



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

“Solidarity in a competing world —
fair use of resources”

Livelihoods and Niche Markets: A Case Study of Kenyan Smallholder Bee Keepers in Mwingi

PETER MUSINGUZI, ASKE SKOVMAND BOSSELMANN, POULIOT MARIÉVE

University of Copenhagen, Department of Food & Resource Economics, Denmark

Abstract

Honey is a product with quality premiums. Organic production is a quality parameter and thus niche markets have emerged with potentially large benefits to producers. Kenya is among East African countries with registered success in niche markets targeting smallholder farmers. However, the benefits to the smallholders depend on access to niche markets, functioning producer and organic farming support groups, extension personnel, skills and knowledge of organic farmers and government support. This study investigates contribution of certified organic honey production to the livelihoods of small scale beekeepers organised in a producer cooperative in Mwingi, eastern Kenya. Data were collected from December 2015 to February 2016 from 54 smallholder bee keepers' groups; 38 organic certified and 16 non-certified. Stratified random sampling was used and a total of 303 smallholder farmers (185 certified and 118 noncertified) were randomly sampled. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected for 2015 and 2008 (retrospectively) for purposes of comparing the before and after organic certification. The data were analysed using STATA. Results indicate no significant impact of certification on household incomes, quantity and price of honey produced and incidence of migration. The results further indicate that non certified smallholders were more diversified, food secure and sold less assets as compared to the certified organic farmers. Only 17% of the certified smallholders attributed their wealth status to being organic certified. There are multiple reasons for lack of certification impact: i) no continuous support to certified farmers after initial phase as it is 100% NGO supported, ii) low premium prices, iii) strong presence of middlemen, iv) lack of governmental support and iv) poorly managed Mwingi bee keepers and crops cooperative society where marketing of smallholders' organic honey is coordinated. This therefore calls for policy formulation that supports organic bee keeping for the benefit of organic farmers. Technical and financial support to the organic bee keepers' cooperative will be vital for marketing and adherence to organic standards. However, results indicate that certified organic bee keeping cannot single-handedly solve the livelihood challenges of smallholder farmers though it is vital for achievement of broad based rural development, sustainable livelihoods and conservation goals.

Keywords: Farmer cooperatives, Kenya, local certified organic production, niche markets, organic honey, rural livelihoods