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Reducing Food Security Conflicts through Protection of Potential Agricultural Geographical Indications in Kenya

FREDAH MAINA¹, HENRIK EGELYNG², CHRIS-ACKELLO OGUTU¹, JOHN MBURU¹

¹*University of Nairobi, Dept. of Agricultural Economics, Kenya*

²*University of Copenhagen, Food and Resource Economics, Denmark*

Abstract

Agriculture in Kenya is characterised by low and declining productivity, poor market access and information asymmetry, environmental degradation, and vulnerability to changing and unpredictable climate, among others. This is made more complex by the increasing demand for land mainly for real estate development. Increasing pressure on agricultural land constitutes a major threat to food security especially among smallholder rural communities. Kenya is in the process of developing the Geographical Indications law to protect its origin products. Enhancing market access through protection of origin products as geographical indications has the potential of increasing household incomes, enhancing social inclusion, raising environmental sustainability and alleviating rural poverty. Geographical indications provide consumers with information on product quality and producers with market information.

The study was conducted to scope agricultural origin products that have the potential to be labelled as geographical indications and the possible impact of the standards. The field study, conducted in 2014 and 2015 in different parts of Kenya, involved review of relevant literature, interviews with key information experts in the various agricultural subsectors, as well as groups of producers, traders and consumers. Snow-balling was used to determine who to interview in order to get additional useful information. The research identified at least twelve potential agricultural products ranging from export crops like tea and coffee, to locally sold products like Tilapia fish, mangoes and goats, and products of industrial value including *Artemisia* and pyrethrum. In most of the sub-sectors, information asymmetry especially on the part of producers and lack of product differentiation led to sub-optimal marketing. Lack of proper market structures and producer collective action in the highly perishable product markets, like mangoes and fish, led to exploitation by traders. This minimised the benefits that would accrue to producers as result of prices paid for their “unique” agricultural products leading to use of unsustainable practices. Agricultural origin products exist in Kenya that can improve the food security situation through sustainable practices. However, in laying out the geographical indications policy, the formal and informal institutions and rules that influence market structure, information and prices need to be analysed and their negative effects minimised.

Keywords: Geographical indications, institutions, markets, smallholder farmers