POLICY BRIEF

Ecological Organic Food for Schools

Executive Summary

A recent study commissioned by the Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement found that the country’s organic farmers are receiving insufficient support from the state. With benefits to consumer health, the environment and the national economy, the organic sector should not be undervalued. The same can be said for the nutritional needs of the users of Tanzania’s public institutions. Despite being a food self-sufficient country at the national level, malnutrition amongst school-aged children in rural Tanzania remains a problem. One source of nutrition for this group has been the School Meals Programme run by the World Food Programme (WFP), which has provided school meals for over 370,000 children in rural Tanzania. With plans being drawn up for the school meals programme to become state-run comes an opportunity to not only maximize nutrition amongst young people, but also support and promote a neglected industry, which comprises 148,610 organic certified farmers. This policy brief calls for the development of an Institutional Procurement Programme in Tanzania, beginning with the integration of ecological organic family farmers into the School Meals Programme. It encourages Government to encourage public institutions to source food grown ecologically by family farmers in Tanzania in order to provide healthy meals with appropriate dietary content, while boosting the rural economy.

Introduction

Tanzania has a wealth of organic producers. With 148,610 certified farmers, it ranks fourth in the world in number. These farmers produce quality-guaranteed food ecologically (safe and environmentally sustainable). Organic certified produce meets standards demanded by health-conscious consumers worldwide, with most demand for organic products coming from the USA (43%) and the EU (40%) (IFOAM, 2014).
In Tanzania, most of the organic growers are also family farmers. According to the FAO, family farming preserves traditional food products, while contributing to a balanced diet and safeguarding agro-biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources” (FAO, 2014). Tanzania’s ecological organic family farmers are producing food in large quantities to feed a growing market, and should be supported to do so.

However, a study commissioned by TOAM supported by TradeMark East Africa’s TRAC Fund, found that very little is being done by the state to support this valuable resource. Organic farmers face numerous barriers and few incentives. One potential incentive would be for state intervention to link ecological organic family farming producers with public institutions. A particular opportunity for piloting this lies in the hand-over of the World Food Programme’s School Meals Initiative to the Tanzania government.

**Problem Statement**

The TOAM policy study found that organic farmers have many barriers to marketing their produce, including high certification costs, lack of government regulation of produce, minimal consumer awareness for organic produce, and limited support from the state.

Most of Tanzania’s organic farmers grow cash crops such as tea, coffee and cotton for export. Large processing and exporting companies contract these farmers and facilitate their organic certification to internationally recognized standards. The farmers sell only their cash crop as organic, but sell their secondary food crops as ‘conventional’ at local markets despite growing them under the same organic conditions. This represents a lost opportunity, with organic food crops losing traceability.

Despite being considered a food self-sufficient country at the national level, the problem of food deficits is significant at regional, district and household levels (WFP, 2015). One of the groups most affected by malnutrition is primary school-aged children in rural areas. For these children, low availability and poor quality of food results in stunted growth, low levels of concentration, and elevated school dropout rates.

One source of relief has been the World Food Programme’s (WFP) School Meals initiative, which feeds 370,000 school children in rural Singida and Dodoma regions with one meal a day.

**The Case for Change**

The WFP proposals to transfer the School Meals Programme to the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (WFP, 2015) presents a great opportunity. The programme will create regular, sustained demand for quality food from the nation’s producers, supporting the development and growth of young children. Ecological organic family farmers should be seen as a priority source of food for the state-led programme, bringing significant benefits to the economy, environment and health. This would provide an incentive for these producers, as well as enhancing the health of young children.

In the Tanzania National Nutrition Strategy (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2011), the following statement is made with regard to dietary improvement: “Ensure that public
and private schools, hospitals, orphanages prisons and other relevant institutions provide meals with appropriate dietary content.” Integrating ecological organic farmers into a state-run School Meals Programme would be a significant step towards meeting this commitment. The move would not only be a clear statement by the government that it prioritises the health of its children, but also a chance to promote the country’s ecological organic family farmers.

Tanzania would not be the first nation to link ecological organic family farm producers to public institutions with resounding success.

The Example of Brazil

Prior to the 1990s, public policy on the agriculture sector in Brazil was aimed primarily at medium-to-large export-oriented producers. With the growing significance of family farmers in Brazil, came new political support. One of the most significant developments in this new political context was the introduction of two Institutional Procurement Programmes (IPPs), the Food Procurement Programme (PAA) and National School Feeding Programme (PNAE). The PAA, an initiative linking public institutions to food supplied by family farmers with a focus on ecological organic farmers, paved the way for the National School Feeding Programme. The programme sets out to “meet students’ nutritional needs during their time in the classroom” by supplying food procured locally from family farmers, to support and promote sustainable development.

As a result, the number of family farm producers participating has grown from 41,464 to over 190,000 in 2012 (FAO, 2015). Government support for the initiative has also grown, with funding in 2003 at 145,014 BRL rising to 970,814 BRL in 2012. The number of students assisted has risen to 43.1 million in 2012 (FAO, 2015).

Conclusion

The value of Tanzania’s ecological organic family farmers is clear to see. Growth in the sector would mean better health, a protected environment and stronger economy with superior trade opportunities. It is unsatisfactory therefore, that these farmers are currently neglected by government policy. Statements made in the National Agriculture Policy (2013) hint at government commitment to these farmers, but little has been done. The government has also made clear its commitment to providing children with nutritious food, through the National Nutrition Strategy. Meanwhile, many children in rural areas of Tanzania still struggle to access nutritious food to support their growth and development. These two challenges can be remedied together through the development of an Institutional Procurement Programme in Tanzania, beginning with the integration of ecological organic family farmers into the School Meals Programme.
Policy Recommendations

1) Government should use policy to encourage public institutions to source food grown ecologically by family farmers in Tanzania in order to provide healthy meals with appropriate dietary content.

2) Government should prioritise ecological organic family farmers as a procurement source of nutritious food for the School Meals Programme.

References


