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## Trust as Integral to Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Dairy Value Chain Improvement

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### Abstract

Multi-stakeholder platforms for agricultural value chain improvement do not often focus on primary stakeholders in small-scale food sectors. As the small-scale sector supplies the majority of milk in Kenya, where about 70% of total milk is produced by smallholder farmers and more than 80% of the marketed milk is transported by mobile traders, improving the chain requires their collaboration. In the framework of the project RELOAD, this study analyses the process of establishing “bottom-up” multi-stakeholder processes with a focus on the role of relationships between different stakeholder groups with an example from Nakuru County, Kenya.

Primary stakeholders such as smallholder farmers, mobile traders and micro-processors from different parts of the county, as well as secondary stakeholders such as county-level government officials, were invited to engage in multi-stakeholder processes. Data was collected in narrative and semi-structured interviews (n=34), intra-stakeholder meetings (n=6/75 participants) inter-stakeholder meetings (n=5/20 participants), and multi-stakeholder platform meetings (n=6/30 participants). Additionally narrative interviews from continued research by our team in 2016 supplement the data with reflection on the group dynamics that were initiated in 2015.

Coding this qualitative data offers results about relationships, including cooperation and conflict, between different stakeholder groups, as well as how they perceive each other. In the initialisation phase of this action research, trust was required between the prospective participant and the researcher tempered by issues related to past experiences and interests. Those who chose to engage in the multi-stakeholder processes, were later able to gain trust, even among stakeholders who initially may have had negative perceptions of each other. During the multi-stakeholder processes trust was strengthened enabling further collaboration such as exchange of knowledge about feeding cows, and more options for milk marketing. Multi-stakeholder platform meetings allowed for dialogue about how to improve communication and cooperation such as between primary and secondary stakeholders.

Conclusions reveal the importance of trust as a necessary precondition for the successful establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms. The growing trust in the group changed the relationships between participants, creating new possibilities to improve the dairy value chain.

**Keywords:** Kenya, multi-stakeholder platform, Nakuru County, small-scale dairy, trust