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Does Ethnicity Matter in Adoption of Organic Agriculture? Evidence from Small Holder Farmers in Mau, Kenya

KIBET NGETICH¹, HADIJA MURENGA¹, BERNHARD FREYER², DANIEL KYALO³, RHODA BIRECH⁴

¹*Egerton University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Kenya*

²*University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU), Inst. of Organic Farming, Austria*

³*Egerton University, Agricultural Economics & Agri-Business Management, Kenya*

⁴*Egerton University, Crop Horticulture and Soil Sciences, Kenya*

Abstract

Organic farming is becoming increasingly important in developing countries largely due adverse effects of conventional farming methods, lack of agricultural inputs, education and training and exegesis of climate change. Yet the pace of conversion to organic agriculture remains very low. Understanding the low rate of adoption of organic agriculture remains a major issue of academic and policy concern. In an area inhabited by people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, it would be interesting to understand whether the practice of organic farming is ethnically patterned. To establish whether ethnicity is a major factor in the adoption of organic farming in Kenya a total of 300 farmers were interviewed in three ethno-ecological zones in Mau East Escarpment. The area is disproportionately inhabited by the Agikuyu (traditionally agriculturalists), Kipsigis (traditionally pastoral community) and the Ogiek (traditionally hunters and gatherers). The results show that adoption of organic farming run along ethnic lines. It was found that Agikuyu tended to adopt organic farming. They mainly engaged in agricultural production and marketing which might be one strong argument to explain their attitude. The Kipsigis and Ogiek were least inclined to practice organic farming. Kipsigis and Ogiek are different dialects of the Kalenjin tribe from the Nilotic people. The Kipsigis are traditionally cattle keepers and their ancestors settled in plains to give their livestock space to graze. They are not keen on intensive cultivation nor on tree planting. Their main diet is diet is based on animal products. They are lately assimilated into cultivation and they are not market oriented. Ogiek traditionally hunt animals and eat honey and that is why they live in the forest. They are less interested in cultivation and that is why organic farming is low there. However their lifestyle is in certain senses close to the organic principles. In conclusion, this underlines the relevance of socialisation theory to understanding of the adoption processes. This finding suggests a need for ethnically focused interventions in the promotion of organic farming in the area so as to take into consideration relative affinity organic agriculture.

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