

Reliant on Relationships: environmental and working conditions among Kenyan smallholder farmers

CAFOD CASE STUDY, NOVEMBER 2019

"The thing is, if they misbehave today their contract will end."

Veterinary inspector, Dagoretti slaughterhouse cluster, Nairobi, Kenya. Key informant interview by Jesuit Hakimani Centre, March 2019

This is a case study summary for development programme managers who are interested in the overlap between economic development and job-creation policy and ordinary Kenyans' livelihoods. It shows very clearly the gap between our concept of a green, decent job and the situation that agricultural workers are experiencing.

Decent and green work means **work that is good both for the worker and the planet**. A green and decent job means that people have access to full and productive employment, rights at work, social protection, the opportunity for social dialogue in the workplace - and that the environment and the climate are preserved or restored through this work.¹ This is based on the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) four "pillars of decent work". In the best cases, decent and green jobs can also be transformative: have positive social ripple effects².

This case study is a report about rural Kenyans' experiences of decent and green work in small-scale agriculture and livestock keeping. It is based on exploratory field research by CAFOD and Jesuit Hakimani Centre in March-April 2019. We also conducted desk research, six group interviews in the field, and several key informant interviews. It is part of CAFOD's policy work on decent and green jobs, and Jesuit Hakimani Centre's (JHC) work on agricultural policy and food security. CAFOD's thinking on decent and green jobs has developed over several years, grounded in integral ecology. It is based on the urgent need to address environmental degradation and climate change while creating sustainable livelihoods for poor and marginalised people.

Our group interview cases are a range of local economic actors in marginal areas of Kenya. They are small-scale farmers who have benefited from CARITAS and CAFOD programmes in Kitui; meat and livestock traders at a municipal slaughterhouse in Kajiado; chicken and dairy farmers and processors in Isiolo; and a small locally run agro-processing factory in Gatundu. Most of our respondents can be classed as family farmers, own-account workers or micro-entrepreneurs. We also interviewed key informants: county government officials and the veterinary inspector at Dagoretti slaughterhouse cluster in Nairobi.



We asked whether they have paid work; what happens when they are ill, have babies, have an accident at work or grow old; whether they have a written contract and how reliable their job is; and whether they are organised.



¹ CAFOD, January 2019, based on ILO definition of a green job. ILO on decent work indicators:

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_100335.pdf

² Lukka & Montgomery 2019

Findings

In our findings **only one of the 56 persons we interviewed has decent work** according to the ILO definition (that person is the veterinary inspector at Dagoretti slaughterhouse cluster). And her job is not green. **Most of our respondents don't have "employment"** in the sense of being hired by another person for a permanent job. Instead, they make a living by farming and selling produce or by trading livestock. Because of this, we adapted our interviews to ask about the *principles* of the four pillars of decent work, rather than the literal meanings: whether work is available and brings a satisfactory income; whether it is stable; and what happens when the workers are in a vulnerable situation. **Even then, their livelihoods don't fulfil the criteria for decent work.** Respondents' livelihoods have occasional "green" aspects, which are sometimes based on outside support from local government, NGOs or UN agencies. We found that support for green and decent work **can't be expected from an unregulated private sector.** But these rural livelihoods have potential to become green with some effort and investment.

In practice nearly all the work we heard about is **informal**. To understand the case study, we need to make it clear that Kenya as a country is still struggling with corruption, and although there is constructive legislation and policy, **there are gaps in good governance, rule of law and applying regulations** that hinder full implementation. Hence among the respondents, **the "decency" of their work is based on social relationships, not rule of law.** People's social security *is* their families. They also earn incomes in social enterprises and savings and loans groups.

In **Kakumuti and Kakululo, Kitui**, our group interview respondents are farmers and participants in CAFOD and Caritas projects. They use some conservation agriculture practices. Nobody has decent work. It depends on your family and the community whether your job is stable, you have help during lean times and whether ill treatment at work is remedied. Farmers are own-account workers who both hire casual labour and work as casual labour. Income comes from selling produce – middlemen who squeeze the prices are a big problem. At **Sampu Slaughterhouse in Kajiado** we interviewed meat traders and tea sellers. The local abattoir provides acceptable jobs and income for livestock keepers. These meat traders are fairly prosperous businessmen who sell to markets and butchers' shops in Kajiado. The tea ladies on the other hand have nearly no rights or status and scrape by. Many slaughterhouse wastes – blood, hides – could potentially be better used to improve "greenness".

In **Isiolo** we interviewed interesting medium-scale agrobusinesses: among them several battery chicken farmers, a camel meat processing group and a diversified dairy farm – two of the businesses owned by women. Social enterprises work well: the camel meat group of five ethnic Somali women and the church-linked youth eggs group. Social security and rights are through patronage/relationships /friendships/family. There were several good environmental practices mentioned but a lot of unsustainable work too (especially the battery chicken farming, which is very dependent on the poultry company).

Gatundu agro-processing factory makes flour from bananas, avocados and other local produce. It's run by a local man who hires neighbours and buys produce at higher prices than the middlemen. It's a social enterprise supporting local value-addition and sustainable consumption, benefiting from a previous USAID grant.

The relationship with the employer underpins job security; families provide childcare and old age care; women organise in savings and loans "merry-go-rounds" for savings.

Our recommendations

Recommendations for development organisations who **support rural and livelihoods enterprises**:

1. **Complement informal social safety nets** by providing social protection where it's missing. For most Kenyans, real-life social protection is largely family- and community-based and hence invisible in economic measurements. If someone offers to work for you despite having an infant, it probably means a younger relative is providing unpaid childcare – and may be missing school.
2. **Engage with the informal economy**, for example by accepting informal associations as negotiation partners, recognising an employment relationship even when there is no signed contract, and helping informal enterprises to formalise gradually¹. Recognise the power dynamics at play, for example patron-client relationships.
3. **Support social enterprises and the solidarity economy**. The most stable and well-paid jobs in our research (aside from formal jobs) were in the solidarity economy: ethnic or religious-based enterprises and a social enterprise factory.
4. **Don't abuse families' willingness to help**. Elderly care, maternity and support in sickness and old age were overwhelmingly provided by family and relatives. This means that when we create projects where women with small children work, it is probable that their family members such as older daughters are doing the child-minding. Are those children able to do us this favour and still keep up with schoolwork? Our projects can't just shunt the care burden onto more vulnerable family members, but we need to pay for it to be organised.
5. **Plan despite legislation, not relying on it**. We shouldn't ignore the regulations or stop trying to improve them. But while good legislation and policy are *necessary*, they are *not sufficient* conditions for positive change to happen. Kenya's policies on labour and environmental standards are good (for example they have a green economic growth strategy, GESIP), but competing priorities hinder their implementation.
6. Advocate for **government provision of free public services** according to ILO Recommendation 202 (on social protection floors) as part of enterprise development strategies. Our respondents form savings and loans groups to cushion against crises. But if those savings are needed to cover everyday events like illnesses and school fees, there is nothing left over for business improvements or seizing new opportunities.



Research team leader Yvonne Kuntai (left) with women from the self-organised camel milk and -meat group Tawaqqal in Isiolo. Their group can be considered part of the solidarity economy. It provides them with an income and they help each other with social security.

CASE STUDY: KAKUMUTI, KITUI WHERE THE VILLAGE PROVIDES

The farmers in drought-prone Kitui grow a wide range of staples, vegetables and fruits, keep livestock and make jokes about farming cats. In this village where everyone knows everyone, farmers (both women and men) have between 2-10 acres of land each. Perhaps encouraged by NGO partnerships, they use terraces and soil conservation to counteract erosion. They hire casual labour during the harvest and for weeding – and work as casual labour themselves when they need extra income.

Nobody here signs a written contract, on the contrary insisting on contracts seems suspicious: “Yes, if you tell someone to have a written agreement then the person might think you don’t have faith in him/her.” “If you trust someone then the person will be able to do the work well but if you tell the person about having a written agreement, then the person will not do his best.” The way to make sure you have a job tomorrow is to do a good job today: “If I have called someone for a job and if he/she does not do the work to my satisfaction then I will not call him/her the next day. Or I can call and tell the casual labourer that I am busy somewhere else but really I have looked for someone else to do the job so in short I have fired him/her. So it is a must he/she does the work well so that you continue.”

It can be a downside when you are the labourer: “Sometimes you can go work and the person fails to pay you or he/she pays you in instalments but never completes the pay in full [and in the end] you stop asking for your pay.” Clearly, the employer holds all the power in these relationships but the traditional leader, or village headman, can mediate conflicts in a reliable way.

The people of Kakumuti have access to the National Hospital Insurance Fund, NHIF. For self-employed or informal workers, the monthly fee is KSH 500³ which the villagers consider expensive: “[Healthcare coverage] wasn’t there but the Governor is now trying to introduce it. We used to use NHIF but it was expensive on the common man. The Governor’s scheme is that you pay 1,000 shillings at the beginning of the year so when you go to hospital you don’t have to pay a cent. It covers treatment in the Kitui General Hospital.”

Other social security is taken care of by family and neighbours. Elderly people are looked after by their children, sick people by their families, and when women have small babies their husbands take up their heaviest work. If someone has an accident while working for a farmer, they have to take care of themselves: “Most of the time they cater for themselves since I pay them. And whatever has hurt him/her, like a snake, does not belong to me either way.”

These descriptions outline the everyday power dynamics that govern the working lives of most rural Kenyans. Our other case studies also highlighted the importance of “do it yourself” arrangements: savings and loans groups (“merry-go-rounds”) for safety nets and social enterprises based on religious, ethnic or village affiliation for income security.

Written by Linda Lönnqvist, Policy Analyst – Economic Justice, November 2019

³ NHIF website accessed 16.8.19, <http://www.nhif.or.ke/healthinsurance/>. But there is a KSH250 fee for each late payment.

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