

# Pilot Testing a Landscape Labeling Approach to Marketing in Mbeya, Tanzania

Case study

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# Pilot testing a landscape labeling approach to marketing in Mbeya, Tanzania: A case study

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## Introduction

The story of landscape labeling in Tanzania begins in Mbeya Region, in the western reaches of the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. This region is among the most important in the country for agriculture, particularly for its rice, which is recognized for its superior quality throughout Tanzania. Recently, the government of Tanzania has renewed its interest in supporting agriculture as the base of the country's economy, and has set impressive goals for boosting public funding for agricultural research, development and extension. National policies, like Kilimo Kwanza (Agriculture First) and Big Results Now, are designed to push this agenda forward. The government of Tanzania aims to encourage private sector investment to scale up agricultural development more rapidly. A public-private partnership approach is being pursued, and the region of Mbeya is being influenced by a particular public-private partnership strategy called the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania (SAGCOT).

While the government's plans for agricultural development have brought considerable excitement, they also have raised significant concerns about the wellbeing of smallholder producers and the conservation of Tanzania's rich biodiversity and natural resources. Smallholder farmers comprise more than 70 percent of the population, and depend directly on natural resources and the valuable ecosystem services they provide. Public, private and hybrid sector investors will need to address these concerns to maintain their legitimacy and be offered a hospitable environment for investment activities in the Corridor.

In 2012, EcoAgriculture Partners collaborated with the SAGCOT Centre to begin developing an "agriculture green growth" model of development for the Corridor that would mitigate these concerns by explicitly including smallholders in agricultural investments and creating incentives for protecting biodiversity. Together with Environmental Resources Management Centre for Sustainable Development (ERMCS), EcoAgriculture and the SAGCOT Center hosted a Green Growth Leaders Workshop that brought



together leaders from the public, private and civic sectors. The leaders explored opportunities for green growth that were ripe for investment, particularly in a set of Cluster areas that included parts of Mbeya region (Milder et al., 2013).

The relationships established at the Workshop led to further conversations with a group of leaders from Mbeya who were interested in expanding the conversation about green growth opportunities in the region, where concerns about development pathways are especially active. In addition to the region's exceptional contribution to national agricultural production, it also is home to the largest mountain in the Southern Highlands, Mt. Rungwe. Furthermore, it encompasses several key biodiversity areas in and around the Kitulu Plateau, the Mbeya Range, Lake Tanganyika and Lake Nyassa. To support the growing number of tourists who come to visit these sites and create opportunities for exporting fruits, vegetables and flowers, the government has expanded the Songwe International Airport.

With financial support from the Arthur D. and Katherine T. MacArthur Foundation, leaders from district government offices, civil society organizations, research institutions and villages worked with EcoAgriculture Partners and ERMCSO to conduct a workshop entitled Greening Agricultural Development

in Mbeya: Using Maps to Advance Innovations in March 2013. The workshop focused on the importance of spatial planning for taking advantage of synergies and reducing tradeoffs between land uses and stakeholder groups. The sessions also delved deeply into identifying more opportunities for investing in green growth through supporting existing climate-smart and biodiversity friendly practices, and helping other producers transition into these practices. The leaders selected priority innovations, formed Innovation Action Teams, and developed action plans for advancing the innovations following the workshop. Based on a brief introduction of the concept during the workshop, an Action Team formed around landscape labeling. Action Teams for System of Rice Intensification (SRI), Biodiversity Conservation and Participatory Land Use Planning, which later collaborated with the Landscape Labeling Action Team, were also established (EcoAgriculture Partners, 2013).

## Introducing landscape labeling

An early focus of the Landscape Labeling Action Team was to expand their knowledge of producers engaged in sustainable agriculture practices, and connect with entrepreneurs and producer leaders who might be interested in learning more about landscape labeling. The members of the groups



maintained a loose collaboration following the March workshop, organizing periodic follow-up by phone. Through the follow-up conversations, it became clear that they lacked in-depth knowledge of the landscape labeling approach and the steps required for its implementation. They became interested in planning a formal set of activities to learn more about the landscape labeling concept, explore potential opportunities and establish buy-in from others who could help advance this innovative approach to marketing.

In June 2013, EcoAgriculture Partners, ERMCS D and leaders from Mbeya received funding from Hivos and Oxfam Novib to organize a set of activities that would introduce landscape labeling and begin to analyze market opportunities and consumer demand for possible products. The activities included a pre-workshop, a main workshop, and a consultancy with a markets expert to analyze the potential for landscape labeling in Mbeya. The pre-workshop, which took place in early September 2013, brought together members of the Innovation Action Teams on Landscape Labeling, Biodiversity Conservation and SRI, along with a markets expert from ERMCS D and EcoAgriculture Partners staff. Participants reviewed the market expert's draft of a market framework for landscape labeling in Mbeya. They also selected a group to serve as the Workshop Implementation Committee, and

prepared the full program and participant list for the main workshop. The pre-workshop report provides more detail on the topics covered and outcomes of the meeting (ERMCS D, 2013).

The main workshop took place in late September 2013. The 20 participants were uniquely selected for their roles in the landscape and with key organizations and value-chains that could contribute to a landscape labeling approach. Early sessions introduced the key ideas and concepts of a landscape labeling approach. Plenary discussions led to the identification of challenges and opportunities seen by participants for landscape labeling in Mbeya. In particular, participants reported a lack of secure land tenure, need to access entirely new markets, reliance on foreign or external expertise, high transaction costs, and lack of marketing strategies for targeting consumers in medium and high income brackets.

A representative from Kijabe Environmental Volunteers (KENVO) shared his experience of landscape labeling with smallholder producers in Lari, Kenya. The case served to concretize the landscape labeling concept for participants, and allowed the representative to share valuable information on bee-keeping, one of the value chains being considered for inclusion in the Mbeya landscape label.



Subsequent sessions focused on selecting potential value chains. The participants created a comprehensive list of potential value chains and ranked them according to the following criteria:

- ability to scale up;
- ease of adoption;
- direct or indirect compatibility with biodiversity conservation;
- accessible market with willing buyers;
- potential for value addition in the landscape;
- active involvement of women in the production process;
- profitability;
- availability of substitute products on the market;
- product prioritized by the Tanzania government or supported by policy; and
- competitiveness of the product.

Those products awarded the highest rankings included SRI-rice, honey, agro-ecotourism, and avocado. The workshop raised several issues that are crucial for the development of a landscape label and that, in the case of Mbeya, would need to be addressed before this marketing approach could take off. The issues included:

- identifying accessible marketing channels;
- improving production capacity and quality to meet demand;
- supporting smallholder and stakeholder collective action;
- sensitizing local leaders and smallholder farmers to landscape labeling;
- specifying the criteria that characterize the multifunctional nature of the landscape;
- identifying local institutions that give the label credibility and legitimacy; and
- maintaining the involvement of key individuals and organizations in effectively operationalizing the development of the label.

The participants spent the rest of the workshop defining the principles of the label and assessing production systems, key stakeholders, current policies, existing and potential quality standards, their linkage to biodiversity conservation, and options for financing products. They ended the workshop by preparing action plans to move forward with pilot testing each of the selected value chains in communities throughout the region. More detail on the proceedings and outcomes of the workshop can be found in the workshop report (Recha, Tumsifu & Rasheli, 2014).



## Expert market analysis

The market expert who participated in the pre-workshop on landscape labeling issued a final report that included an initial assessment of the current production systems and practices, key actors in the value chain, links to biodiversity conservation, and challenges and opportunities for each of commodity discussed at the workshop. A preliminary market analysis on the rice value chain and potential for expanding SRI was provided (Rasheli & Tumsifu, 2014). Brief summaries, drawing from the work done by the participants in the final sessions of the workshop were provided for the other priority value chains – avocado, honey and agro-ecotourism.

In several cases, mechanisms for expanding the promotion and adoption of sustainable practices were not well-specified. In the case of rice, most farmers in Mbeya do not practice SRI, and the Action Team had conducted only small trials. A significant number of farmers would need to learn about the practice and scale up production before SRI-rice could be marketed under the label. In other cases, some large producers already had a competitive advantage in a selected product, such as organic avocado. It would be difficult, therefore, to expand production to other areas, or generate equal profits for smaller land holders. Also, although niche markets for sustainably

produced goods are growing in Dar es Salaam, it was not clear if consumers in local and regional markets would be willing to pay price premiums for the labeled products. Further market analysis is needed to better understand consumer preferences and to use the findings to shape the marketing strategy for the landscape label.

## Next steps: investigating challenges and opportunities

The workshop caused considerable excitement around landscape labeling. However, the challenges discussed in the first few sessions of the main workshop remained serious concerns. After the workshop, several follow-up conversations took place, aimed at selecting a pilot site for product testing. Participants identified Matebete village in Mbarali District as the best candidate site for testing landscape labeling activities related to agro-ecotourism. Consultations with residents in Matebete and other candidate pilot sites confirmed, however, that land tenure insecurity would be a major roadblock to advancing any activities related to landscape labeling. They argued that this would be especially true for smallholder farmers who could not afford to take on additional risk with their limited assets.



A suite of land laws was established by the Tanzanian government more than a decade ago to improve land tenure security. The laws specify a process for Participatory Village Land Use Planning (VLUP) that is meant to help villages secure their rights to village land. It seemed that that VLUP was an important factor for facilitating land use planning, but it was unclear if VLUP would increase tenure security sufficiently to encourage producers to adopt new practices or entice investors to come into the landscape. EcoAgriculture Partners, ERMCS D and leaders from Mbeya, with support from the International Land Coalition, decided to explore the potential for VLUP to improve tenure security in a brief participatory research study conducted in March 2014.

A research report documents the full set of research activities undertaken (Hart et al., 2014). The study found that VLUP is an important prerequisite for producer and investor tenure security, but not enough in itself to provide sufficient tenure. VLUP is a necessary step for dividing village lands into individual or collective plots for which Certificates of Customary Rights of Occupancy (CCROs) can be granted. It found that only farmers with CCROs have improved tenure security and access to financial capital. For example, farmers with CCROs reported that their land was worth three times as much as land without a CCRO and the CCRO could be used

immediately as collateral on bank loans. Interestingly, VLUP was also an important step in the processes for designating land for investment and allocating land for Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). Although the government primarily considers VLUP a tool for reducing conflicts between land users and formalizing a market for property, it serves different purposes for different stakeholder groups.

VLUP has been slow to advance due to limited funding to support the participatory process. However, for the reasons outlined in the introduction, interest in Mbeya is growing on the part of investors, conservation organizations, agribusinesses and other sectors. The success of nearly all of these stakeholders depends on VLUP being in place. Therefore, a set of recommendations were made for district governments in Mbeya to advance VLUP more rapidly. In addition to the findings already mentioned, the study showed that the benefits of VLUP and CCROs were not as clear for pastoralists, many of whom traditionally are nomadic ethnic minorities and have been considered outsiders in nearly all of the villages where they have tried to participate in VLUP. It also became clear that extension services for sustainable intensification of livestock production are lacking or altogether absent in the region. Civil society organizations (CSOs) do not seem to be providing alternative extension services to pastoralists. Given that pastoralists manage such



a large portion of the landscape and have expressed interest in participating in a landscape labeling approach, it is important to consider how to improve extension services to these producers.

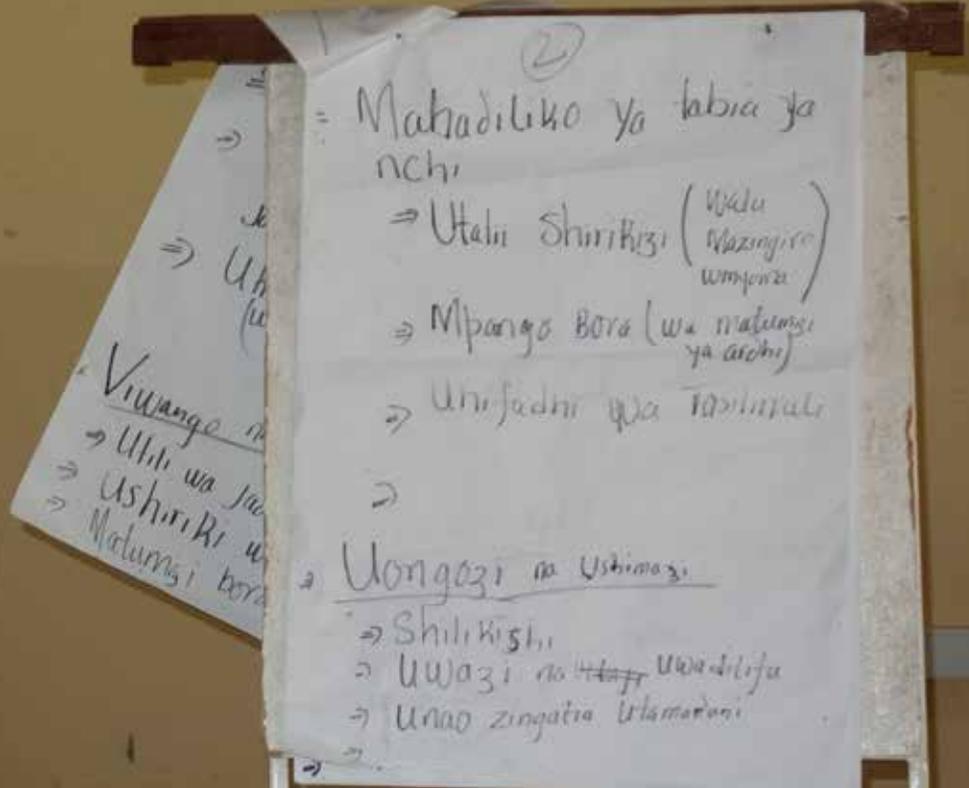
## Lessons learned from pilot testing a landscape labeling approach

The group of leaders in Mbeya has demonstrated interest in continuing to develop a landscape label despite slow progress and notable barriers. It remains to be seen if viable markets can be accessed or created for the products explored in the workshop. Nonetheless, the landscape labeling approach has facilitated cross-sectoral dialogue, inspired collaboration between diverse actors in the landscape and identified important new areas for capacity building and knowledge exchange. As investment in agriculture, conservation and ecotourism in Mbeya grows, markets for products that are good candidates for a landscape label are likely to expand, including local markets.

The experience of the team of leaders in Mbeya demonstrates that landscape labeling can be a complex, lengthy and expensive process to bring about. Currently, no formal organization of producers or entrepreneurs is poised to lead such a venture.

The Action Team is well positioned, however, to play a key role in helping strengthen existing groups and/or form new ones who can take charge. In addition to creating the label itself, it is likely that the group will need to formalize itself to provide ongoing support and monitoring of a landscape label. Additional donor support will be needed to build capacity and address challenges to landscape labeling voiced by leaders.

The project led to the development of a tool to support landscape leaders interested in testing a landscape labeling approach in their own landscapes. Based on the experiences documented here, and those of other partners in Kenya, we developed a framework tool that describes a decision-making pathway that landscape leaders can follow to develop a label, market their products, and reap financial and social benefits for stewarding biodiversity through landscape marketing strategies. The framework document (Hart et al., 2014) presents guidelines that we will continue to refine as our experience with landscape labeling and other innovative marketing approaches to support biodiversity conservation grows.



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## Photos

Cover photo: Cattle grazing in Mbeya, March 2013 by Raffaella Kozar. All other photos from Mbeya landscape labeling workshop, September 2013 by John Recha.

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