Sustainable Land Management in Western Kenya – Lessons Learnt and Future Directions

Insights from stakeholder workshops

Dr. Serah Kiragu, Dr. Anne Flohr
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1. Background: Land degradation and SLM in western Kenya

For smallholder farmers in the densely populated region of western Kenya, subsistence farming forms the main source of food and livelihood support. But land degradation in the region threatens agricultural productivity and food security of households especially of resource-poor farmers. Sustainable land management (SLM) technologies have in recent years been a focus of the Government of Kenya and numerous development partners, due to their potential to minimize degradation, rehabilitate degraded lands and increase food production. GIZ, one of Kenya’s key development partners, is currently implementing a program on “Soil Protection and Rehabilitation for Food Security in western Kenya”. The programme is part of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) Special Initiative “One World, No Hunger”. The Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies – Potsdam (IASS) is tasked to support this program through research that identifies the hindrances and enabling conditions that constrain or support smallholder farmers to practice SLM.

The soil protection and rehabilitation for food security accompanying research project by IASS

The accompanying research takes a transdisciplinary approach in development and implementation of participatory research agendas for exploring pathways to overcome hindrances to sustainable land management.

Under the premise that a comprehensive approach to soil protection and rehabilitation for food security needs to pursue multiple goals – durable soil health, equitable access to and sharing of benefits from (land) resources; and short and longterm profitability, the project’s overarching research question is: What is needed to achieve broad-based and long-term soil protection and rehabilitation that serve food security?

In particular, the research engages multi-stakeholder dialogues in finding entry points and in developing pathways for overcoming the hindrances to SLM in concrete local contexts through taking a broader perspective underlining the “importance of socio-economic and institutional factors beyond the farm-level”.
2. A multi-stakeholder approach: Lessons learnt from past SLM promotion in western Kenya

As a first step towards improving knowledge on such hindrances and enabling conditions for SLM, IASS facilitated two Lessons Learnt workshops with SLM stakeholders in western Kenya in the months of February and March 2016. The aim of these workshops was to jointly reflect upon and draw lessons from successes and challenges in past efforts of implementing SLM promotion programs and projects in western Kenya. This report shares the outcomes of these workshops. The workshops’ overall design was informed by the IASS philosophy of working at the science-policy-practice interface and acknowledging that all forms of knowledge count and should be given due hearing through multi-stakeholder dialogues in the process of seeking solutions to sustainable development.

To ensure that farmers’ voices are duly heard, the first 2-day workshop, held in Kakamega, assembled 26 smallholder farmers who were beneficiaries of past SLM projects implemented in the region.

Through a set of participator sessions, the farmers jointly assessed the degree to which past projects helped them to overcome the challenges they face in adopting SLM practices and in what respect future programs could learn from and improve on these past efforts. Results of this farmers’ workshop were then fed into the second 2-day workshop, held in Kisumu, which assembled project implementers, extension agents and policy makers with the aim of having these experts exchange on good practice examples and on “what has not worked” in past SLM promotion efforts.

Six SLM projects implemented in Bungoma, Kakamega and Siaya were subjected to analysis and assessment by the workshop participants. The prime criterion for selecting these six was their approach of linking SLM to food security and their attempts of tackling broader institutional hindrances and enabling conditions for SLM that lie beyond the farm level. In providing specific examples, the workshop outputs discussed in the following sections make reference to these six projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SELECTED PROJECTS</th>
<th>LEAD IMPLEMENTING AGENCY</th>
<th>LOCATION OF IMPLEMENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nitrogen to Africa – N2Africa</td>
<td>Centre for Tropical Agriculture – CIAT</td>
<td>Kakamega</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Sustainable Community-based Input Credit Scheme</td>
<td>Kenya Forestry Research Institute – KEFRI</td>
<td>Siaya</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Kenya Agricultural Carbon Project – KACP</td>
<td>Vi Agroforestry</td>
<td>Bungoma, Kakamega, Siaya</td>
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</table>
3. Learning from success

There was acknowledgement that significant positive outcomes had been experienced by the project beneficiaries, the farmers. The following project elements were applauded for having made a difference in the way farmers embraced SLM technologies.

i. Knowledge and skills: Farmers from across all six SLM projects under discussion appreciated the value of knowledge and skills provided to them by actors engaged in SLM promotion. They acknowledged value of capacity building initiatives ranging from trainings in general agronomic practices to specific skills such as growing and utilization of soybeans, composting, intercropping maize and soybeans.

ii. Approaches to learning: Demonstration plots are popular with farmers. The opportunity to take part in and observe practical application of SLM practices within their locality – normally hosted by a volunteer farmer, is considered by participating farmers an effective approach to learning. In the SIMLESA project for instance, farmers clearly recall that they were able to make side by side comparisons of performance in the maize-legume intercrop demonstration plots. It is however important to note that although the approach of volunteer/lead/master/model farmer is popular with many farmers and project promoters, some farmers have expressed discontentment as they watch external resources repeatedly being concentrated at one farmer in the locality as project promoters tend to work with same farmers.

iii. Beyond crop production – value chain approach: Farmers hold in high regard, SLM interventions that embrace more than soil fertility improvement, to include other elements of agricultural value chains. Some examples include seed bulking in KAPAP, market linkages through farmer cooperatives under N2Africa and SRI.

iv. Strength in partnerships: SIMLESA innovation platforms, comprising of farmer representatives, traders, food processors, researchers, government officials were considered favourable learning and exchange spaces due to the diversity of membership in the partnerships. Though farmers feel the feedback loop needs to be strengthened for more effective exchange, the platforms are considered to hold valuable potential.

v. Credit for SLM inputs: The Kenya agricultural carbon and SCOBICS projects acknowledged from the onset the value of incorporating credit access by farmers if SLM interventions are to gain substantive adoption levels. It may be too early to make bold claims on the success rate of the village saving loan scheme under the Kenya agricultural carbon Project (phase I ended in 2013). For SCOBICS, the credit design still runs 11 years since the donor funded project ended (2005).
4. Learning from challenges

Despite these positive assessments, farmers and external actors agreed that the struggle for achieving food security through SLM was far from won due to a multitude of challenges faced in project implementation, including the following:

i. **Hard realities of agricultural extension:** The importance of agricultural extension in disseminating knowledge, technologies and agricultural information, and in linking farmers with other actors in the economy is unquestionable when aiming to promote SLM. Yet, county governments which took over agriculture services from national government in 2013 following devolution through promulgation of a new constitution in 2010 are still struggling to come to grips with the new responsibilities. Farmers lament they are not adequately and timely reached by extension services while county governments fault lean budget for its inability to provide adequate extension staff and accompanying facilitation. Farmers are skeptical of the predominant demand-driven approach to extension which puts onus on them to seek out extension services. Groups-based extension, an alternative aimed at reaching marginalized farmer populations remains project-based on pilot locations for pre-determined project time period. Farmer-to-farmer extension based on volunteerism is not sustainable. Recent piloting of privately contracted extension, for example by the KAPAP project, has not been well received by farmers due to conflicting perception of the valuation of the services – farmers felt the remuneration to the private service providers was not worth the services rendered. A review of delivery of agricultural extension services is therefore timely to allow for delivery stratification based on farmer characteristics and needs.

ii. **Access to and control of land resources** is considered a critical hindrance to youth uptake of farming despite being targeted by SLM projects – as parents are reluctant to bequeath land assets to their children or subdivide their land. N2Africa, SCOBICs and the Kenya Agricultural Carbon projects had a youth component that did not take off for these reasons. The farming generation-gap is worsened by social stigma that does not consider farming a worthwhile profession but an option only for academic failures.

iii. **Farmer organizations not yet on their feet** – Like in many other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, farmer organizations are increasingly being regarded as crucibles for enhancing farmers’ access to crucial services such as markets and credit. However, some fail to take off due to start-up organizational, technical and financial challenges. In Bungoma, a village savings and loan scheme under the Kenya Agricultural Carbon project failed to take off due to internal malpractices. SCOBICs, though still functioning 11 years since exit of donor support, has been unable to scale up to offer services to other farmer organizations. Out of the 31 farmer cooperatives formed under the support of KAPAP, only 9 were still functioning by the beginning of 2016. Member farmers lament that external technical and financial support was withdrawn too early. Project designs including their exit strategies need to more strongly consider institutional and economic viability of the organizations they create or work with in post-project period.
iv. Access to markets: Although efforts by governments and development partners in western Kenya to address market access for smallholder produce have been on the increase, challenges abound. Where soybean markets have been developed through linkage with large-scale soy-processors, farmers lack sufficient and consistent volumes. To date, Mumias District Federation of Soybean Farmers, a Kakamega-based soy beans-farmers’ cooperative, struggles to accumulate sufficient soya bean volumes for corporate clients. Meanwhile, farmers from distant locations lament of no awareness of such soya bean market options. Soybeans are considered a valuable yet inexpensive soil nitrogen restoration option ideal for resource-poor farmers. But lack of palatability leading to low household-level utilization and lack of markets continue to throttle soybeans’ widespread uptake by farmers.

Feasibility of target markets is in some instances not given adequate consideration. The KAPAP project efforts in supporting drying of vegetables for sale have not been rewarded as designed. The local population does not have a culture of consuming dried vegetables. The far off markets such as Nairobi or refugee camps in the north and north-eastern Kenya are too far from reach by a young farmer cooperative that is still struggling to get on its feet.

vi. Farm inputs – Farmers lament of the high cost of farm inputs ranging from fertilizers to certified clean seeds. But even more worrying, is their concern over what are considered sub-standard inputs or “fake inputs” circulating in the market place. Planting seeds in particular were pointed out as the input mostly targeted by criminals who package sub-standard materials and release them to the market. Unavailability of some critical inputs in the locality of farmers was also raised. Examples: Biofix, the inoculant used to facilitate nitrogen fixation in the soil, Desmodium seeds used in push-pull technology for integrated pest management and lime for lowering soil acidity are not available in many general farm inputs outlets. These constraints hinder farmers from investing in SLM.
5. Workshop outcome messages: Moving to solutions

Farmers had one key message to share with actors in the agricultural sector – that of custodianship and the necessary enabling environment for SLM, as summed up in the figure below.

Institutional actors on the other hand, while acknowledging the pleas of the farmers, pointed at weaknesses in policies and institutions governing the agricultural sector as a big challenge.

Overall, farmers’ experiences with SLM provided institutional actors with input with which to tailor their efforts in supporting smallholder farming. At the second workshop, assembling farmers’ representatives and institutional actors, they jointly came to a consensus that:

- Policies and institutions for agricultural development in general and SLM in particular need to be improved and enforced.
- Counties, as the anchor institutions for agricultural development in a county, need to coordinate activities and contributions from all development partners under a multi-stakeholder coordination forum.
- An innovative hybrid model between demand and supply driven extension models needs to be explored to ensure all farmers including food-insecure and resource-poor farmers are reached.
- There is need for innovations to address family decision making processes which thwart women and youth’s rights of access to and control of resources especially land resources.
- Farmer organizations and collective action have a vital role to contribute in making agricultural inputs and outputs work for the poor and food-insecure farmers. They need to be supported to levels of self-sustainability.

These outcome messages were packaged into one summary document “the Chair’s Conclusions” (see Annex I), that outlines future themes for policy and research in support of SLM in the Western Kenyan context.

Farmers are stewards of sustainable land management. But they need an enabling environment consisting of

(i) adequate provision of services,
(ii) effective market regulation and control,
(iii) transparency and accountability of institutions and
(iv) strong representation of farmers’ voices and interests.
6. Next steps for IASS accompanying research and its partners

In accordance with IASS principles of multi-stakeholder dialogue, IASS Soil Rehabilitation staff team will continue working with SLM stakeholders in western Kenya on the themes collectively identified as priority areas for research and action (compare Chair’s Conclusions). As next steps, these themes will be developed into more concrete research proposals coming out of the above messages and follow up made for joint implementation with the western Kenyan partners. Two themes being considered as pioneers due to the inherent potential impact on food-insecure farmers are extension services and youth involvement in agriculture.

i. Making extension services work for the food-insecure smallholder farmers

As its research contribution to making extension services work for the food-insecure smallholder farmers, IASS will work closely with stakeholders in western Kenya to reflect on existing extension services delivery as a basis for elaborating diversity in delivery approaches, actors and localities for hybrid extension service packages. In particular, the research will interrogate and map out existing modes of extension service delivery as well as establish typologies of those who are reached and who are not. An extension needs assessment will be undertaken to establish the nature of heterogeneity of needs, with particular focus on supply-driven needs.

ii. Policies for youth agency – making agriculture cool for the youth

A frequently brought up but highly neglected research agenda is what needs to change particularly at policy and institutional levels, for young men and women (youth) to play a meaningful role in agriculture and food security. While aware of the breadth of this agenda, the research package will narrow down to youth already engaged in farming and to possibilities for supporting them better in taking up SLM. The focus will include but not be limited to investigating alternative options of access and tenure to land; youth access to agricultural financial services; institutionalization of young farmers’ voice as well as how formal education can offer a broader approach to agricultural education to provide youth with skills, understanding and innovative capacity they require to play an active role in farming.

iii. Farmer organizations

Collective action through farmer organizations is considered a viable option for addressing challenges of access to affordable farm inputs (through bulk procurement), accessing markets through produce bulking or championing farmers’ interests to policy makers. Yet creation of many farmer organizations is externally supported and may slump upon withdrawal of the external support. This research package will explore challenges of farmer organizations as well as options for strengthening their viability.
7. Closing observations: The value of continued dialogue

Both actor groups, farmers and SLM project implementers, strongly appreciated the opportunities for dialogue at the end of the two workshops. The request by policy makers that the dialogue provides content for policy making was the hallmark of institutional actors’ workshop. The follow-up in post-workshop feedback sessions conducted in the six SLM project areas with farmers who attended the Kakamega Farmers’ workshop were considered by farmers as a clear signal of commitment to genuine continuous engagement. IASS will build on the good will generated from these dialogues to pursue options for addressing farmers’ SLM needs /challenges through the above research agendas.
Annex I: Chair’s conclusions

Sustainable Land Management in Western Kenya: Lessons Learnt and Future Directions | March 2016

On the 2nd and 3rd of March 2016, farmer representatives jointly held a meeting with representatives of County Governments, development partners and academia to discuss the lessons learnt from the long-standing experience of implementing sustainable land management projects in the counties of Bungoma, Kakamega and Siaya. The purpose was to jointly identify contributions for a way forward on soil protection and rehabilitation and sustainable land management in western Kenya. The meeting was jointly convened by GIZ, German Development Cooperation, and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, IASS.

Appreciating and recognizing the active and diverse contributions by the participants and the open atmosphere of the meeting, this document summarizes the emerging consensus on this topic from the point of view of the chair, the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies. A full list of participants is attached to this outcome document. The purpose of the document is to stimulate debate among all stakeholders involved in order to support soil rehabilitation and sustainable land management for increased food security in the three counties.

The workshop built on the insights generated by an earlier workshop with farmers of the three counties with the same title. This farmers’ workshop concluded with the following message:

Farmers are the stewards of sustainable land management. But they need an enabling environment consisting of (i) adequate provision of services, (ii) effective market regulation and control, (iii) transparency and accountability of institutions and (iv) strong representation of farmers’ voices and interests.

Taking this message into account, participants emphasized the following themes with relevance for policy, practice and research:

- **There is a strong need to protect and rehabilitate soil resources in western Kenya.** Participants recognized that the protection and rehabilitation of soils is central to food security. Agricultural policies need to reflect this pivotal role of the soil resources of western Kenya. This holds true in particular as soil resources in many parts of the three counties suffer from degradation and decreasing soil fertility putting long-term food security and development of the three counties at risk. Public funding for agriculture and rural development in general needs to reflect this.

- **Improving policies and institutions is key to addressing many of the challenges to sustainable land management in a cross-cutting way.** There was a strong consensus that policies and institutions for agricultural development in general and sustainable land management in particular need to be improved and enforced. These policies need to take into account the complexity of the farming systems and the role of agriculture and sustainable land management in supporting sustainable livelihoods. There was also concern about the low percentage of funds of a given programme budget that actually arrives at the farmer level. To ensure effectiveness of the work done by institutions tasked to support farmers at various levels, these institutions need to work under principles of transparency and accountability in order to respond to instances of corruption.

- **Coordinate sustainable land management efforts.** There is a need to coordinate the various activities and contributions by all development partners
under the umbrella provided by national and county Government policies. A county-level multi-stakeholder forum may be worth considering as a steward of this coordination effort to achieve sustainability of sustainable land management endeavors (taking note of the example of Governor’s Roundtable Discussions and similar bodies). Adequate attention would need to be paid to include the voices and perceptions of food insecure farmers.

- Support for farmers’ interests organizations. Catering for farmers’ concerns is best achieved through empowering their own organizations. Strengthening farmers’ organizations and political interest representation must be an objective of all policy, research and programming efforts in the agricultural sector.

- An exit strategy needs to be thought of right from the beginning of any sustainable land management project. To ensure sustainability of investments in sustainable land management, an exit strategy needs to form part of any sustainable land management project. Exit strategies need to take into account the existing differences between farming households. For farmers oriented towards agribusiness, commercialization approaches need to be supported. Private sector participation needs to be explored in this regard. Exit strategies for food insecure farmers will continue to rely on further support by the public sector. Long-term institutional sustainability must be at the heart of these exit strategies.

- There is need to review the effectiveness of existing extension approaches in supporting food insecure farmers. Farmers participating in the workshop highlighted the shortcomings of the dominant demand-driven approach. They also questioned the public-private-partnership model to extension that is being piloted. Innovative hybrid demand and supply-driven extension models emerged as an area to be explored further. Funding levels for extension were also voiced as being low, thus effecting extension staffing levels and facilitation to get to the farmers. Improvement of budgetary allocation to extension was recommended.

- Responsive rural services are key to improving sustainable land management. There is need to think beyond extension services alone as ways of enabling farmers to enhance the sustainability of land management. Adequate provision of financial services, support in collective marketization of farming products or in organizing collective farm inputs purchasing are also important keys to unlocking the potential of farmers. A specific challenge faced by all actors providing these services is that of reaching those below the poverty line and most vulnerable parts of the population, in particular, women and youth. Addressing this challenge will require additional efforts made, dedicated budgets allocated and effective control mechanisms in place.

- Need to explore local innovations to address the challenge family decision-making processes pose to rights of access to and control of resources, land in particular by women and youth. Innovative policies and institutions (beyond the constitutional stipulations) to support women and youth to access resources (e.g. land, credit) also need to be explored to complement family decisions making.

- Appreciate all sources of knowledge and experiences. Perceptions on the core challenges of sustainable land management voiced by farmers and by other actors were complimentary, rather than overlapping. Hence, we need to take all sources of knowledge on sustainable land management into account when charting the way forward.

The chair welcomes comments and an open debate on these topics and looks forward to continued interaction in the near future! We will take this document proactively to other fora in order to publicize the messages of the workshop.

Serah Kiragu  
IASS Potsdam

Boniface Kiteme  
IASS Consultant  
Facilitator

Anne Flohr  
IASS Potsdam

Jes Weigelt  
IASS Potsdam
## Annex II: List of participants – Farmers’ workshop

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<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>REPRESENTATION</th>
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<td>COUNTY</td>
<td>REPRESENTATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kakamega County – KeNaFF</td>
<td>29. Monica Rapando – Kenya National Farmers Federation</td>
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<td>Bungoma County – KeNaFF</td>
<td>30. Paul Masin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Siaya County – KeNaFF</td>
<td>31. Kevin Yongo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Siaya County Extension</td>
<td>32. Lorna Oketch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bungoma County Extension</td>
<td>33. Maurice Emuria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kakamega County Extension</td>
<td>34. Patrick Wamaya</td>
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<tr>
<td>IASS</td>
<td><strong>IASS; Resource Persons; Support Team</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>35. Anne Flohr</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36. Serah Kiragu</td>
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<td>37. Larissa Stiem</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIZ</td>
<td>38. Flora Ajwera (Day 2 afternoon – for closing session)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource Persons</td>
<td>39. Prof. Inonda Mwanje</td>
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<td>40. MMUST – Dr. Humphrey Nyongesa</td>
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<td></td>
<td>41. MMUST – Dr. Alice Ndiema</td>
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<td></td>
<td>42. MMUST – Dr. Vitalis Ogema</td>
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<td></td>
<td>43. MMUST – Dr. Nicodemus Nyandiko</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support Team</td>
<td>44. Joseph Odayo – Research Assistant</td>
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<td>45. Inviolater Lusweti – Research Assistant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>46. William Obura – Research Assistant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>47. Eric Musundi – Visual Artist</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48. Winstone Atamba – Research Assistant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>49. Lilian Faith Mungau – Research Assistant</td>
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## Annex III: List of participants - Institutional Actors’ workshop

1. Hon. Philigona Ooko | Minister of ALF&C – Siaya County
2. Willys Atiang’ | Minister of ALF&C – Siaya County
3. Femina Ogolla | Minister of ALF&C – Siaya County
4. Chrisantus Mang’oli | Minister of ALF&C – Bungoma County
5. Jane Gitau | Minister of ALF&C – Bungoma County
6. Maurice Emuria | Minister of ALF&C – Bungoma County
7. Joseph Kisaka | Minister of ALF&C – Kakamega County
8. John Manyengo | Minister of ALF&C – Kakamega County
9. Patrick Wamaya | Minister of ALF&C – Kakamega County
10. John Mukalama | CIAT – N2Africa Project
11. Wycliffe Waswa | CIAT – N2Africa Project
12. Caroline Musee | Vi Agro-forestry – Carbon Project
13. Martin Barasa | Vi Agro-forestry – Carbon Project
14. Dr. Michael Misiko | CYMMYT – SIMLESA Project
15. Dr. David Mbakaya | KALRO – SIMLESA Project
16. Ms. Roselyn Juma Oside | KALRO – SIMLESA Project
17. Dr. J. K Ndufa | KEFRI – SCOBICS Project
18. Shadrack Mutavi | GIZ – Nairobi
19. Elise Pinners | GOPA – County Coordinator, Soil Project
20. Kenneth Mutoro | GOPA – Bungoma
22. Sarah Maiyo | WelthungerHilfe, Head of Project, Western Region
23. Stephen Milimo | Director, CREADIS
24. Charles Ogada | Ugunja Community CBO
25. Wycliffe Ouma | AGRICS Farm Inputs, Project Manager, Kakamega
26. Dr. Kefa Nyende | Kibabii University – Agricultural extension
27. Prof. George Odhiambo | Maseno University – STEPS project backstopping
28. Stephen Kasamani | Mumias Federation of Soyabean Producers
29. Habakuk Khaamala | Kakamega Farmer Field School
30. Monica Rapando | Kenya National Farmers Federation – Kakamega
31. Paul Masin | KENAFF – Bungoma
32. Kevin Yongo | KENAFF – Siaya
33. Mary Nafula | Bungoma – SRI
34. Paul Wekesa | Bungoma – Kenya Agricultural Carbon
35. Paul Okonga | Siaya – SCOBICS
36. Rosemary Oganga | Siaya – SIMLESA
37. Jared Ateya | Kakamega – KAPAP
38. Catherine Juma | Kakamega – N2Africa
39. Gerrit Gerdes | (Only Day 1), GIZ – Kisumu
40. Flora Ajwera | GIZ – Kisumu
41. Bonface Kiteme | Moderator
42. Inonda Mwanje | Moderator
43. Koudougou Saydou | Moderator – Benin/Bukina
44. Vitalis Ogemah | MMUST
45. Stanley Omuterema | MMUST
46. Alice Ndiema | MMUST
47. Joseph Muriuki | Camera