



European Union Delegation to Kenya

- a partnership for development

Information Sheet

Improving market access for tea growers in the Mount Kenya region



Tea is a major export commodity for Kenya, earning it more than €1.25 billion each year, putting it amongst the top in the world of tea producers. Between 2005 and 2010, 84% of its tea exports went to Pakistan, Egypt and the UK.

On the equator, at altitudes of 1500 – 2700m and with a favourable climate makes the region near Meru and Mount Kenya one of the main tea-producing zones. Freshly picked tea is highly perishable and requires reliable methods of transport to local markets and factories to reduce wastage.

Road infrastructure in the region, however, is limited and after heavy rains is often impassable. The European Union, in partnership with the Government of Kenya, agreed to support improvements to the local road infrastructure.

More than a quarter of a billion small-holders farmers produce tea in Kenya, and operate as part of the Kenya Tea Development Agency. In the Mount Kenya area, there are four tea factories that buy tea from a total of 36,000 farmers.

Reducing costs, improving access to market

The aim of the road-building programme was to reduce transport costs and increase access to the tea-buying processing factories.

Five sections of road, totalling 85.7 km, were built between 2009 and 2013:

- Meru – Marimba road (D482),
- Marimba - Nkubu road (D475),
- Nkubu - Mitunguu road (D475)
- Imenti –Kionyo - Chogoria road (T52/E779/D474)
- Ndagene Loop (T51)



The programme of road-building was funded with €69 million from the European Commission, KfW and the Government of Kenya, and implemented by the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure through the Kenya Rural Roads Authority. The EU grant was €21.25 million.

Impact of the project

Following the completion of the road-building programme the EU development officials recorded:

- Reduced wastage of farm produce like tea due to more efficient leaf collection following improved access
- Increased frequency of transport of fresh tea to processing factories increased from average of zero or once a day to twice a day.
- Increased picking of tea leaf increased from 20-30kg per day to 40-60kg per day.
- Turn-around time of factory trucks reduced by more than half.

“Before the new road was built to Meru, it used to take us 3 hours to collect tea from very short distances. This time has been reduced to 15 minutes.

“For further places the turn-around time of our tea collection lorries is now 2 hours from 4 to 5 hours previously.”

Mr. J.K. M’Mwenda, Factory Manager, Kionyo Tea Factory Limited

Before and after: the Meru to Marimba road that was completed in December 2013.



Tea processing in Kenya

1. Two top leaves and a bud are hand-picked.
2. Green leaves are transported to a collecting centre for sorting out and weighing.
3. Leaves are transported by road to processing factories and re-weighed and spread for drying.
4. Leaves are blasted with warm air and then sliced.
5. Stored in containers they are left to ferment, reducing tannic acid.
6. The grey brown leaves are then roasted at a temperature of 100°C for roasting after which they turn black.
7. The leaves are sifted, graded and tasted for classification.
8. The graded tea is packed in tea chests for export.

Long-term support to agricultural export markets in Kenya

Previously, the EU financed road construction in other coffee and tea producing areas of Kenya:

- In 1993, the EU financed the Rehabilitation of the Kericho to Sotik Road (52km) which cuts through the tea growing region of Rift Valley at cost of € 9 million.
- In 1998 to 2011, rehabilitated 1024 km of gravel rural roads in central and eastern Kenya at total cost of € 13.8 million.