



Tropentag, September 18-21, 2016, Vienna, Austria

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## Activity and Knowledge Analysis of Small-Scale Milk Traders in Nakuru County, Kenya

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### Abstract

Small-scale milk traders in Kenya, who market the large majority of milk produced, are facing significant restrictions related to financial capital, knowledge, and political context. Reasons are that little is known about their system, neither in the research, nor in the political area. This explains why the ‘informal’ market, to which small-scale milk traders are attributed, is often accused of low quality milk — although scientific findings show that milk quality in the informal is not worse than in the formal market.

This study aims at contributing to an understanding of the traders’ activity system, their context-specific knowledge and the overall importance of their business in Nakuru County, Kenya. By conducting an activity and knowledge analysis using second-order cybernetics, rules that underlie routine and problem-solving actions of the traders can be made explicit and improvement strategies can be derived.

Field data was collected in two study sites during May and September 2015 by applying an actor-oriented approach using different qualitative methods such as semi-structured (n=8) and narrative (n=3) interviews, participant observations (n=7), focus groups (n=3 with 2, 2 and 4 participants) as well as group meetings (n=15 with 3-12 participants each).

Results show that small-scale milk traders manage their system through a wide range of routine and problem-solving actions which enable them to pursue their overall goal of gaining a stable income from the business and several sub-goals such as ensuring quality milk, reducing losses and involvement in sound relations with different stakeholders. Problems encountered by traders in their activities were made explicit. Based on these outcomes, traders identified improvement strategies that they could pursue self-reliant such as testing milk quality with Alcohol tests and others that required collaboration with other stakeholders of the milk supply chain, such as workshops on hygienic milk handling with primary or meetings with secondary stakeholders on political regulations.

With their context-specific knowledge, small-scale milk traders guarantee supply of quality milk at affordable prices and increase market access for smallholder dairy farmers. Reconstruction of the traders’ routine and problem-solving rules shows that they adapt their decisions to their business-related, environmental and political-framework conditions.

**Keywords:** Kenya, RELOAD, second-order cybernetics, small-scale milk traders