Smallholder Tea and Coffee Production and its Impact on Food Production and Living Standards in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper is based on an ongoing research on impact of cash crops on living standards under different farm and family conditions. Kenya relies on production of coffee and tea among other cash crops to earn foreign exchange. The rural small scale coffee and tea farmers in Kenya, do not understand much about foreign exchange but toil in their land every day, month, and year to earn some income from these crops which also have uncertainties ranging from prices, weather and decline in productivity.

There is clear evidence of changing farming systems with the coffee zone shifting from major cash crop production to major food production. This is due to the fact that these farmers receive little or no payments thus have uprooted or pruned down coffee bushes to use the land for food production. The farmers have adapted living standards coping strategies through off-farm activities and mainly food crop diversification with half of the tea farmers seeking off-farm activities due to their small food production land sizes. The type and magnitude of crop diversification is different with tea farmers producing less of traditional food crop such as cassava and bananas but concentrate more on short term rain-fed crops mainly for home consumption.

2 Background and Aim of the Study

The economic performance and development prospects of many developing countries are largely dependent on cash crop production mainly for the purpose of export. The heavy dependence of
these developing countries on a few commodities exposes them to adverse economic impacts, sometimes with harmful consequences for growth and the reduction of poverty (ICO, 2003). Declining living standards and poverty is evident among many rural families that for a long time depend on cash crops as a major source of income and spent most of their resources in their production while foregoing other sources of livelihood. This is because for the last 10-15 years, what the farmers earn from cash crops such as tea and coffee has declined due to competition in the global market, changes in consumer’s tastes among other factors leading to a lot of social and economic problems in these communities. At the same time, just like other communities in sub-Saharan Africa, high increase in population has brought conditions of high family sizes and low farm sizes which impacts negatively on food production. There is therefore overuse of available land which coupled with drastic changes in climatic conditions have led to poor agricultural performance which according to Odhiambo (2004) is an important determinant of poverty whereas hunger is a major constraint to achieving poverty reduction. Apart from food, other criteria\(^1\) of measuring living standards are equally less and/or poorly available to the people in rural area. Due to the above mentioned setbacks of coffee and tea, farmers in the study area have changed their farming systems and diversified both in farm and off-farm activities. The paper aims at assessing the impact of changes of cropping systems and economic diversification on living standards. The paper will discuss to what extent the farmers have diversified and strategies which they have adapted to improve their living standards.

3 Methodology and Data

3.1 The Study Area

Murang’a district is situated on the eastern slopes of Nyandarua range. It borders Kirinyaga to the east, Maragua to the south, Nyeri to the north and Nyandarua range to the west. Annual average rainfall reaches a maximum of 2700mm at 2500m above sea level and ranges between 800 to 900mm at 1300m above sea level. It has four administrative divisions namely, Kiharu, Kahuro, Kangema and Mathoia. The study area covers two agro-ecological zones\(^2\) - UM1 (tea, coffee

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\(^1\) Criteria for measuring living standards include family income, cash and liquidity, independence from resource owner, food supply and food security, supply of water, housing, sanitary equipment, energy and clothes, health conditions of the family, education and qualification and social security (Doppler, 2004).

\(^2\) Main enterprises in UM1 include tea, coffee, dairy, maize and beans, poultry and Irish potatoes. Main enterprises in UM2 include coffee, dairy, maize and beans, macadamia, bananas, poultry, avocado.
(main) and dairy zone) with an attitude of 1670 – 1880 and UM2 (coffee (marginal), bananas and mango zone) with an attitude of 1500-1670 (Republic of Kenya, 2002)

Fig 1: The Study Area

### 3.2 General Research Concept

The problems relating to living standards of farmers in Central Kenya mainly come from poor prices of the main cash generating crops which are tea and coffee and declining productivity of their lands due to land overuse brought about by high family sizes and small farm sizes. The farmers are a highly indebted people due to loans from coffee and tea co-operatives which make their situations worse since makes them unable to access human basic needs such as sufficient and nutritious food, good health, education and housing. Farming systems approach will be used to carry out a socio-economic analysis of farm-household-family systems. This analysis will identify the real situation in regard to living standards and accessibility of resources. Fig 2 clearly demonstrates the main issues and analysis to be carried out.
3.3 Data

The data used in this paper is from an ongoing research on impact of cash crops on living standards under different farm and family conditions. Primary data was collected from 120 farm families using standardized questionnaires. Sampling was done using systematic random sampling method from sampling lists obtain from a tea processing factory and two coffee processing factories. Data was also obtained from 30 key persons at the village and regional level. Secondary data was obtained from the institutions at village, district and national level. Comparative analysis of the farming systems have been done using descriptive statistics.
4 Current Results

The current results exhibit clear differences in the cropping systems of the two study areas. The coffee farmers are noted to produce and diversify more in drought resistant crops and vegetables (Fig 3). Crop diversification and low income from cash crop production also signifies a change of eating habits. Cassava which is a drought resistant and a traditional food is prominent in the coffee area. Results also show that 93.3% of coffee farmers grow bananas either traditional or tissue culture varieties.

![Fig 3: Food crop diversification in two study zones in Kenya in 2004](image)

However, tea farmers still get a little more income from their crop but also seek more off-farm activities (Fig 4) through labouring in larger farms, construction and even public transportation.

![Fig 4: Percentage of farmers with off-farm activities in the two study areas](image)

5 Further Results

Further farming system analysis, food security, household, income and gross margin analysis among others will be conducted to determine how the cash crops impacts on living standards of the farmers and whether contribute accessibility of resources in the two study areas. The analysis will also establish the socio-economic factors that influence the decision of farmers on land, capital and labour use in reference to what they earn from their cash crops.
Analysis will also find out future development strategies the farmers can adapt on how and where to best use and manage their available resources in order to cope with the cash crops uncertainties and at the same time sustain or improve their living standards.

6 Conclusion and Remarks

All stakeholders in agriculture need to work together to understand the different farming systems in different regions. This will assist in development of extension packages and development projects that best suits different regions. Diversification of farm and off-farm activities is also an important concept in many regions in sub-Saharan Africa due to unpredictable weather changes, high population growth rate combined with continuous reduced farm sizes.

References


