

- Country: Republic of Kenya
- Project Name: Project for Improving One Village One Product (OVOP) Services
- Duration: 2011–2014
- Implementing Agency: Ministry of Industrialization and Enterprise Development

1. Background of the Project

Kenya faces the task of making its private sector more competitive for socio-economic development because the country is poor in natural resources. Urban areas have most of the country's industries, investments and regular employment while rural ones face an unfavorable environment for enterprises to grow. Thus, revitalization of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which are common in rural areas, through utilization of local resources is a key for private sector development as it is expected to contribute to creating jobs, improving income, and reducing poverty.

The Government of Kenya has implemented the One Village One Product (OVOP) program since 2008 with JICA's technical assistance. This initiative began based on the experience of Oita prefecture, Japan, in rural development through OVOP to boost the competitiveness of MSMEs.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (MALF), 70% of small farmers and 80% of the labor force in small farms in Kenya are women. However, gender gaps exist in income and the access to extension services. The income of female farmers is as low as 50% of that of male ones.

2. Activities of the Project

This project aims to improve and expand the OVOP program by strengthening the administrative capacity of the OVOP secretariat in the Ministry of Industrialization and Enterprise Development (MOIED), promoting the program at the district and community levels, and strengthening the cooperation among relevant organizations. These activities are expected to help develop MSMEs and transform a product into a quality product. In turn, the gem and the network to produce it are expected to be a driving force for sustainable and self-reliant development of the region.

To strengthen the administrative capacity of the OVOP secretariat, the project has sensitized the OVOP philosophy to the high-ranking officials at the MOIED and strived to gain their understanding. As a result, the MIED incorporated OVOP in Kenya's industrial policy and set up a special budget in the MOIED's budget plan. The project has also aided human resource development through training in Oita, Japan, where the OVOP movement began, and Thailand that has incorporated the OVOP movement in its national program.

To promote the OVOP program at the district and community levels, a District OVOP Committee was formed in 22 target districts. In each district, workshops were held with officials who knew the locality well, farmer groups and farmer support agencies, and regional networks were formed. Organizations that backed the program include the Kenya Institute of Business Training, private financial institutions, and the Kenya Industrial Estate Ltd. By July 2014, the number of support organizations reached 40.

Through the networks, the project has implemented practical training for sound business management and turning products into quality products. It has helped nearly 200 producer groups whose members are 51.74% male and 48.26% female.

The training above covered bookkeeping, market research and action plan preparation, and stressed the importance of such activities for sound management. 176 women and 188 men attended the training.



Checking packages and prices



The participants in the market research session gave comments with excitement such as “I understood what to do to make our products better,” “The market research seemed difficult, but I did it well and enjoyed it” and “My products sold well.” Providing awareness and an image of success is the first step to cause behavior changes.



Business training

In business matching forums, the project introduced the producer groups to prospective business partners such as financial institutions, technical support institutions, and supermarkets, and provided producers with an opportunity to negotiate the possibility of business partnership. The project also provided training on necessary techniques to turn products into quality products in such items as dairy products, processed agricultural products, soaps, and lotions.



A female producer displaying her well-packaged products

After the training, the participants took action to calculate profits regularly, expand markets, and improve packages. As a result, 48 sample groups increased their sales by 4.3% and benefits by 32.8% on average. The total annual sales by all the groups reached 100 million Japanese yen.

A survey on the OVOP services showed that 81.7% of the producer groups helped by the OVOP program were revitalized.

3. Effects of the Project from the Gender Perspective

In rural areas of Kenya, it is hard for women to gain understanding of men on their community activities. Thus it is not easy for women to extend the scope of their activities and earn money at their disposal. These social norms sometimes keep women from participating in activities like the OVOP program.

However, activities that contribute directly to increasing cash income and developing business bring about a tangible output in the form of money. As women took part in the activities and increased their cash income, they made remarks such as “Men rate the project higher than before” and “It became easier to go out for meaningful activities.” They also took pleasure in having changed their behavior for the better. Among their comments are “I can make money that I can spend,” “I began attending a business management school with the income from my business,” and “I can run my business with more confidence.”

The participation of women has also brought positive effects to the project. Women who actively participate in practices and role plays and lead the other participants are common. Even in business scenes, women tend to keep books carefully and sustain their business activities. Thus it is fair to say that the participation of women in the training has caused positive effects such as better management index of business groups.



A female producers' group