

CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE TEA IN NYERI COUNTY, KENYA

ABSTRACT

Aim: To investigate the factors curtailing production of tea in Nyeri and come up with possible mitigating measures.

Study design: In-depth qualitative survey that involved the interviewing of 28 tea farmers and 4 key informants (Subcounty Agricultural Officers)

Place and Duration of Study: Othaya, Tetu and Mathira sub-counties of Nyeri County: July 2014

Methodology: Twenty eight farmers and 4 Key informants were interviewed using 2 structured questionnaires. The interviewees were selected using systematic random sampling. Data were collected on the challenges that face the tea sector as well as the mitigating measures used to address them. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages and means) using SPSS statistical program.

Results: Low prices, lack of technical know-how on some aspects of tea production, adverse climatic conditions, lack of markets for purple tea were identified as major issues limiting tea sector in the county. Possible solutions have been discussed in this paper.

Conclusion: Challenges that face the tea sector need to be addressed expeditiously in order to maximize tea production and earnings in Kenya.

Keywords: Tea, challenges, mitigating measures

1. INTRODUCTION

Kenya is the 3rd largest producer of tea. Tea is the leading cash crop in Kenya with the significant contribution to the economy as it contributes 20% of the export earnings [1]. It is the highest export earning single commodity and crop in Kenya. About 3 million (almost 10%) of the Kenyan population derive their livelihood from tea. It contributes significantly to infrastructure development and environmental conservation. The small holder sub sector contributes 60% of the total production of tea [1]. The task of managing small scale farmers lies with the Kenya Tea Development Agency [1].

Tea is produced best in tropical red loam mixed with volcanic soils found in the higher altitudes of Kenya usually between 1800-2000m above sea level. Soils are required to be well drained within 2 meters depth and have a PH range between 4.5 and 6.5. Tea thrives with rainfall ranging from 1,200mm to 2,500mm annually, preferably with long and sunny intervals [2]. These conditions are found in Nyeri County making it one of the leading producers of tea in Kenya.

Tea production is a function of a combination of several factors which include land, number of bushes planted and their age, labor availability and its utilization, plucking cycle, proximity to collection or buying centers, rainfall and soil conditions (fertility and level of pH) and

general tea husbandry [3]. Kenya tea is grown in prime lands capable of producing over 6 tons/ha/year of made tea under good cropping and weather. However, smallholder teas yield on the average less than 2 tons/ha/year of made tea due to the use of inappropriate agronomic and cultural practices resulting from low adaptation and adoption of developed and recommended research technologies [4]. This study attempts to identify and address these and other challenges in the tea production of Nyeri County.

2. METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted in July 2014 in Othaya, Tetu and Mathira subcounties of Nyeri County.

2.1 Site description

Othaya, Tetu and Mathira subcounties are classified as the tea and dairy zone. They fall under the LH1 ecological zone. They receive a mean of 1400-1800mm of annual rainfall. They lie at the altitude of 1950-2070m asl. Some parts of Othaya and Mathira are also classified as UM1 ecological zone which is the coffee-tea zone. These parts receive 1100-1600 mm of mean annual rainfall [5]. These parts are 1710-1780m asl. Soils in the subcounties are red volcanic soils. Soil Ph in Tetu and Othaya is strongly acidic with pH ranging from 4.1 to 4.4 and is moderately acidic in Mathira where it stands at 5.4 [6].

2.2 Questionnaire development

Twenty eight farmers and 4 Key informants were interviewed using 2 different structured questionnaires. A review of literature on tea production was conducted to provide a basis for constructing the questionnaires. A draft of questions was then constructed for each questionnaire. The questionnaires were discussed with the members of staff at the School of Agriculture, Karatina University and revision made according.

2.3 Sampling and interviewing

The 4 key informants were purposively selected from the subcounty offices of Othaya, Tetu and Mathira. Criteria used were their involvement in overseeing extension activities on tea production in the subcounties. Ten farmers were interviewed in each of the subcounties of Mathira and Tetu while 8 farmers were interviewed in Othaya. The farmers were selected using simple random sampling. This involved picking a random starting point in each of the subcounty and then picking the homesteads randomly.

2.4 Data collection and analysis

The researcher interviewed the farmers and key informants following the respective questionnaires. Each question was read and the respondents' responses were recorded. Data was collected on the challenges that face the tea sector as well as the mitigating measures used to address them. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages and means) using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical program.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socioeconomic data of the respondents

3.1.1 Age

Majority of the farmers were between 36 to 50 years. Only 8% were in the age bracket of 18 to 35 years (Table 1). This could be to the fact that tea farming is mainly done by the older generation. This reflects a widespread issue since in Kenya the average age of the farming fraternity is 60 years old [7]. The youth tend to shun agriculture as a dirty job and are look for 'white collar' jobs to sustain themselves. Key informant ages ranged from 36 -55 years still showing lack of involvement of youth in tea production.

3.1.2 Education Level

Majority of the farmers had primary/secondary school level of education (Table 1). This has implications for farmer education meaning that the materials should be simplified. Audio visuals and field demonstrations should be used to ensure all farmers understand whatever innovations that are being taught [8].

85 All key informants had the college education and held various positions in KTDA i.e. Tea
86 Extension, Production manager, Factory unit manager and Field services coordinator. All
87 the informants had worked for over 10 years. The college education and work experience
88 imply that they were well educated and able to pass technical information to farmers.

89 **3.1.3 Gender**

90 Most of the farmers interviewed were male (Table 1). This does not mean that women are
91 not involved in tea production. Studies indicate that women provide most of the labor in tea
92 production [9]. However, men tend to be involved in educational forums and surveys like the
93 present one while women are unable to attend due to numerous agricultural and household
94 chores. Tensions have also been recorded as a result of conflicts over the control of
95 proceeds of tea sales as the men are likely to receive them while women may not benefit
96 much. These negative gender relations affect tea production adversely and lead to low
97 productivity due to neglected tea fields [9].

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100

101 Table 1 Socioeconomic characteristics of farmers interviewed
102

SOCIO ECONOMIC DATA OF THE RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Age of respondents	
18 to 35 years	8%
36 to 50 years	44%
Over 51 years	48%
Education	
Did not go to School	11%
Primary school level	37%
Secondary school level	41%
High school/college level	11%
Gender	
Male	91%
Female	9%

103
104 **3.1.4 Size of the farm**
105 The average size of the farms of the respondents was 2.2 acres. This indicates that most of
106 the farmers are small scale and borne out by the fact that the farmers interviewed are
107 serviced by KTDA whose mandate is to aid in production and marketing of tea produced by
108 small scale farmers. Other authors found that the average size of land under tea was 0.85
109 acres. Seventy eight percent of the farmers had one acre and below under tea production
110 [10]. Small land sizes have been reported to be constrain productivity in Nyeri County due to
111 declining soil fertility [10]. .

112 **3.2 Sources of information for the farmers**
113 Majority of the farmers obtained information on tea from KTDA (Table 2). Half of the farmers
114 indicated that they obtained information on tea from the public extension service. Less than
115 half of the farmers indicated that they did not obtain information from fellow farmers. These
116 findings are in line with the fact that one of the roles of KTDA is training of farmers and the
117 role of public extension service in farmers' fields schools [10].
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125 Table 2 Sources of information and KTDA farmers field schools awareness and membership
126 of the respondents

	Percentage
Sources of Information	
Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA)	75%*
Government Extension Service	50%*
Fellow farmers	48%*
KTDA Farmers Field Schools	
Are aware of them	79%
Are not aware of them	21%
Are members of the FFSs	48%
Are not members of FFSs	52%

127 *Percentages do not add up to 100% as the farmers were allowed to give multiple answers
128

129 **3.3 KTDA farmer field Schools (FFSs)**

130 Majority of the respondents have heard of the FFSs (Table 2). Almost half of the farmers
131 were members of the KTDA of FFSs. Those that were members of the schools were asked
132 to rate them. Forty six percent rated them as adequate while 38% rated them as highly
133 adequate. Only 15% rated the schools as not adequate. Key informants indicated that the
134 role of the FFSs was training of farmers in all aspects of tea production as well as other
135 crops or animals that farmers choose, provide a link between public extension and tea
136 farmers and mobilizing leaders among the farmers.

137
138 A study done on the impact of the field schools indicated that the farmers were very positive
139 with the program however the income of participating group was lower than non-participating
140 group. This was attributed to increased use of fertilizer and labor [11]. KTDA has also
141 indicated that that tea production has been boosted by 30% country wide [12]. This raises
142 the question of who is benefitting from the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices and
143 this could also explain the 15% who rate the schools as not adequate. KTDA plans to roll out
144 the FFS program to the 3200 collecting centers it has with the help of the Unilever Company
145 and other stakeholders. Environmental conservation is an important part of modern
146 agriculture. Proposed certification of the KTDA factories by Rain Forest Alliance will also
147 safeguard future tea production in Kenya [12]. However, the income aspects of the adopting
148 farmers need to be addressed.

149
150 Other challenges were enumerated by key informants included by low support of the schools
151 by young farmers, low farmer enrolments, frequent absenteeism of some members,
152 interruption due to some social activities in the local areas, limited time for training trainers,
153 limited funds to compensate trainers and lengthy program which causes a lot of drop outs.
154 These challenges need to be addressed.
155
156

3.4 Farmers' knowledge of tea production practices

Majority of the farmers were able to describe various tea production practices which included land clearing (slashing of bushes, cutting and uprooting of trees that are done before the rains), land preparation (digging), crop establishment (plant spacing, depth of planting, transplanting). Findings from key informants also support this. Mean adoption percentages for land preparation, planting techniques, weeding and plucking table establishment were high (Figure 1). There were somewhat lower mean percentages the on use of manure, plucking frequency and pruning (Figure 1). Low tea output has been attributed lack of diffusion of adequate production technologies and inefficient use of fertilizers [2].

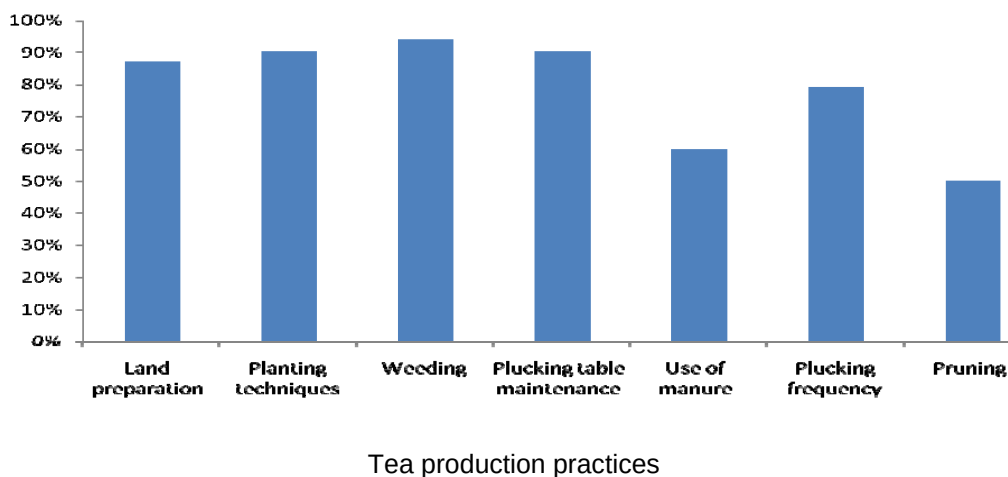


Figure 1 Farmers knowledge on tea production practices in Nyeri County

3.5 Fertilizers

Fertilizers are provided by the government on credit to the farmers.

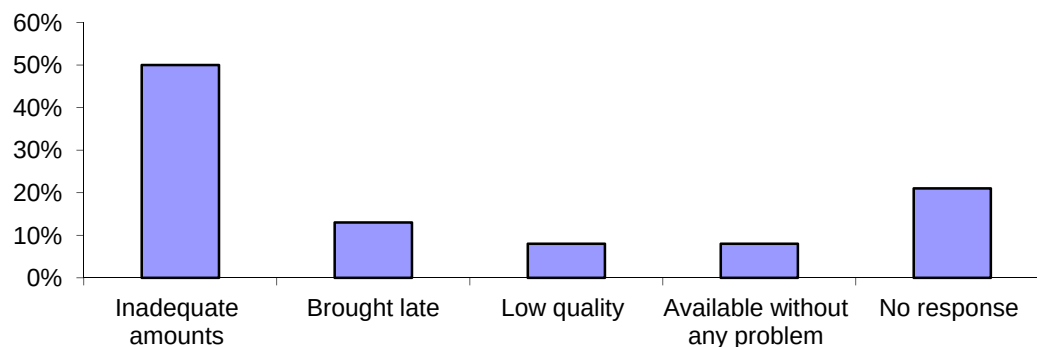


Figure 2 Availability and quality of fertilizers used by the respondents in tea production

Half of the farmers indicated that fertilizers were available but the amounts given were not adequate in some cases. Small percentage of the farmers indicated that the fertilizers are available but they were brought late or fertilizers provided were of low quality. Few farmers indicated that the fertilizers were available without any problems (Figure 2).

194 Majority of the farmers (88%) indicated that they had no problem with excessive fertilizer
195 use. However, key informants indicated the problem does exist and said the Tea Research
196 Foundation of Kenya (TRFK) tests soils periodically and recommends liming where need be.
197 Farmer education has also been used to reduce its occurrence.

198 **3.6 Pests and Diseases**

199 Majority of the farmers indicated that they did not have any problems with pests in tea
200 production (Table 3). Of the farmers that experienced the pests, aphids and rodents were a
201 problem. Control measures used were rodenticides. Other farmers said that the aphids
202 were killed by rains. Most of the key informants (75%) also indicated that pests do affect tea
203 production however their effect on tea is minimal. Key informants indicated that the pests
204 observed in farmers' fields were red spider mites, scales, thrips, aphids and crevice mites.
205 Control measures suggested were cultural measures like good nutrition. This supports the
206 view that by and large tea production in Kenya is pesticide free.

207

208 Table 3 Pests, Diseases and soil erosion incidence on farmers' fields
209

	Percentage
Pests	
Observed pests	18%
Did not observe any pests	82%
Diseases	
Observed disease (<i>Armillaria</i> root rot)	54%
Did not observe any diseases	46%
Soil Erosion	
Is a problem	28%
Is not a problem	72%

210

211 Over half of the farmers (54%) indicated that *Armillaria* root rot is a problem in tea
212 production. The control measure of this disease was reported to be uprooting the affected
213 plants and venturing into different enterprises on the affected land.

214

215 All the key informants indicated that diseases encountered in tea were *Armillaria* root rot,
216 *Hypoxylon* wood root and stem canker. Disease control measures suggested were for
217 *Armillaria* uprooting of the tea, for *Hypoxylon* proper pruning and chemicals for stem canker.
218 Other studies have also indicated these diseases affect tea [13].

219 **3.7 Soil Erosion**

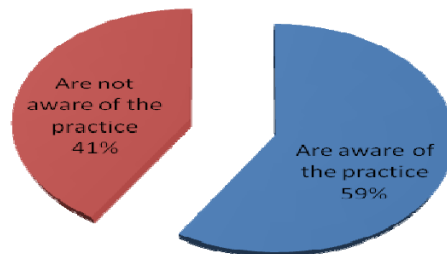
220 Majority of the farmers indicated that soil erosion is not a problem (Table 3). Of the farmers
221 that indicated soil erosion was a problem 28% indicated that it occurred on the sides of the
222 mature tea and in young tea. Control measures such as contour cultivation, terracing and
223 cover cropping were used to reduce soil erosion. Key informants expressed the same
224 sentiments.

225 **3.8 Labor**

226 In most tea growing areas labor is manual and only multinationals use tea plucking
227 machines [13]. Most of farmers (68%) said that labor is easily available. However, the price
228 of labor was rated to be high by majority of the farmers (96%) and it ranged from Kshs. 8 to
229 12 per kilo of tea plucked. Similar sentiments were echoed by the key informants that are
230 labor costs are very high when compared to the proceeds from tea. Farmers need adequate
231 monthly payment to organize harvesting of entire crop. During the monthly green leaf
232 payment, KTDA needs to workout rates that can facilitate the smallholders to remove all crop
233 on the bush. If the farmers are unable to remove all ready shoots, there is overgrowth which
234 translates into losses [14].

235 **3.9 Machine plucking**

236 Almost half of the farmers do not know about the machine picking (Figure 3).
237



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239

240 Figure 3 Farmers Awareness of mechanized tea plucking in Nyeri County

241

242 The farmers who were aware of mechanized tea plucking also indicated that machine
243 picking was not done in the area, machine picking was cheaper than hand picking but gave
244 low quality tea and damages the bushes affecting their ability to sprout and that it is not
245 recommended for hilly terrain which is found in Nyeri County.

246

247 Half of the key informants indicated that machine plucking is the best and has high
248 acceptability. Other advantages of machine plucking were enumerated as reduction in cost
249 of plucking, fast plucking and ease of maintaining the plucking table. Ongoing research
250 indicates that machine plucking does not have adverse effect on tea quality but it
251 significantly reduces costs [15].

252 **3.10 Quantity of tea harvested in rainy and dry seasons**

253 The mean quantity of tea harvested in the wet season was 96kg/acre. In the dry season the
254 mean quantity harvested was 52 kg/acre. Key informants indicated that tea productivity was
255 lower than the potential given Nyeri County climate and soils.

256 **3.11 Tea factory/collecting Centers**

257 The respondents took their tea harvests to Chinga and Ragati, Gitugi, Iriani and Gahuthi
258 factories. Collecting centers were numerous. The mean distance between the farms and the
259 collecting centers was 0.8 km. Majority of the farmers (96%) carried tea harvested on the
260 back to the collecting centers while only one farmer indicated that the lorry picked the
261 harvest from his farm. Most of the collecting centers in the County are at the recommended

distance of 1km. Proximity to the factory/ collecting centers is important to reduce quality deterioration and reduce leaf spillage [16].

3.12 Climate

All farmers indicated that low rainfall, extreme cold or heat and frost affects productivity of tea. All the Key informants also indicated that adverse weather reduces yield significantly. Majority of the farmers either said nothing could be done about the climate or they did not know the mitigation measures that can be used (Figure 4). Mitigation measures against climate suggested by the rest of the farmers were tree planting and farmer education on climate change (Figure 4).



Figure 4 Mitigation measures against adverse climate in tea production

Key informants suggested interventions that were mainly based on planting of trees and preserving of existing forested areas through energy saving jikos and renewable energy sources. Farmers' and key informant responses show low level of knowledge on what can be done to mitigate the effects of adverse climate.

Adaptations to adverse climatic changes are numerous and include crop management practices (choice of fields, planting densities, crop varieties and planting dates), livestock management practices (feeding and animal feeding practices), land use and management (fallowing, tree planting or protection, irrigation and water harvesting, soil and water conservation measures, tillage practices and soil fertility management), livelihood practices (mix of crop and animal production, permanent or temporary migration and agricultural and non-agricultural activities) [17]. Some clones developed by Tea Research of Kenya are also resistant to frost damage and are recommended for those areas that suffer from frost.

3.13 Prices and revenue of tea

Majority of the farmers (78%) and all the key informants indicated that low tea prices are a serious problem in tea production. Average revenue obtained from the tea by the respondents was Kshs.102, 416 per year. However, the maximum amount of revenue obtained from tea was Kshs. 300,000 per year while the minimum amount was Kshs. 10,000 per year. Revenue levels are still low and dependent on a myriad of factors.

KTDA reported that low tea prices are mainly due to oversupply of tea in the market, volatile political environment in some of the key export markets like Egypt, Pakistan and Syria and depreciating currency in Pakistan [17]. Low prices have in the past led to some small-scale farmers in Nyeri County to uprooting their crop, citing frustrations in payments. Kenya Tea Board and Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA), however, moved to arrest the situation

and warned errant farmers with legal action, if they uprooted their bushes [18]. Whereas, KTDA claims that Kenyan farmers are among the best paid in the world the sentiments of the farmers surveyed shows the income they get is not enough to sustain their livelihoods.

Some farmers (37%) indicated that nothing can be done concerning prices because marketing of their tea is in the hands of KTDA. This reveals the feeling of helplessness farmers have about tea prices which fuels resentment towards KTDA. Others suggested looking for new markets. The same intervention was expressed by the key informants. KTDA has set up strategies to mitigate these challenges through business and market diversification across the supply chain [19]. A lot still needs to be done for the effect of diversification to be felt by farmers.

Other farmers suggested government intervention in the tea industry. Government subsidies to farmers are used the world over to protect farmers. This can be introduced in tea production especially when the prices are very low. A small percentage (4%) suggested value addition of the tea. A task force commissioned by the Nyeri County government has also recommended value addition of tea as the way forward in the tea sector as barely 5% of the tea in Kenya is sold in value-added form [20]. Value addition strategies included market and product development support, physical and logistical support, enhancement of Kenya tea brand and compliance with consumer requirement. Benefits of tea value addition include competitive prices, increase in income, creation of cottage industries, diversification of products, knowledge and technology development. Other stakeholders such as Karatina University are spear heading research on value addition of tea [21].

Farmers in this study also suggested that improvement in tea grades would increase the prices. This is also a critical suggestion since high quality tea attracts high prices. KTDA is trying to address this through introduction of different tea clones and farmer education [19]. Studies on the impact of KTDA FFSSs indicate that leaf rejection at factories has significantly reduced. This was because farmers were taught on quality tea production. This needs to be encouraged to help mitigate low tea prices.

Another mitigating measure though not mentioned by the farmers in this study is diversifying to other enterprises that require little land (much of the land is under tea) but are rewarding income wise. Dairy goats, piggery, rabbits, horticulture and green houses are the new emerging agricultural opportunities in the County. Already some these incentives have been introduced. For example 6,000 tea farmers for the Iriana Tea Factory have acquired hundreds of beehives to help diversify their income and a 150-acre plot of land on which they hoped to erect 12,000 beehives [20].

3.14 Purple Tea planting

All the farmers interviewed did not grow purple tea. Various reasons were given for not growing purple tea. These include no knowledge on purple tea, lack of land to diversify to purple tea production, purple tea seedlings were not available in the area, climate was not suitable for purple tea production and no market for purple (Figure 5).

Most of the key informants indicated that their organizations grew purple tea. The one that did not grow the purple tea indicated the lack of market and equipment to process the tea as hindrances. Mean acreage under purple tea was 4.83 acres which quite minimal. Research studies also indicate the main constraints to purple tea production are low prices and low consumer uptake [23].

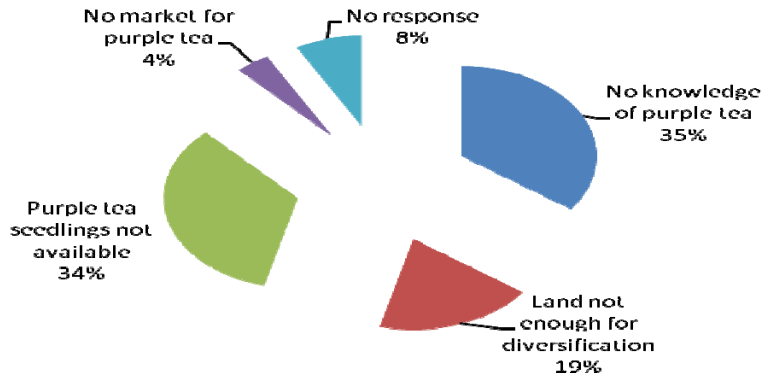


Figure 5 Reasons farmers are not growing purple tea in Nyeri County

3.15 Disposal of agricultural chemical containers

Although tea production in Kenya does not need a lot pesticide, fungicides or herbicides the many tea farmers are involved in vegetable production that requires a lot of these chemicals. Over half of the farmers did not know of any special way of disposing agricultural chemicals containers (Figure 6). This is critical as proper disposal of chemical containers is crucial in preventing pollution of land and water sources in the area. Few farmers indicated that the containers should be buried or KTDA should collect the containers for disposal or containers should be thrown into the latrine or dustbin. Others suggested farmers should be educated on container disposal.

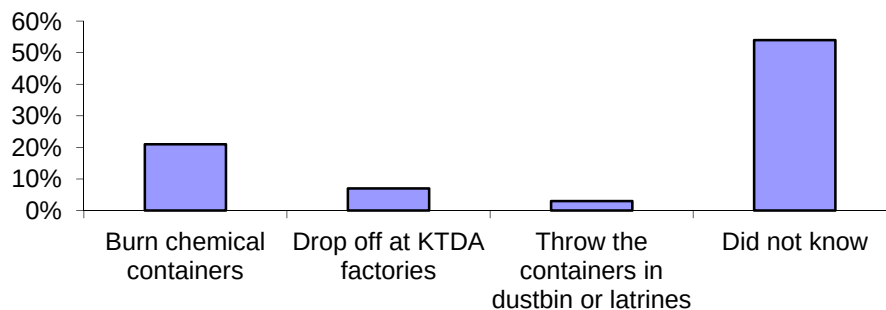


Figure 6 Ways of disposing agricultural chemical containers as indicated by tea farmers in Nyeri County

Most of the key informants (75%) did not know of special way of disposing chemical containers. Those that knew suggested washing the container 3 times and burying in the ground. Recommended practices include combustion of the containers in licensed incinerator and burying of containers after rendering them unusable [24].

3.16 Role of KTDA in tea production

The farmers indicated the roles of KTDA as transporting, processing and marketing of tea, road maintenance, provision of bursaries to deserving students, provision of SACCO loans and inputs. Interesting 7% of the farmers added that KTDA does not have transparency and oppresses farmers. Key informants also indicated the above named roles. The roles observed by the farmers are accurate as they are reflected in the services that KTDA provides to farmers [1].

3.17 Other Challenges

Other challenges enumerated by the farmers include wastage of time at the collecting center waiting for the clerk or trucks, delay in payments, dusts and smoke from the factories affect the nearby tea plantations, lack of proper clothing during cold and rainy seasons, and non-tallying of tea weight. Challenges indicated by key informants included the fact that 50% of the labour has no formal training, other players apart from KTDA who want to construct factories, lack of farm management services to manage labour, competition from other beverages, political interferences, poor infrastructure and high processing costs due to high prices of firewood. Other studies have similarly enumerated infrastructure, poor extension coverage and governance issues as problems facing tea in Kenya [12, 18].

4. CONCLUSION

Challenges that face small scale farmers need to be mitigated for tea production in Nyeri County to go to the next level. These challenges include poor gender relations, low adoption of some aspects of tea husbandry, low prices, adverse weather, pests and diseases and high labour costs. Opportunities in the tea industry are diversification to other enterprises to reduce the risks of low tea prices, value addition, purple tea production, research on effective tea husbandry and clones and KTDA farmers field schools.

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