

Tobacco production baseline survey in Serengeti, Tarime and Rorya Districts, Mara region

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ABSTRACT

Objective: In Tanzania, tobacco is one of the major agricultural export crops. The crop is the main source of household income to smallholder farmers who are striving to get, or stay, out of poverty especially in the tobacco farming zones. Using 2009/2010 cropping season survey data from 181 randomly selected smallholder tobacco farmers from three districts, this study provides baseline information on tobacco farming in Mara region.

Methodology and results: The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from the survey was done using descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency, multiple responses, cross tabulation and correlation. Inferential statistics such as independent sample t-test was also employed. The results indicate that tobacco production in Mara region has been taking place since 1992. Farmers adopted tobacco farming from tobacco farmers in Kenya. The major production constraints identified by farmers were drought, untimely as well as inadequate supply of



inputs which was attributed to the existence of only one inputs supplier and distributor. Other limitations were high incidence of pests and diseases, shortage of fire wood for curing leaves, poor extension services and hailstones in some seasons. Low selling price and contradicting grading systems were the major tobacco marketing constraints in the study area. The study also revealed that access to extension services was similar across study districts with over 65.7% of the respondents obtaining technical expertise mainly from Alliance One Kenya employees. Tobacco yield recorded in three districts were 658.1569kg/acre, 972.7672kg/acre and 785.8138kg/acre in Serengeti, Tarime and Rorya, respectively. These yields are still below the yield potential of 1,012kg/acre. To counteract the problem of fire wood shortage, majority of farmers have already grown Eucalyptus and Grevillia sp. as their main source of fire wood for tobacco curing. Given the positive and negative impacts of tobacco farming, majority of the respondents (95.6%) were still willing to continue with tobacco farming as their main source of income. However, watermelon, maize and sunflower were ranked as first priority alternative cash crops to tobacco in Serengeti, Tarime and Rorya districts, respectively. Other alternative cash crops identified by farmers were coffee, cotton, tea and groundnuts.

Application of findings: This study concludes that tobacco farming is still the main source of household income. Therefore, more investment needs to be undertaken to ensure sustainable economic development of rural communities in Mara region.

Key words: *baseline, production, marketing, tobacco*