



The 'growing fields' of Wilmar Agro Ltd., bringing economic life to many a Kenyan family.

lecting points that have been set up near the growers. Seven trucks drive distances of up to 250 kilometres to the different collecting points. The business has grown so much, that there are now two companies involved. Their mission statements illustrate their keen understanding of the project's socio-economic impact: Wilmar Agro's missions statement is 'Hope through flowers' and the newer company, Nature Grown Ltd., has summed its targets in the words 'Livelihood through flowers'.

Indeed, the project is changing the lives of many families. Whereas in the early days many of the growers cultivated some tea or coffee as well as their own food products, now the flower profits are higher and they are making enough money to buy clothing and to send their children to school.

Policy meetings

Since his first visit, Kamami now visits the Netherlands every year to talk to buyers, breeders and other folk at the auctions. The knowledge he acquires is channelled straight back to the growers. He meets with each individual group every three months to talk about his vision, trends that may impact the markets in the near and more distant future and problems that may exist. Together they make plans for the future. One thing Kamami says he learned in the CBI programme is to talk about weaknesses

and to turn them into strengths. "This is very important in the whole concept, along with communication," says Kamami. "Not only top-down communication, but also the other way around. This way we stay in close contact with the farms in Kenya as well as the market in Europe."

Quality in the cool chain

The CBI training and the years of experience have made Kenyan growers more aware of the consequences of temperature changes during transport. Van der Hulst, CBI expert for cool chain management, has seen many changes in the cool chain approach of Wilmar. "The first time I saw the flowers of Wilmar at the auction in Aalsmeer I couldn't believe they were grown by different growers on different locations. They all looked the same, just as if they'd been produced at one nursery. But there was still a lot to improve in the cool chain – enough to get a couple of eurocents per stem more at the auction. With an annual volume of 9 million stems, that's a lot of extra money."

Adds Kamami, "With the help of the CBI we have become aware of the bottlenecks in the cool chain. What we can improve we will. But sometimes things happen on the way from Nairobi to Europe that we cannot explain." Van der Hulst recognises that problem. "The grower is the owner of the flower until it is sold in Europe. But the quality during transport is in the hands of transporters who are not always reliable in this respect. The problem is that they don't

lose any money if the quality of the flowers drops before arrival – but the growers do."

Truck temperature

On the Kenyan side of the line a lot of employees are now involved in cool chain management. Even the truck drivers check the temperature of the trucks when they load and unload flowers. Everything is registered, so the information is available if it is called for. The growers realise that if the flowers arrive at the auction in a better condition, each individual grower will receive more revenues: the price they get for their flowers is related to the auction price. "That is a very important component in our concept", says Kamami. "This way they know, for instance, that July and August are not very good months for the price. But they also have the benefit of extremely good seasonal prices, like the ones we had this summer due to the bad weather in Holland."

Business

As of January 2007 Wilmar is an official member of the Aalsmeer Auction. Kamami had a few good business reasons to become a member: lower commission, which means more money for the growers, the availability of more market information, and the right to vote on auction issues. The last reason has already proved its worth. Just this year the two biggest flower auctions in Holland, Aalsmeer and FloraHolland, decided to merge. This was big news in the horticultural world. The Kenyans were more than pleased to have say in the matter.