



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



Tharaka Nithi County Promotes Food Security through Provision of Free Certified Seeds

County:	Tharaka Nithi		
Sector/s:	Agriculture	Sub-sector/Theme:	Climate change, food security, PWDs and vulnerable populations
Keywords: (for search in the online platform)	Tharaka Nithi Annual Free Seed Distribution Program, environmental conservation, economic empowerment, Climate change, Maarifa Centre, success stories		
Target Audience:	Counties		
Authors (contacts and their institutions can be included as well)	Mercy Gatabi – Programme Officer, Knowledge Management		
Resource Persons (include their designations)	<p>County Executive Committee Member (CECM) in charge of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, Veterinary Services and Environment and Natural Resources, Mr. Njue Kaithungu</p> <p>Chief Officer in charge of Agriculture, Livestock and Veterinary Services, Chief Officer Peter Kimathi</p> <p>Rachel Kimani – Knowledge Management Champion</p>		

Introduction:

Tharaka Nithi County is categorized as an Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL) in Kenya. The County presents a diverse landscape characterized by stark contrasts: rugged, drought-prone lowlands dominate approximately 70% of its territory, while the remaining 30% comprises fertile highlands (Tharaka Nithi County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027). This topographical variety creates distinct agricultural zones, with the eastern lowlands featuring thorny bushland and scattered acacia trees typical of semi-arid ecosystems, while the western highlands near Mt. Kenya showcase lush vegetation and year-round streams. The County's elevation ranges from 600 meters above sea level in Tharaka to over 2,500 meters in the highlands (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), creating microclimates that influence farming possibilities across different regions.

Climate change has significantly altered traditional rainfall patterns in Kenya and East Africa at large. In Tharaka Nithi County, the long rain season traditionally began around the 15th of March, but climate change effects have disrupted this predictability, threatening agricultural productivity and food



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



security for thousands of households. Each year, approximately 65,000 farming families face food insecurity due to these erratic weather patterns (Kenya Food Security Steering Group, 2023), leaving them vulnerable to malnutrition and economic hardship as crop yields diminish and traditional planting calendars become unreliable.

The County Government of Tharaka Nithi, led by the Governor, H.E. Muthomi Njuki, EGH, through the Department of Agriculture, designed a biannual seed distribution program to combat these challenges. This initiative focuses on supporting vulnerable farmers who are often the first victims of changing rainfall patterns, aiming to enhance food security and build agricultural resilience across the County.

Implementation of the practice

The process begins with comprehensive planning meetings and stakeholder consultations several weeks before each distribution season, bringing together County agriculture officials, ward administrators, and community representatives to ensure successful delivery and maximum turnout. Planning includes aligning distribution to budget allocations, procurement of certified seeds from approved suppliers, and ward-specific distribution schedules. The effectiveness of the process has gradually improved over the years, resulting in a better-coordinated exercise being carried out in subsequent seasons.



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



H.E. Muthomi Njuki, EGH participating in the handing over of certified seeds to affected families



Ms. Kelly Karimi Chief Officer, Gender and Social Services distributing seeds in various parts of the County to PWDs and elderly women

Distributions are strategically timed based on Kenya Meteorological Department forecasts, ensuring farmers receive seeds at the optimal planting time aligned with predicted rainfall patterns. The County's agriculture department works with meteorological experts to analyze seasonal rainfall projections, helping farmers maximize germination rates by planting just before rains arrive.

National Government Administration Officers, including deputy County Commissioners, chiefs, and assistant chiefs, are engaged early to create buy-in and provide security during distribution events. This collaboration represents an effective model of intergovernmental cooperation between National and County officials.

Distribution venues are strategically located across each ward to reach farmers most in need. The County employs a targeted approach to identify vulnerable households, particularly smallholder farmers, women-headed households, and elderly farmers. By providing drought-resistant and quick-maturing seed varieties, the program helps ensure food production despite increasingly unpredictable weather.



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



Results of the practice

- On average, 100,000 people benefit from the program annually, representing approximately 30% of the County's population (Tharaka Nithi County Department of Agriculture Impact Assessment, 2023). The distribution network has expanded to cover all 15 wards, ensuring equitable access across the County's diverse geographical regions.
- The County has documented significant improvements in key performance indicators related to crop production and nutrition. Household food security assessments indicate that beneficiary families have increased their maize yields by an average of 42% and bean production by 36% compared to previous seasons when using non-certified seeds (County Agricultural Extension Services Survey, 2023).



Residents during on of the distribution drives of certified

- The distribution events have evolved into platforms for public participation. During the 2023 distribution cycles, over 15,000 residents provided feedback on various County initiatives, contributing valuable insights that informed subsequent development planning. This participatory approach has strengthened the social contract between citizens and County leadership.

The program has also generated positive spillover effects beyond agricultural productivity:

- By bringing together diverse community members during distribution events, the program has helped reduce inter-ward tensions and promoted a shared sense of County identity.
- The program's integration with community health initiatives has increased household enrollment with Community Health Promoters which is improving preventive healthcare outreach in remote areas and resulted in increased uptake of interventions such as registration with the social health authority.



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



Lessons learnt:

- The consistent presence of County leadership, particularly the Governor, during distribution drives has proven crucial for strengthening public trust and program credibility. When citizens see high-level officials directly involved in service delivery, it significantly enhances program legitimacy and community buy-in.
- The program's adaptive approach to climate change, which involves distributing fast-growing seeds timed precisely with rainfall onset, helps farmers navigate unpredictable weather patterns, providing a model for climate-responsive agricultural interventions.
- The program demonstrates how agricultural interventions can effectively serve as platforms for addressing multiple development objectives simultaneously. By intentionally integrating food security goals with public participation mechanisms, healthcare outreach, and youth engagement, the County has maximized the return on investment for each distribution activity.

Recommendations:

- Implementing robust systems to assess the program's financial, social, and economic impacts annually. There needs to be an establishment of clear indicators that track not only immediate outputs (seeds distributed), but also medium-term outcomes (yield increases) and long-term impacts (household food security). Regular impact assessments can help justify continued investment and identify areas for improvement.
- Engaging warehousing and collateral services from the [Kenya National Trading Corporation](#) to handle surplus production. Creating accessible storage infrastructure can help farmers capitalize on post-harvest price increments and reduce losses, turning the productivity gains from improved seeds into sustainable economic benefits.
- Establishing supportive policies to sustain the seed distribution program, including action plans for addressing logistical challenges. Counties should consider embedding seed distribution within broader agricultural development strategies and securing multi-year funding commitments to ensure program continuity regardless of political transitions.
- Prioritizing the distribution of fast-growing certified seed varieties that can thrive despite rainfall uncertainties. There is need for partnerships with research institutions to identify and propagate locally-adapted, drought-resistant varieties that maximize productivity under changing climate conditions.

Further reading:

<https://www.facebook.com/GovernorTNC>

www.tharakanithi.go.ke

Tharaka Nithi County Department of Agriculture Impact Assessment, 2023

County Agricultural Extension Services Survey, 2023

Tharaka Nithi County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



Photos taken during seed distribution drives

