

Banana farming and rural livelihoods in central and eastern regions, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Banana (*Musa spp.*) is an important crop in the world and has very high nutritional value. The crop serves as food, income resource; animal feed in addition to its environmental benefits. In Kenya the crop is mostly grown and managed by small scale farmers in rural areas. It has provided income and substance for both rural and urban populations. Bananas are cultivated in a wide range of ecological zones. The fact that after establishment harvesting of the crop continues throughout the year adds to its importance as a food security crop. In addition, bananas are suitable for intercropping making it more attractive to small scale farmers who often grow different crops at the same time. This study reports on banana



production systems and the crops contribution to livelihoods in the study area.

Methodology and results: A survey was conducted in July 2010 in six districts: Imenti South, Meru Central, Embu East, Kirinyanga, Mathioya and Murang'a from Central and Eastern regions of Kenya. Results showed that majority of rural households >80% only cultivate few banana plants and 100% of the households intercrop. For more than 90% of the farmers' banana was not the primary crop. Over 80% banana production in the selected districts is rain-fed except in Imenti South where production is almost entirely under irrigation. Pests and diseases, drought, limited land and poor markets were noted to be among the leading challenges affecting banana production in the study areas.

Application of findings: Besides being a source of food, banana production has improved the rural livelihood since surplus production provides a reliable source of income. However the crop faces numerous challenges that require intervention to ensure sustainable production.

Key words: *Banana cultivation, rural livelihood, priority, important crop*