

**Experience Report on Master’s Thesis Data Collection in Coastal Kenya**

**Topic: Possibilities to increase small scale Farmer Participation in Organic Moringa Contract Farming**



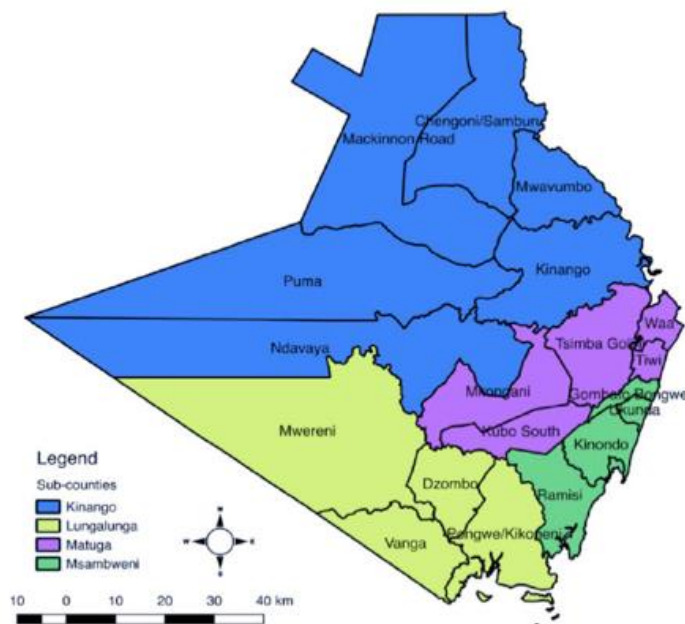
a) General impression of the host institution

In the context of my MSc thesis, I collected data within Live Love Well (LLW) and received supervision by Karatina University in Kenya. LLW demonstrates a sustainable agribusiness business, aiming at value chain integration of organically produced Moringa products supplied by small-scale farmers to enhance social and environmental impact. The start-up company's processing plant is located in Msambwueni Sub-county (Figure I), nearby Diani Beach, where I stayed most of the time.

**Moringa Value Chain at LLW**



The small scale farmers who produce for the company are located across Kwale county, mostly in the fertile sub-counties Matuga and Msambwueni (Figure II). Thus, my data collection implied quite a lot of travelling. Due to rather bad roads, the households were only accessible with a Motor bike. To save some time, I decided to stay three weeks with my translator in a village of Shimbahills, an area where most farmers are located, stretching across Msambwueni and Matuga. For the rest of the time I stayed in an accommodation in Diani, which was provided by the company.



*Figure 1: Kwale County administrative and political boundaries, Source: Kwale Integrated Development Plan 2019-2022*

My primary contact person was Talitha Hogebrug, co-founder of Live Love Well. We have been in touch on a regular basis prior to my arrival and I have shared the research proposal for confirmation in advance. Upon my arrival I met up with my second supervisor Dr Dennis from Karatina University who has been of great help in kick starting my research stay. In particular, Dr Dennis supported me in developing a data collection tool appropriate for the local conditions. Due to his experience in collecting data among farmers in coastal Kenya, he was able to give me a number of useful insights regarding cultural differences and ethical considerations, travel distances to consider and appropriateness of interview questions.

Live Love Well is well connected with the entrepreneurial value chain community in coastal Kenya, which allowed me to establish a relatively large network with people working in similar fields. Over the course of my stay, I increasingly attended associated stakeholder forums and discussions which was an extremely useful platform to learn from local institutional experts and to connect with interview partners.



*Data collection with Farmers, Source: own pictures*



*The Live Love Well Team and Farmers, Source: own pictures*

## b) Content and purpose of my stay abroad

The research idea which led to my final data collection in Kenya is rooted in an internship experience in Uganda, whereby I was involved in a conservation agriculture project in the Mt Elgon region of eastern Uganda. Upon working with several villages on the conversion to more sustainable agriculture, I realized how challenging community engagement can be and how heterogeneous they are. My field work revealed that there are quite a number of farmers who are already practicing conservation agriculture, others aren't but are willing, whilst some are not familiar with organic farming practices at all. The same holds for the Coastal Kenyan context. Eager to transform future livelihoods and environment in an eastern African region for the better, I wanted to investigate how one can make sustainable agriculture an attractive option for small scale farmers. Upon a number of conversations with experts of organizations working in the field of behavior change and sustainable small scale farmer business models I eventually came across Talitha Hogebrug, co-founder of Live Love Well (LLW).

Back then LLW just started to recruit small scale farmers for their production and was of great need to find out *how to increase the small scale farmer participation in organic moringa farming*. This became my final research topic. Participation is, however; not just a matter of farmer's willingness, but also depends on requirements set by the company.

With the initial aim to allow a larger proportion of small-scale farmers to benefit from Contract farming my research investigated what motivates farmers to participate and the reasons for which they don't want to or cannot participate.

The data collection consisted of:

- 2 pilot test interviews
- 3 interviews with local institutional experts (Kwale county government officials)
- 1 Interview with the outgrower relations manager of Kwale Coconut
- 1 Interview with an agronomist from Vert limited
- 4 Interviews within the LLW management
- 54 farmer Interviews

The findings revealed that the majority of farmers are not participating, because they are not qualified. Out of a random household sample of 34 farmers distributed across the region only 37,5 percent were able to participate. Interestingly, major reasons for non-participation are associated with organic certification requirements, such as the use of inorganic fertilizers or availability of land. The company requires farmers to have a minimum of 1 acreage, however; many farmers actually have less land available. With regards to farmers motivations it turned out that the number one reason for not being willing to join the LLW outgrower scheme is the lack of trust in export contracting companies due to prior contract renegeing. Furthermore, low valuation of information during the recruitment process led to lack of understanding of the contract.

Finally, the company was confronted with the findings and solutions to increase the participation were discussed. As a result of my data collection, the company reduced the certification requirements for the majority of small scale farmers and switched production systems to agroforestry. Furthermore, a producer group was established to create economies of scale. In this way small sale farmers with less than 1 acre of land availability can be clustered and collection centers used as a collective marketing strategy. Last but not least, the contract has been modified according to my suggestions, including a translation into Swahili, a clear demonstration of costs and benefits, as well as a clause indicating which authority would stand up on behalf of farmers in the case of contract renegeing.

Although, the preparation and adjustment of the research topic to the case study was quite time consuming, it was rewarding to see the impact of my study through direct practical implementation.

c) Criticism and recommendations

Living in Kenya can be quite expensive if one wants to live according to European standards. However, you always have the option to eat and live more local, which makes life much cheaper. Finding nice and safe local places is easy once you are in the country and get to know people. So I would advise to find an Airbnb for the first month and then explore the local scene. One can find an Airbnb room in Diani for about 300 euros a month.

*Visa*

The visa application takes about one week and can be processed through the following website: <https://www.kenyaimmigration.org/visa-fees>. Be careful, there are many other websites which charge you a higher price. It takes about 7 days for the visa to process. I applied for the Toursit eVisa (Single entry for 90 days). In case you choose to stay longer in the country, don't worry, it is fairly easy to extend your stay. I extended my visa once, which was easily done in the migrations office in Mombasa, a big harbor city close to Diani. It cost me only an additional 30 euros.

*Transportation*

Transportation is very easy as there are taxi motorbikes, tuc tucs (three wheel taxis) and Matatus (public transportation mini busses). You can just stand by the road and wait until either one is picking you up. I personally travelled longer distances with Matatus as they are by far the cheapest option.

Culturally, Kenya has quite a heterogenous population with a large number of ethnic groups. But everyone is very friendly and helping. If you have time to learn Swaheli, Kenyans will love it and it makes the field work in rural areas much easier. I had to get a translator for most of the interviews with farmers as the majority does not speak English. However, in cities and more touristic places you get away with English very well.

*Translation*

In case you need a translator for your data collection I would recommend to do this upon your arrival. Some things are just easier to organize once you are in the country and start to interact with the local realities.

### *Travel Insurance*

It is important to have a travel health insurance. I can highly recommend Visitors from Central: [www.central.de](http://www.central.de)

### *Importance of adaptive capacity in the research process*

It is very difficult to anticipate the conditions in which you have to collect your data really look like on the ground and one should be prepared for improvisation and flexibility to adapt the research process according to local realities. Despite several skype calls and discussions on my research and the final confirmation of my research proposal by LLW, the local conditions turned out to be very different to what I expected. As a result, I was left with the decision to either find a new case study that fits my research problem or to adjust my research problem to the case study context. I decided for the latter and consequently had to prolong my stay. Retrospective and after a feedback discussion with the local institution, we concluded that for future Master students with complex research problems, it is advisable to make one self-familiar with the local context and conditions under which the study will have to take place beforehand. This implies that students should visit the country and institution/organization/case study beforehand and/or know the local context with regards to the research problem well. Regardless, of the fact that I had to adjust my research topic, data collection in a developing country in Africa can be quite time consuming and I would generally advise students to account at least 10 weeks for the stay. I ended up travelling enormous distances to interview farmers and often could only do 1-2 Interview per day.