

EXPERIENCE OF COUNTIES IN SOIL FERTILITY MANAGEMENT-PROGRAMMES AND REGULATIONS

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Introduction

- Soil fertility and consequently agricultural productivity in Kenya has been declining over the years. A good example is maize, the staple food for a majority of Kenyans which dropped from a high of 30-40 bags per acre in the 80s to an average of 12-15 bags per acre by 2013.
- In view of the reduced productivity of most crops, County government's key development priority has been to reverse the declining production, increase productivity and hence enhance farmers income.
- Attempts have also been made to address the high cost of farm inputs and optimize their use by subsidizing the cost.
- A number of counties have undertaken soil sampling and testing to establish soil nutritional status so as to recommend the most appropriate farming practices and fertilizers to be applied to revitalize production and more so in the face of the big four agenda where achieving 100% Food and nutritional security has been given priority.

1. Fertilizer cost reduction

- County governments have come up with the fertilizer cost reduction programme to enhance uptake of soil specific fertilizer by making it affordable and attractive to the smallholder farmers with less than 5 acres.
- The main objective of the programme is to enhance optimal utilization of soil and crop specific fertilizers and hence increase productivity per acre.
- The subsidy programme has been used to introduce to farmers fertilizers blends emerging in the market and restore the depleted meso and micro nutrients which are absent in most of the fertilizers which have been existing in the market.
- Some fertilizer blends have been known to have less acidifying effect to the soils compared to the commonly used planting fertilizer, DAP.

Other programmes being implemented include;

2. Intensive capacity building and sensitization about integrated soil fertility management to change farmer's perception about use of the 'traditional' types of fertilizer
3. Liming of the soil to raise the pH
4. Introduction and use of technologies such as **conservation agriculture**. Counties have invested in CA equipment to promote the technology
5. Use of soil ameliorates like Black Earth
6. Technologies to enhance uptake of nutrients from the soil such as Rizofos and Panoramix are new technologies counties are introducing and promoting by subsidizing them heavily to enhance uptake
7. Use of Biofertilizers and foliar feeds
8. Manure application to increase the organic carbon content in the soils

The programmes have achieved momentous impact on the lives of county residents;

- The key among them is increased farm productivity. As a result of fertilizer subsidy intervention, optimal use of fertilizer has been enhanced and production level of for example maize has increased from an average of 12-15 bags to over 20 bags per acre in the major maize producing counties thus increasing household food security.
- It has also led to reduction of poverty due to increased earnings.
- The use of the fertilizer blends has tremendously improved the soil nutrient status on the farms where they were used
- An opportunity exists for industry players to partner with counties and demonstrate best practices and new technologies in model farms set up in counties up to Ward level.

Conclusion

- The overall objectives of the programmes have been partially achieved. Farmers are now aware of soil fertility status and many of them have since analyzed their soils to know the fertility status and use soil & crop specific fertilizers.
- This will go a long way in ensuring that production is done in a profitable and sustainable manner.
- The success of the programmes has made a number of Counties adopt them to address crop production and soil related challenges.
- Counties such as Trans Nzoia, Kakamega, Bungoma, Uasin Gishu, Vihiga have all moved to crop specific and soil specific fertilizer brands.
- However, a lot more needs to be done to increase budgetary allocations to increase farmer coverage since the programmes do not cover all farmers and the quantities are never enough.

Regulations

- Agriculture is a fully devolved function and the COK 2010 transferred the crop husbandry function to County Governments
- Legal Notice No.137 of 2013 also transferred the role of construction of storage structures to Counties.
- Further, pursuant to the Fourth Schedule of the CoK 2010, Inputs and subsidy provision is a fully devolved function, meaning County Governments have full powers to procure and distribute fertilizer to farmers.
- However, NCPB, the sole distributor of government subsidized fertilizer still operates using the NCPB Act Cap 338 which was developed before the advent of devolution and is therefore inconsistent with the Constitutional provisions for a devolved function.

- Presently, fertilizer industry is regulated by the Fertilizer and Animal Foodstuffs Act (Cap 345). The Act regulates the importation, manufacture and sale of agricultural fertilizers and animal foodstuffs.
- Further, the Act provides for approval of fertilizers and licensing of sterilizing plants; inspection of fertilizers and records by authorized inspectors; analysis of samples taken by inspectors; financing of the regulatory program through licensing fees and administration; and enforcement and assessment of penalties.
- Fertilizer Bill has been drafted to replace and address areas not covered in the current Act, but it is awaiting parliamentary vote and presidential assent.
- KEBS is expected to regulate quality at all levels in the chain, but due to their limited capacity, there is weak quality control at the retail end resulting in selling from open bags, some underweight bags and mislabeling.

Recommendations

- National Government should transfer the fertilizer fund to Counties as conditional grant to enable Counties distribute fertilizer since inputs provision function is a devolved role.
- There is need to increase fertilizer subsidy budgetary allocation and subsidize fertilizer across board to level the ground for all industry players
- The County Governments can leverage on the Regional Economic blocks to enjoy the economies of scale as opposed to central procurement by National Government
- KALRO should undertake National Soil mapping & analysis to determine the soil nutrient requirements to inform decision making when it comes to fertilizer importation. This will ensure that, soil, region ,and crop specific fertilizers are procured.
- Counties can identify & manage depots for storage and distribution of fertilizer and use existing storage structures since construction of storage facilities was transferred to County Governments.



THANK YOU