

Access to the Potato Market Through Viazi Soko Digital Platform

The National Potato Council of Kenya (NPCK) is a Public Private Partnership (PPP) and a multi-stakeholder organization whose responsibility is to help plan, organize and coordinate potato value chain activities.

The Potato Council organizational structure enables it to draw synergies from a wide membership, representing all stakeholders and actors in the potato industry both public and private. The services provided by NPCK to the stakeholders include: 1) Providing forums for engagement, planning, networking and solution search, 2) Lobbying and advocating for supportive policy and legal framework, 3) Providing any services that will enhance businesses in the industry and 4) Promoting adherence to regulations and adoption of good standards and best practices.

Kenya's potato industry, a sector that contributes over Ksh 50 billion to the economy, is driven by the use of quality seed, suitable fertilizers, good agronomic practices, and approved pesticides.

Wachira Kaguongo, the Chief Executive Officer of the National Potato Council of Kenya, is passionate as he discusses the strides being made, including collaborations with stakeholders and development partners to transform the potato value chain through the implementation of various projects. Among these is the Kenya Sustainable Potato Initiative (KSPI), which aims to transform the potato subsector in Nyandarua, Meru, Laikipia, and Nandi Counties. The KSPI is supported by AGRA and is being implemented by a consortium comprising NPCK, KALRO, and Egerton University. The project seeks to catalyze improved potato productivity and marketing to foster a sustainable food system across the project counties.

The project has three strategic objectives:

1) Enhance sustainable potato farming through established



Wachira Kaguongo
Chief Executive Officer, National Potato Council of Kenya.



seed systems and the adoption of climate-smart practices;

2) Foster inclusive markets and trade through a structured marketing system;

3) Improve the policy environment and coordination within the potato subsector for inclusive transformation.

The other intervention that the potato council is undertaking is the promotion of digital technology such as NPCK Viazi Soko digital platform; www.npckviazisoko.com.

With farmers and service providers scattered all over the country, there is power in the massive use of a mobile phone to link the farmer and the market. Thus, this interactable platform provides opportunity for farmers to transact and order seed, fertilizer, agrochemicals, soil testing and more services just by logging online.

How Viazi Soko Digital Platform works.

Viazi Soko is an e-commerce digital platform for information dissemination and market linkages. It provides an efficient way to source and procure quality farm inputs such as certified seeds, fertilizers, and agrochemicals, as well as services like soil testing, mechanization, spraying, and extension services. The platform also helps link farmers to markets.

For many years, the accessibility of high-quality farm inputs such as certified seeds, suitable fertilizers, approved agrochemicals, and advisory services has been a major challenge for smallholder potato farmers. To address this, NPCK developed the Viazi Soko platform, which was initially created as an ICT platform for information dissemination. In 2020, the platform was upgraded into an e-commerce ecosystem for information dissemination and market linkages, accessible via the Google Play Store, a web-based portal, and a USSD short code. Currently, the platform has 115,741 registered farmers.



The National Potato Council of Kenya (NPCK) is a non-governmental and multi-stakeholder organization whose responsibility is to help plan, organize and co-ordinate potato value chain activities in Kenya.

We have four membership categories:
**PLATINUM, GOLD, SILVER
AND BRONZE.**



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- 4) Promoting adherence to regulations and adoption of good standards and best practices.

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Farm Service Providers (FSP), who are young farmers among the farmer groups, help aggregate input orders from the farmers. The aggregated inputs are made available to a logistics company for distribution. Farmers can also market ware potatoes on the platform, while buyers can log in and place orders. Additionally, farmers can access extension and advisory services through the platform in the form of short video clips, interactive voice-overs, and brochures on Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) at www.npckviazisoko.com.

Since the upgrade, over 19,000 farmers have transacted inputs worth over USD 615,384 through the platform. Farmers no longer have to travel long distances to source inputs, which typically incurs high transaction costs and wastes time. Monitoring and Evaluation reports indicate that **SHFs** who ordered inputs through the platform recorded yields of over 12 tons per hectare, translating to better incomes. The platform has also created business opportunities for 72 farm service providers and other actors in the subsector.

The business opportunities available for the FSP include;

Soil Sampling

NPCK has partnered with Cropnuts and OCP to promote soil testing to determine the correct fertilizers to use, with the aim of increasing productivity. Through this partnership, the companies have extended a discount to NPCK's farmers for any soil samples tested. NPCK is therefore recruiting FSPs as soil sampling agents who will be trained in this entrepreneurial skill. The FSPs are expected to assist in collecting soil samples from interested farmers' fields, send the samples to labs for analysis, and help interpret the soil testing results for the farmers. The FSPs trained in soil sampling will be listed on the Viazzi Soko platform, allowing farmers to query and find the nearest agent.

Spray Service Providers (SSP)

Agrochemicals have been misused and mishandled over the years due to a lack of knowledge, inadequate physical protection, poor spray regimes, and the heavy use of highly

toxic counterfeit products, which have exposed farmers and consumers to various health-related issues. Furthermore, the use of ineffective agrochemicals and the fact that farmers often buy the entire package of agrochemicals lead to unnecessary expenses and losses. To mitigate this, NPCK has partnered with the Agrochemical Association of Kenya (AAK) and Pest control Produce Board (PCPB) to train FSPs as Spray Service Providers (SSPs) in all potato-growing counties. The trained SSPs will be listed on the Viazzi Soko platform, where farmers can query and find the nearest SSP to spray their crops for a fee. SSPs are expected to support farmers in spraying their crops using recommended and effective spray regime, responsible use of agrochemicals and empty container management.

Scouting for ware potato for marketing

The FSPs will be trained by NPCK to provide support in scouting and aggregating ware potatoes ready for harvesting. This is important for informing NPCK about the amount of potatoes available for market linkage purposes. They will act as NPCK scouting agents on the ground for matters related to potato availability and expected harvesting dates. Additionally, they will market ware potatoes for the farmers they represent on the Viazzi Soko platform.

Aggregation of input orders

The FSP will be trained on the importance of input aggregation and economies of scale. FSPs are expected to aggregate and order inputs on behalf of the farmers. The ordered inputs will be dropped to the respective selected pick-up points. NPCK is also establishing more pick-up points in various regions. The drop points are identified based on its accessibility, well known to farmers, secure and with someone to receive the inputs. The FSPs manning the pick-up points will be getting commission for every bag of seeds they aggregated and order on behalf of the farmers. The farmers who will not collect the seeds upon delivery will pay some fees for storage. Based on the rating, the FSP who will register more farmers and support in ordering inputs collectively will be rewarded.