

RAAKS Case Study

Matemu the Industrious Bachelor

We went to college with Matemu. He was a bright person, especially after he came from America where he had gone on student exchange programme when he was in Form Six (S6). Matemu surprised everyone when we were second year university students in Agricultural Marketing at Tumaini University by coming up with the idea of “Tumaini Night of Talents”. This was to provide an opportunity for students of agricultural marketing to present and demonstrate innovative ideas on how to improve the livelihoods of Small-Holder Farmers (SHFs) through improving agricultural planning, production and marketing.

Four years after college, I met Matemu in Nairobi Town driving a good looking sports utility car (SUV). I was still doing my low paying civil service job as an agricultural marketing officer II (AMO II), without a car I could call my own. According to our discussions then; Matemu after college went to his rural home to plan what he could do with his father’s one hundred and fifty (150) acres’ land in semi-arid lower Machakos District, Eastern Kenya.

Matemu did consultations with the local Agricultural Extension agents and discovered that someone – Kuguru Distillers Limited – was manufacturing a local Sage beer – “Sorghum” – which needed fermented Sorghum Flour as a major ingredient. He visited the Distillers and agreed with them he could become one of their outreach Sorghum growers after certification of his farm by their Sorghum agronomists. He then visited the local agricultural research station – Katumani Research Station – which is part of Kenya Agricultural Research Institute’s (KARI’s) five regional research stations. At the research station he discussed with the concerned researchers about the qualities of the locally viable Sorghum varieties suitable for beer brewing. Then he visited the local distributors and stockists of Sorghum inputs – Machakos branch of Kenya Farmers Union. This was to understand the pricing of Sorghum inputs and marketing of the particular Sorghum varieties he was interested in. Then he approached his bank – Barclays Bank Kenya, Machakos branch – with a proposal to grow Sorghum for industrial use. He got the backing of the Bank’s Credit Manager and acquired the necessary funding.

After the loan, Matemu knew that the real work had just begun, but he was keen to succeed. He worked closely with the local Machakos Agricultural Mechanisation Station preparing his land and went fully into commercial Sorghum growing for industrial use. After three successful seasons, Matemu was a comfortable man. However he knew he had to be better prepared to be sustainable in Sorghum growing. He approached several women and youth groups in his area and they formed a Sorghum Growers Association as an affiliate to Kenya Farmers Union. Since then the going has been challenging but an upwards one.

Several issues that needed further attention had become apparent, among these were:

- Cooperation among the various actors involved in industrial Sorghum input supply, production, marketing and processing was weak;
- There was poor internal communication between the various categories of Sorghum farmers (wage farmers, tenant farmers, innovative farmers, part-time farmers, cash crop farmers, subsistence farmers) and other actors in Sorghum growing, marketing and processing;
- Transparency and accountability was weak because neither farmers, input stockists, and Sorghum marketing agents/agencies and processors were keen to keep their word; and
- There was weak horizontal integration between farmers, input suppliers, extension agents and researchers. And also weak vertical integration between sorghum farmers, marketing and processing agencies.

Group Assignment:

1. List all stakeholders/actors involved in the Sorghum industry in this case study
2. Using possibly a diagram show the interaction between the various stakeholders/actors in the Sorghum input supply, production, marketing and processing chain (focus on the type of information, knowledge, communication, and service they share or exchange)
3. What is/are the main challenge(s) in the Sorghum Industry if it has to improve the livelihoods of small-holder farmers (SHFs)
4. What organisational aspects should we consider to make the Sorghum Industry more effective and efficient in achieving its objectives through knowledge management (think about linkages, coordination, interaction and networking for “Reflection, Action and Reaction” – RARE)