooperative had 248 registered members, aggregating 1.2 tons of honey.
- The same year the County, through the National Agricultural Rural Inclusive Growth Project (NARIGP) supported farmers from the Kamaki Cooperation with an inclusion grant of Ksh999,000. This support covered expenses in the processing plant including marketing, buying of machines and training of farmers on honey harvesting.
- Subsequent years witnessed significant growth, with honey aggregation reaching 8.7 tons by 2020. The County provided support in various forms, including buying more equipment to encourage apiculture as a sustainable source of income and business.
- In 2021, the County aggregated 28.6 tons of raw honey while providing training on bee management, honey harvesting and candle making.
- In 2022, there was a drop in honey aggregation to 12.4 tons, but membership increased to 855.
- In 2023, climate change has impacted production, causing a decline to 5.6 tons due to factors such as drought and deforestation.
- The implementation of a collective marketing strategy, which involves ensuring the availability of Kitui honey in all supermarkets in the County and select supermarkets such as Carrefour, Naivas, and Quickmart, has resulted in a threefold increase in the selling price from Ksh50 to Ksh250 after the establishment of the processing plant.
- At the end of every financial year the cooperative shares dividends with the members.

Though the other 15 cooperatives did not pick up as desired, the County is in the process of drafting a policy for the sustainability of the Kamaki Cooperative Society Plant.



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The County has established various inspection measures at the processing plant to verify the quality of honey submitted by farmers, ensuring it meets both local and international standards. The processing plant conducts assessments of water and sucrose content in any honey submitted, mandating a sucrose content of 80%. Honey falling below this threshold is deemed unripe. Additionally, strict guidelines prohibit the mixing of honey with varying sucrose percentages within the processing plant.



The Kamaki honey processing plant

Results of the practice

1. The growth in honey production is apparent in the implementation of the practice from 2018 to 2022.
2. The improved quality of honey production has resulted in increased market demand for Kitui honey.
3. The honey processing plant has improved the livelihood of farmers and members of the Kamaki Farmers' Cooperative Society

4. The assurance steps and guidelines at the Kamaki Cooperative Society has instilled trust in both local and external consumers, affirming the high standards of honey produced in the processing plant.
5. The processing plant has provided employment opportunities to youth working as cleaners, watchmen and other duties including branding and tagging of the packages.

Lessons learnt:

1. Inadequate management leads to the failure of projects- Though Kamaki Farmers' Cooperative Society was commissioned together with the other 15 processing plants, the management and leadership has impacted on the sustainability.
2. Standards are upheld through adherence to guidelines- The outlined guidelines including the percentage of sucrose acceptable at the processing plant have ensured good quality honey
3. The success of any County project relies heavily on community support- Through the support from the local farmers who are members of the Kamaki Farmers' Cooperative, the processing plant has stood the taste of time
4. Climate change is a universal concern affecting all living beings- Climate change caused by various aspects including deforestation has led to drought and the death of living things including bees.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the initiative undertaken by Kitui County in the field of apiculture has yielded commendable results and presented valuable lessons. The transition from a Community-Based Organization (CBO) to the Kamaki Farmers' Cooperative focusing honey, reflects a strategic shift towards a more business-oriented approach. The success of the Kamaki Farmers Cooperative Society, amid challenges faced by other processing plants, underscores the importance of effective leadership and robust community support.

Quality assurance measures implemented at the processing plant have not only enhanced the marketability of Kitui honey but have also instilled trust in consumers. This, in turn, has contributed to increased market demand for locally produced honey.



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Photos of the Kamaki Farmers' Cooperative

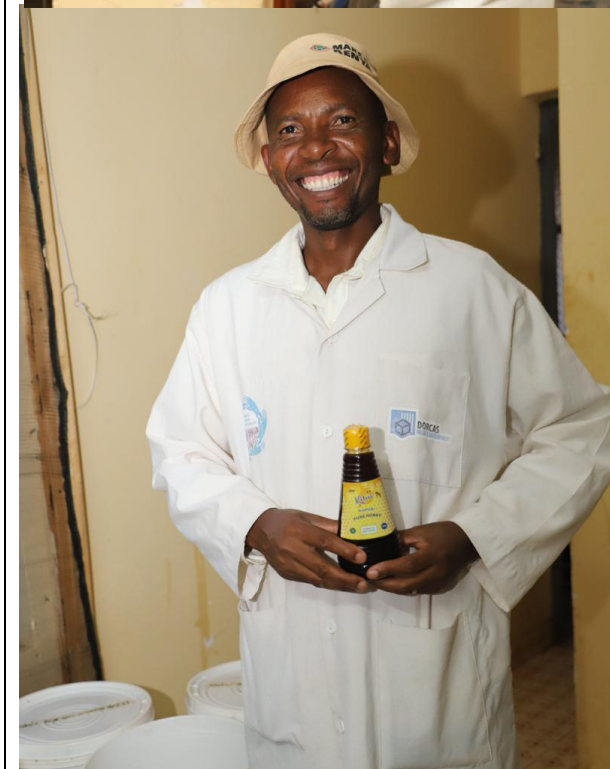




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