

Smallholder aggregation and processing center initiative to be replicated in other counties and African countries

On 18th May 2017, the Managing Director of the Rockefeller Foundation, Africa Region Office, Mr Biteye visited the Karurumo Smallholder Horticulture Aggregation and Processing Centre. Mr. Biteye was accompanied by Dr. Lindiwe Sibanda, the Vice President for Country Support, Policy, and Delivery- Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and Mr. John Logan, the Country Director- Technoserve (Kenya). The University of Nairobi was represented by Prof. Kiama Gitahi, the Principal - College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences (University of Nairobi). Also present during the visit was H.E David Njeru, the Deputy Governor- Embu County, Ms Annie Nyagah, the CEC in charge of Agriculture and Mrs. Mary Munene, the chief of staff in in Embu County.

The aggregation center has been renovated and upgraded by the University of Nairobi's Postharvest Project team led by Dr. Jane Ambuko, in partnership with researchers from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology and Technoserve Kenya. It was commissioned in March 2018 by Hon. Martin Wambora, the Embu Governor. The center is equipped with facilities for aggregation of fresh produce and small-scale wet and dry processing. The installed facilities for aggregation include evaporative cooling technologies (zero energy brick cooler and evaporative charcoal cooler) and the Coolbot cold room which is a low-cost alternative to conventional cold rooms.

The center has small scale wet processing facilities which can be used to process various products including pulp (puree), fruit concentrate, ready to drink juices (including juice blends) and other high quality products. To facilitate high quality dry processing, the center has two tunnel dryers each of which can dry one ton of fruit slices in one loading.

During the visit, the team witnessed the dry-processing steps for leafy green vegetables and mango fruit.

These impressive operations make the centre a one-stop station where farmers and other stakeholders can find technologies to help them in their efforts to reduce postharvest losses, access market for their produce and attain quality, quantity and consistency in agricultural production. With such facilities, the center becomes the first of its kind in Kenya and is meant to demonstrate postharvest technologies and innovations for postharvest handling of perishable horticultural commodities.

During the discussions and reflections session after the tour of the center, Dr. Ambuko thanked the Rockefeller Foundation, YieldWise initiative for the support to enable the project team to bring their research outputs to the end user (smallholder farmers). "This practical center has debunked the myth that donors are theorists who live in ivory towers" Dr. Ambuko said.

H.E David Njeru welcomed the project and pledged the County's support in ensuring its growth into a model that can be replicated in other counties and countries. The Deputy Governor confirmed the commitment by HE the Governor to facilitate installation of the 3-phase power to make the center fully functional. The County will also support the group to get certification from Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) for their flagship products.

In their remarks, Dr. Sibanda (AGRA) and Mr. Logan (Technoserve Kenya) congratulated the project team for the good work and hoped that they will continue to grow the partnerships to impact the smallholder farmers.

In his remarks, Mr Biteye on behalf of the Rockefeller Foundation congratulated the project team for their commitment and passion in actualizing the idea of aggregation centres. He thanked the farmers for actively accommodating the program and the county government for their support. He also added that the Rockefeller Foundation desires to replicate the aggregation project in other African countries. "Shared vision in partnership has given us success in this project. The aggregation Center will enhance the farmers' welfare, reduce Postharvest loss, create wealth and increase profits in agricultural production because the facilities and technologies are in line with the demands/needs of the community" said Mr. Biteye.

On his part, Prof Kiama (Principal CAVS) on behalf of the University of Nairobi thanked the Rockefeller Foundation for their financial support and assured a long-term engagement of the University with the farmers on the project. He further commended the initiative as one of the many community outreach engagements of the University of Nairobi. "Recently the University of Nairobi launched Kenya's first satellite into the orbit. This center will serve as a local satellite station for postharvest management to enhance economic, social and cultural prosperity of the smallholder farmers" Prof Gitahi said.

While the aggregation centre belongs to the Karurumo Self-help Horticultural Farmers, it is expected to benefit the more than 4,000 horticultural farmers in the area.