

COLLECTIVE MARKETING REVIVES FORTUNES OF SMALLHOLDER DAIRY FARMERS IN MAKUENI COUNTY

“All the good ideas I ever had, came to me while I was milking a cow,” American [Grant Wood](#) is quoted as saying. This quote definitely resonates with the members of the Kaiti Dairy Cooperative Society, who have since forgotten the days when milking was an art of relieving the cow’s udder and not extracting a commodity for food or sale. Back then, they had no market for their milk.

Located in Mukuyuni, Ukia Location, Kaiti Sub-County in Makueni County, Kaiti Dairy Cooperative Society is a farmers’ group that was started in 2012 as Mukuyuni Dairy Value Chain Self-Help Group.

Its 82 founders were engaged in the production and marketing of milk. The group’s partnership with Micro Enterprises Support Programme Trust (MESPT) dates back to 2016 and has inspired the society to achieve remarkable growth, especially in the area of milk value addition. MESPT supported the cooperative in the development of a strategic plan that would enable it to realise its potential. The Society members produce and market milk collectively.



Kivuva at the Kaiti Dairy Cooperative Society cooling plant.

MESPT also trained the farmers in hygiene and safety aspects of milk production. Additionally, they were facilitated to attend field days to learn new skills in dairy farming. “I have benefitted from the training offered by MESPT. The skills I acquired were on animal husbandry, feeding, business planning, value-addition, and marketing. We are currently adding value to our milk at the society level,” says Ms. Hellen Kivuva, 44, a mother of four children and a member of the society.

Kivuva is contented with the roles played by her society in marketing her milk. “Before I joined the society in 2006, I had incurred losses due to lack of a market for my milk. The problem has been solved. I wait for my payment at the end of the month — a lump sum amount that enables me to achieve my investment goals,” she says.

According to Kivuva, the other benefits of membership to the society and holding an account include access to loans. “I took a loan of KES 50,000 and bought a cow,” she adds.

Mr. John K. Masyula, 71, is a founding member of the society. He owns 11 cows, six of which are lactating. He supplies 20 litres to the dairy. Masyula says he is a better farmer as a result of training by MESPT. “Currently, there is a market for our milk although this has partly been interrupted by COVID-19. Value addition ensures that all our milk is marketable,” says Masyula.



Masyula outside Kaiti Dairy Cooperative Society cooling plant.

According to Masyula, the dairy value chain is beneficial to many people in Kaiti. “I personally employ two casual labourers on my farm daily. When farmers are paid for their milk at the end of the month, they pay agrovets and buy food for their families,” he adds.

“MESPT officials visit us regularly to encourage us as we strive to meet our society’s objectives. They have also been supportive of our endeavours to add value to our milk. We now produce yoghurt and *mala*,” says Mr. Peter Mboya, the acting manager at the society’s Kaiti plant.

The partnership with MESPT rejuvenated and restructured the dairy value chain in Kaiti Sub-County. MESPT offered the society several training sessions on dairy farming and production. In 2017, the Trust provided the society with a milk cooler. The cooler has helped in ensuring the quality of the milk by chilling it for longer shelf life. Employees working at the cooling plant have been trained in standard operating procedures and food safety.

Back to history, training and acquisition of a cooler motivated the self- help group to transform into a dairy cooperative and was registered in 2018 with 53 members then. Milk production rose from 200 to 300 litres per day the same year. The society subsequently opened a satellite milk marketing point at Wote, the capital of Makueni County and received a milk ATM, weighing machine, *tuktuk* and an extra cooler with a capacity of 500 litres from the County Government of Makueni.

In 2019, Kaiti Dairy Cooperative Society merged with Kilala Dairy in Ukia Ward which processes between 250 and 300 liters of milk per day. In the same year, the merged group digitised record keeping through support from the Kenya Crops and Dairy Market Systems Programme.

All active milk producing farmers opened accounts with Universal Traders Sacco (UTS) that partners with the society in ensuring financial access to farmers. Members of Kaiti Dairy currently receive their milk payment through the Sacco. Current milk production after the merger stands

at 1,000 litres per day. The cooperative's current membership is 306 (161 from Kaiti and 145 from Kilala). Plans are afoot to partner with the county government for vaccination services and improved breeds. The Coronavirus has affected milk marketing negatively especially due to closure of schools and reduction of business in hotels as well as reduced consumer incomes.

Armed with a strategic plan, the society has approached the county government seeking a KES 20 million loan. "It was easy for us to be given audience by the county government officials because of the strategic plan. We are seeking the loan to buy 100 pedigree cows for our farmers," says Mr. Jonah Malika, the society's chairperson. Farmers need to increase their dairy herds to be able to satiate the need for milk at Kathonzweni plant. Malika is leading by example; he supplies Kaiti Dairy Cooperative Society with 80 litres of milk per day.



Malika inside the Kaiti cooling plant.

Milestones have been achieved in the society's journey that is focused on creating job opportunities; ensuring that every farmer earns a living through dairy farming; becoming the leading/best dairy in Makueni County; producing 10,000 litres of milk a day through improved quality breed; increasing membership to 1,500 members; adding value to the milk and expanding their market reach.

The society through its unique pricing, has catered to the needs of all economic segments without any compromise on their product quality. Kaiti cooperative buys milk from the farmer at an average KES 40 per litre and retails between KES 50 to KES60 per litre. They sell to nearby primary and secondary schools at a fixed price of KES 60 per litre. Market factors at times affect pricing of milk where prices drop to lows of KES 30.

Employment creation

The society has four employees at Mukuyuni and two at Kilala. They also sub-contract motorbike owners to collect milk from farmers and delivering it to the dairies' collection, bulking and cooling centres. Milk is transported in recommended stainless-steel cans. For quality milk, the society's staff ensures that milk is handled and stored as safely as possible to minimise risks of microbial food safety hazards.

The cooperative also offers artificial insemination services to its members and non-members to enhance animal health and breeding. According to Mboya, the society offers animal vaccination for members and treatment at subsidised rates.

For Kaiti-Kilala farmers, this is a case of leapfrogging obstacles of integration into value chain development by collaborating, pooling quantities, and coordinating for improved quality and profitability.

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