

Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery

Strengthening evidence-use for equitable climate resilient coffee policy and praxis in Kenya

September 2026

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The British Academy

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Suggested citation

Kumeh, E.M., Hirons, M., Karuri, A.N., and Anne-Lily Kamau, A.L. (2026). Strengtheing evidence-use for equitable climate resilient coffee policy and praxis in Kenya. LCNR, ECI, University of Strathmore: Oxford.

This work was supported by the British Academy Evidence Informed Policy-making programme through the project Strengthening Evidence-use for Equitable Climate Resilient Coffee Policies (STEEP) (Award reference: EPG\100135). The authors gratefully acknowledge the British Academy for its support.

Abbreviations and acronyms

EIPM	Evidence-informed policymaking
EU	European Union
EUDR	European Union Deforestation Regulation
STEEP	Strengthening Evidence-use for Equitable Climate Resilient Coffee Policies
DSS	Direct Settlement System
AfCFTA	Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement
KPCU	Kenya Planters Cooperative Union
ECI	Environmental Change Institute
USD	United States Dollars
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
MRV	Monitoring, Reporting and Verification
CRI	Coffee Research Institute
NEMA	National Environment Management Authority
NTMs	Non-Tariff Measures
KEPHIS	Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate
KRA	Kenya Revenue Authority
KEBS	Kenya Bureau of Standards
QR	Quick Response
QA	Quality Assurance
AFA	Agriculture and Food Authority
kg	kilogramme
ha	hectare
4C	Certification for Climate, Conservation and Communities

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Executive summary

Kenya's coffee sector has experienced a long productivity and output decline since its peaks in the late-1980s. Nevertheless, the coffee sector supports over 700,000 small-scale farmers while export revenue, over USD180 during the 2025/2026 season. The decline in Kenya's coffee output is driven by interacting pressures, including climate variability, pests and diseases, and institutional and market disruptions associated with structural adjustment-era liberalisation and subsequent governance gaps. Recent reforms aimed at reversing these dynamics under the country's newly promulgate Coffee Bill (2023) include tighter trading rules, renewed working capital through the Coffee Cherry Advance Revolving Fund, emerging traceability/geo-mapping initiatives to manage compliance risk, and the creation of a coffee research and training institute. Parallel to domestic reforms, Kenya has developed a Green Supplement to its Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) implementation strategy to position coffee within a climate-resilient, green trade framework emphasising regenerative production, standards, and green finance.

This report assesses how evidence is produced, brokered, and used (or not used) in Kenya's coffee policymaking ecosystem, using the Evidence-Informed Policymaking (EIPM) framework. It argues that the Green Supplement represents a continuation of consultant-led, expert-curated evidence mobilisation during formulation relative to more distributed, institutionalised evidence economy for its implementation, in which evidence (audits, traceability artefacts, standards compliance, adoption metrics) becomes an operating requirement for policy delivery, enforcement, and market access. The report outlines the core evidence actors, including government ministries and agencies, research and academia, civil society and platforms, coffee companies/exporters, and producers/cooperatives, demonstrating how evidence is expected to flow across governance levels.



Analysis of how evidence featured in the Green Supplement highlights four key pathways, capabilities, relationships/networks, structures/processes, and evidence culture, and shows that evidence movement is shaped by four dominant contextual moderators, namely 1) coffee's political economy and reform volatility, 2) devolution and uneven county capacity, 3) compliance-driven trade risk (including EUDR) and documentary gatekeeping, and 4) smallholder economics and cooperative performance that determine the cost of evidence and whether documentation and certification are feasible and worth adopting. These moderators explain why the evidence architecture may become enabling or extractive.

Coffee stakeholders prioritised three key pressure points where the evidence architecture needs to pay attention: 1) transforming smallholder production by improving information transfer and ensuring benefits (prices, premiums, services, finance) flow back to farmers, 2) managing tensions associated with coffee certification (costs, labour demands, governance, premium transparency) through interoperable systems and credible returns, and 3) responding to emergent unilateral regulation, notably, the European Union Deforestation Regulation(EUDR) by building a national evidence architecture that reduce the risk of smallholders' exclusion from EU markets while reducing duplication and transaction costs, while exploring avenue to develop regional standards in collaboration with other coffee producer countries across Sub-Saharan Africa.

The report concludes that the success of Kenya's coffee sector will depend more on implementing the policies in place while building decision-ready evidence routines that align domestic reforms, regional (Green Supplement) ambitions with compliance realities. Additionally, it is essential to navigate these within the contextual need to protect small-scale coffee farmers who must not be overburdened with documentation demands and bureaucracies.



1. Introduction

1.1 The need to transform towards climate resilient coffee in Kenya

Kenya's altitude, soils and favourable climate enables it to produce quality Coffea arabica that is recognised by international, and increasingly local, consumers. After considerable gains in productions to about 130,000 tonnes in 1988, Kenya now produces around 50,000 tonnes of green coffee beans annually (Figure 1). Despite the decline, the coffee sector is a key employer, supporting over 700,000 small-scale farmers and their dependants. These farmers produce about 60% of Kenya's coffee. Coffee farmers produced on about 105,000 hectares of Kenya's agricultural land. Green coffee beans export generated USD310 million to the Kenyan economy in the 2023/2024 coffee season (USDA, 2025), and is the country's third largest agricultural export, behind tea and cut flowers.

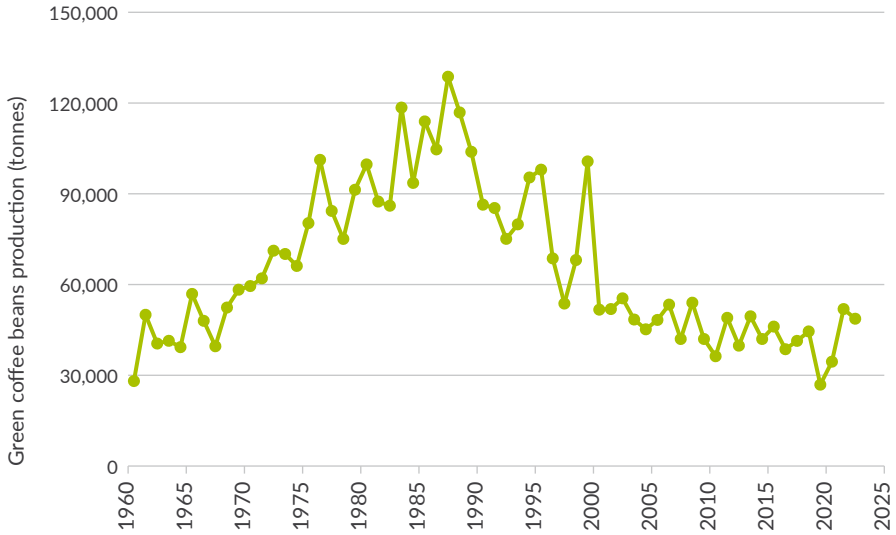


Figure 1: Coffee production dynamics in Kenya (1961-2023): Data, FAOSTAT (2025).

Drivers of Kenya's coffee decline are manifold. These include pests and diseases, climate change impacts and policy and institutional mishaps (Duguma, 2021). Regarding policy, the decline coincided with Kenya's Structural Adjustments Programme (SAP) in the late 1980s and 1990s which led to multiple restructuring of the sector. The SAP centred around a three-part cocktail of macroeconomic liberalisation, coffee market reforms and curtailing of financial services, resulting in cuts in support to agricultural services, and the curtailing of the Coffee Board of Kenya and Kenya Planters Cooperative Union's marketing and milling monopolies, respectively. The process also opened up and heightened the invention of multinational companies. These changes re-wired Kenya's coffee marketing and milling quickly, while thinning out farmer services, tightening credit, and deepening governance gaps. Combined with post-1989 price/regime shocks, the result was a sustained output decline from late-1980s peaks through the 1990s and 2000s, with small-scale coffee farmers experiencing the most decline.

In recent years, the Kenyan government have introduced multiple reforms to reconfigure its coffee sector and address SAP-liberalisation hangovers, aiming to produce 200,000 tonnes by 2027 (KILIMO, 2024).[1] For instance, the Nairobi Coffee Exchange now operates under Capital Markets Authority rules (with new trading rules) and a mandatory Direct Settlement System (DSS) that pays growers first and on time; broker licensing has been opened up, including farmer-led brokers, to dilute the old miller/agent choke-points; a refreshed statutory framework (the Coffee Bill, 2023), passed in March 2026, aims to restore sector-specific institutions and stable funding for research and coordination; licensing on the export side has been tightened and made more transparent; affordable working capital has been revived through the Coffee Cherry Advance Revolving Fund. A national geo-mapping/traceability drive is also underway to meet EUDR due diligence while keeping smallholders in EU chains. These reforms target the some of the sticky points that: impacted output and farmer incentives, nurtured opaque trading, delayed and leaky payments, weak research/extension, costly finance; and compliance risk. The stated goal is to overcome such challenges through clearer rules, faster cash flow, more competition, better data, and a practical path to premium markets.

The Kenyan government is concurrently exploring policy options to enable Kenya's coffee sector tap into trade opportunities available under the nascent Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement. Specifically, it developed a "Green Supplement" to its AfCFTA implementation strategy in order to integrate climate resilience and green trade practices in Kenya's coffee sector. This includes promoting regenerative coffee production, sustainable consumption, green standards and financing mechanisms (Section 2). An effective implementation of the Green Supplement will depend on 1) how well it dovetails with existing policy and institutional changes in the coffee sector, and 2) stakeholders' ability to mobilise quality evidence for innovation and reflexive learning that reflects lived and gendered experiences of coffee farmers.

This means that the challenge ahead is not merely more promulgating the policy but how to better use of evidence to steer implementation such that planned reforms, climate resilience, and market compliance reinforce one another rather than pull apart. Indeed, Kenya's targets (production growth, smallholder incomes, EUDR readiness, and green trade under AfCFTA) will be achieved or lost in the day-to-day decisions of various coffee farmers and their cooperatives, counties governments, regulators, and buyers. This demands a shared, decision-ready knowledge base: credible agronomy and landscape data, traceability and legality artefacts; and lived (including gendered) farmer experience, all translated into costed options aligned to the coffee stakeholders' resources and capabilities.

The next section introduces the Strengthening Evidence-use for Equitable, Climate-Resilient Coffee Policies (STEEP) Project, a research project designed to contributing to understanding how such dynamics are currently organised in order to generate insights to inform future decisions. STEEP applies an evidence-informed policymaking approach to (i) map who produces, brokers, and uses knowledge across Kenya's coffee system; (ii) strengthen the pathways through which evidence travels, capabilities, relationships, structures, and culture; and (iii) time analyses to the windows when decisions are actually made (regulatory updates, budget cycles, compliance deadlines).

1 In hindsight, this ambition is unachieveable as it would require Kenya to quadruple its production between now and 2027.

In practical terms, STEEP will convene partners, curate and generate decision-grade evidence (from shade–yield guidance to geo-traceability and finance options), and embed it in simple, reusable tools and routines that counties, cooperatives, and national agencies can act on.

1.2 The STEEP project and evidence-informed policymaking in coffee

The Strengthening Evidence-use for Equitable, Climate-Resilient Coffee Policies (STEEP) Project was conceived within the context of coffee policy reforms momentum in Ethiopia and Kenya: trading rules are being tightened, payment systems modernised, compliance expectations (notably EUDR) are rising, all while decentralised levels of governance and farmers carry a growing share of implementation burdens. Within the Kenyan coffee context, STEEP sought to understand existing evidence ecosystem, including the various actors, mechanisms and contextual factors that condition evidence-informed policymaking toward climate-resilient coffee production and trade.

Funded by the British Academy and implemented by the Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford (UK), and Strathmore University (Kenya). STEEP was also supported by the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery at the University of Oxford and the Faculties of Forestry & Environmental Stewardship and Land and Food Systems at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

The project was anchored in the Evidence-Informed Policymaking (EIPM) framework (Sempé et al., 2025) but interpreted through Kenya's devolved context. Adopting a broad understanding of evidence as coffee-relevant information produced across epistemologies and ontologies, the project recognises and give equal weighting to scientific, experiential, and Indigenous knowledge held by various actors with effective knowledge about coffee production, governance and trade. Within this framing, different forms of evidence include: peer-reviewed studies, administrative datasets, auction records, and geospatial layers, oral histories of climate and disease cycles, phenological calendars that link flowering, pruning, and harvest to local rainfall and temperature cues, shade-tree taxonomies and soil indicators used to balance cup quality with plant health, cooperative bylaws and customary rules that shape labour, water, and landscape stewardship, and tacit processing know-how (fermentation timing, drying routines) that determines quality and price.

Building on this and the Evidence-Informed Policymaking (EIPM) framework (Sempé et al., 2025), clarified in the next section, the project mapped who produces, brokers and uses this evidence (evidence actors), how evidence travels via capabilities, relationships, structures and routines (evidence pathways), and why/when it gains traction (moderating and contextual factors). By design, STEEP's outputs are decision-ready insights for a broad range of power differential actors working on climate-resilient coffee. Before delving into these insights, the next section explains the EIPM framework and the methods used to engaged coffee sector stakeholders to at the various findings (Section 2, Section 3), and main conclusions and recommendations (Section 4).

1.3 Approach and methodology

1.3.1 Conceptual framing: understanding evidence-informed policymaking

This report adapts the Evidence-Informed Policymaking (EIPM) Framework (Sempé et al., 2025) as its conceptual foundation. The Framework was developed to guide the Research Commission Centre of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's work on evidence use in policymaking. The framework provides a structured way to examine how evidence is generated, shared, and applied within complex policy systems. It stresses that policymaking is not a linear process whereby research outputs automatically drive policy designs. On the contrary, it posits that policymaking occurs in a dynamic and negotiated space that is influenced by various actors, relationships, power asymmetries, institutional incentives, and political context.

Policy actors, including governments, companies, civil society, farmers and local communities operate within a policy cycle, contesting to define policy problems (agenda settings), develop solutions or policy formulation, implement and evaluate policy outcomes to generate insights for influencing future actions. The EIPM framework recognises four sets of interrelated questions regarding who, how, and why and when evidence is brought into policy processes. We parse out these questions to build an analytical framework to guide our analysis in the Kenyan coffee sector.

To start with, at the heart of evidence-informed policymaking is a nested ecosystem of actors who produce, broker, and use evidence. This encompasses individuals and organisations who generate, broker, and demand evidence in policy processes. Such actors may include government agencies, research institutions, farmers or producers' associations, private-sector actors, civil society, and development partners, and their intermediaries such as think tanks and knowledge translation platforms. The quality of interaction among these actors influences how effectively knowledge flows through the system. Each actor operates within an institutional environment that shapes their mandates, incentives, and capacity to engage with evidence. The institutions are also nested with broader policy and political systems that are shaped by international organisations and other actors. This layered structured creates multiple entry points for evidence to influence policy. However, effective EIPM depends not only on technical research quality but also on trust, credibility, communication, and alignment of agendas across these actors. Where relationships are weak or misaligned, evidence risks being ignored, misinterpreted, or instrumentalised.

Secondly, after actors generated evidence, the knowledge can only influence policy if it is channelled and transformed across relevant individuals and institutions within strategic nodes of policy processes. According to Sempé et al. (2025) how depends on multiple interconnected pathways. To begin, a capability pathway relies on strengthening individual and institutional capacities to produce, interpret and apply evidence by providing them with technical research skills, policy analysis and other soft skills, including communication and negotiation. Additionally, a relationships and networks pathway emphasises building trust-based, sustained connections between actors in the evidence ecosystem to open space for dialogue, co-production, mutual understand of policy needs and evidence relevance. Moreover, a structures and processes pathway relates to institutionalised mechanisms that embed evidence in decision-making, such as dedicated evidence units, quality assurance systems, data sharing protocols and budge and planning frameworks.

Furthermore, evidence culture pathways highlight fostering norms, values, and leadership behaviours that make the use of evidence a routine expectation. Together, these pathways constitute the engine through which evidence informs, shapes, and legitimises policymaking. They also represent the key levers for reform, areas where targeted interventions can strengthen the evidence-policy interface.

Thirdly, evidence use never occurs in a vacuum. Consequently, the Sempé et al. (2025) postulate that political, economy, institutional and social context actor as moderating forces, either enabling or limiting EIPM. These factors influence why and when evidence is used. Political priorities, electoral cycles, budgetary timing, bureaucratic incentives, and public opinion all create or close "policy windows" for evidence uptake (Nohrstedt & Heinmiller, 2024). For example, leadership transitions, donor alignment, or international regulatory pressures (such as the EU Deforestation Regulation) can open opportunities for new, evidence-informed approaches to emerge. Alternatively, entrenched interests, limited institutional capacity, or competing narratives can restrict evidence use to symbolic or rhetorical functions. Understanding these dynamics is therefore essential for designing interventions that are both evidence-informed and politically feasible. In practice, this means recognising that context is not a backdrop but an active determinant of how evidence travels through the policy system. Effective evidence use depends as much on timing, framing, and relationships as it does on data quality or methodological rigour.

Sempé et al's. (2025) EIPM framework provides a systemic and adaptive lens for examining evidence use (or not) in Kenya's coffee sector. It helps unpack the complex interface between knowledge and power in coffee value chain governance by enabling us to specifically trace: 1) Who are the key actors and institutions generating, mediating and using evidence across the Kenyan coffee value chains? 2) how does evidence flow through pathways of capabilities, relationships, structures and culture, and 3) why and when do contextual factors enable or inhibit evidence uptake in coffee-related policymaking. By building on this simple decomposition of the framework, this report moves beyond linear models of research update. On the contrary, it positions EIPM as a relations, iterative, and context-dependent process that depends as much on socio-political systems as on evidence itself.

While Sempé et al's. (2025) framework emphasises research-based and institutional forms of evidence, as noted earlier (Section 1.2), this report adopts a broader, pluralistic understanding. In Kenya's coffee sector, evidence also encompasses traditional, experiential, and indigenous knowledge systems, the intergenerational wisdom of farmers and forest communities whose practices have sustained Coffea arabica for centuries. Recognising these epistemic traditions alongside formal scientific research is essential to a genuinely inclusive vision of evidence-informed policymaking, one rooted in the lived realities and ecological intelligence of Kenya's coffee landscapes. Anchored in this inclusive understanding of evidence, the next section outlines the empirical approach through which the study examined how diverse forms of knowledge interact with policymaking processes across Kenya's coffee value chain.

1.3.2 Data collection and analysis

This report adopts a three-phased approach (see Fig 2) to determine who, how, why and when evidence may be mobilised for coffee sector policymaking in Kenya. The iterative approach was designed to 1) capture how evidence, broadly defined, circulates, is valued, and is applied within Kenya's coffee policy ecosystem, 2) ensure the research moves beyond descriptive mapping to interrogate the dynamic processes and contextual conditions shaping evidence use. The approach combines key informant interviews, participatory stakeholder mapping and engagement, and analytical synthesis. Our designed emphasised inclusion of diverse stakeholders and knowledge systems, reflecting Kenya's history of coffee cultivation and governance.

Phase I: Key informant interviews (KIIs)

The first phase comprised in-depth interviews with purposively selected stakeholders representing the range of institutions involved in coffee governance and policymaking. Participants included officials from national government bodies, research and extension organisations, producer cooperatives, private exporters, civil-society, and development partners (full list, see Annex 1).

The KIIs explored: 1) how evidence is understood and valued within coffee policy processes and the most influential actors; 2) the institutional mechanisms and incentives shaping evidence use; 3) perceived enablers and barriers to integrating research and experiential knowledge; 4) examples of effective or missed opportunities for evidence uptake, 5) and topical issues in coffee that require more evidence. Phase I was useful not only in revealing who mattered in coffee policymaking but also their relationships with other actors, their key capabilities and motivations, as well as how they mobilise evidence when making coffee policy in Kenya.

Phase II: Stakeholder workshops

We held two multi-stakeholder workshops, in October 2025, and March 2026, bringing together participants from across the coffee value chain to validate, deepen, and co-interpret findings from Phase 1. Through presentations, group work and discussions, participants collectively examined how evidence moved through policy spaces. The workshops created a deliberative environment to identify and validate priority challenges for achieving climate-resilient coffee policy, highlight cross-institutional linkages, and articulate practical entry points for strengthening evidence use. Priority issues identified were: 1) transforming smallholder coffee production, 2) coffee-certification nexus, and 3) the EUDR in the context of Kenya. The participatory process of this stage stimulated mutual learning between various actors in Kenya's coffee evidence ecosystem, including government officials, NGO representatives, coffee companies, research institutions, and platforms.

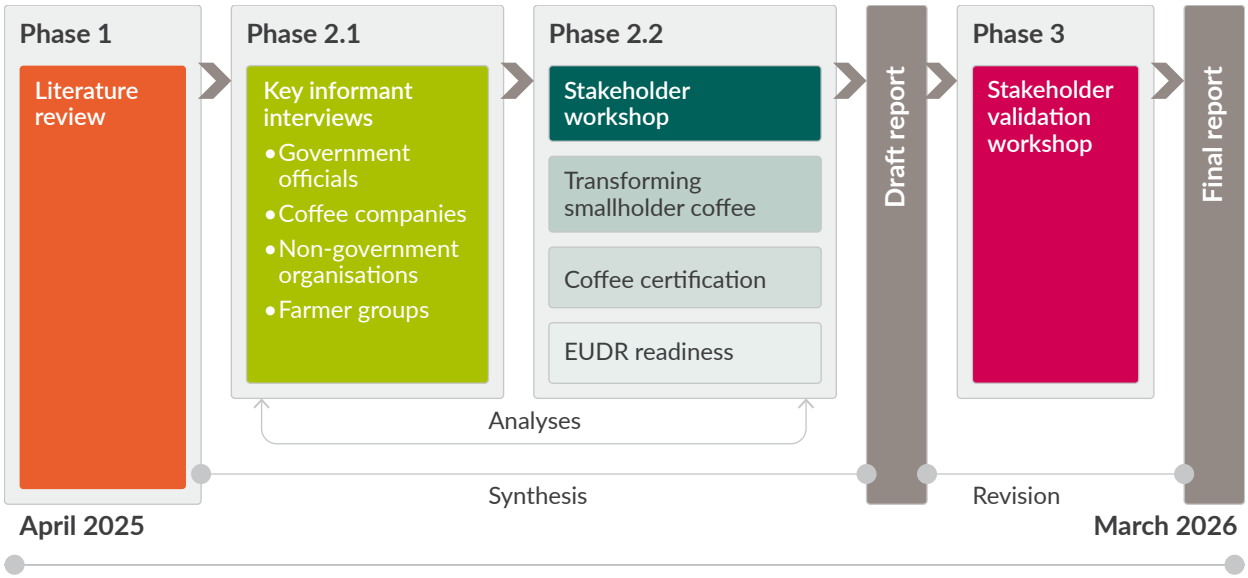


Figure 2: Methodological approach to evidence-informed coffee policy in Kenya

Phase III: Analytical synthesis

The final phase of the approach involved a structured synthesis of insights from the KIIs, the workshop deliberations, and a targeted review of relevant policy documents, strategic plans, and research outputs. This triangulation enabled a comprehensive analysis of how evidence interacts with Kenya's coffee policy landscape, guided explicitly by the Sempé et al.'s (2025) framework's three dimensions, i.e., actors and institutions, pathways of change, and moderating and contextual factors. The synthesis distils patterns of evidence (non) engagement and barriers across various levels of coffee governance in Kenya, sustainable production and trade. By linking empirical examination with conceptual insights, the synthesis anchors the report's analysis of Kenya's coffee policymaking ecosystem in both the systemic lens of Sempé et al.'s (2025) framework and the lived realities of coffee policy actors in Kenya.

1.3.3 Methodological reflections

By design, the qualitative, multi-phase approach enabled triangulation validation of our insights across Kenya's coffee sector actors. Nevertheless, some limitations are inherent with our approach. Firstly, the research was conducted within a compressed timeline (April 2025-March 2026). This limited the depth of stakeholders that could be covered. Some policy actors, such the county official and coffee farmers were under-represented due to access and scheduling constraints. Secondly, we relied on self-reported perceptions, which may have introduced selective recall or institutional bias among some of the stakeholders interviewed. However, by triangulating data from multiple sources, including the stakeholder validation workshop, the project created space for different stakeholders to review, refine and confirm interpretations of preliminary findings. This included forming a team of local experts from the validation workshop to review the final report.

1.4 Structure of the report

Beyond the Introduction, the report is organised into three main sections. Section 2 applies the EIPM framework to map Kenya's coffee policy ecosystem. It begins with an overview of the formal policy and regulatory landscape governing Kenya's coffee sector, followed by an analysis of the actor ecosystem - the who of EIPM. It then explores the pathways of change through which evidence travels across institutions and networks, and the moderating and contextual factors that shape when and why evidence influences decisions. Together, these analyses reveal how evidence currently operates within Kenya's coffee governance architecture.

Section 3 draws on the key informant interviews and stakeholder workshops to synthesise the issues that actors themselves identified as most critical for achieving a climate-resilient coffee policy. It examines three interlinked policy arenas: (i) transforming smallholder coffee production; (ii) tensions and issues with coffee certification; and (iii) emerging external legislative requirements, notably the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). The analysis connects these issues to the evidence pathways identified earlier, showing where knowledge generation and policy processes either align or diverge.

Section 4 integrates insights from across the report to distil the key lessons for effective, climate-resilient coffee policymaking in Kenya, with resonance for other producer countries. It revisits the EIPM framework to identify leverage points for strengthening evidence use and formulates stakeholder-specific recommendations for government agencies, producer organisations, research institutions, and development partners. The section concludes by outlining practical steps toward a more adaptive and inclusive evidence ecosystem in Kenya's coffee sector.

Throughout the sections, we deliberately provide space for the voices of the various actors by quoting materials from the key informant interviews and works. A list of references and annexes follow the main text, providing supporting documentation from the research.

2. Evidence-use in coffee policymaking in Kenya

> **"What started as a racially stratified export regime is transitioning towards sustainability-seeking value chain system – yet both rely on dense regulatory infrastructures that continue to shape who benefits from Kenya's coffee economy."** (Authors, 2026)

From its origins as a colonial estate crop to its current role in green and regional trade strategies like the AfCTA, coffee production in Kenya has been defined by successive waves of institutional reform. These reforms reflect evolving political, economic and environmental priorities, moving from centralised control to cooperative governance, and more recently, to standards-based value change management. Understanding this historical imperative is essential for navigating EIPM as reflected in contemporary coffee policy choices and future reform trajectories. Thus, this section recaps the evolution of coffee policies in Kenya, situating them in three overlapping eras that reveal key changes that have been undertaken.

2.1 Colonial Era: racialised control, discipline and extraction (1900s – 1963)

Kenya's coffee policy regime during the colonial era emerged as part of a broader strategy by the British colonial administration to consolidate settler agriculture, stabilise imperial revenues, and regulate the country's participation in export production. Thus, coffee framed in colonial development plans as a strategic export crop, required to balance the colony's export accounts and finance administrative infrastructure. Development policy during this era prioritised European estates in the highlands, while cultivation by the natives was tightly restricted, permitted selectively after the 1930s and particularly in response to the Mau Mau uprising as a mechanism of political pacification and rural restructuring.

Legally, the colonial era was typified by centralised and racially differentiated regulation. The Coffee Industry Ordinance (1932) and subsequent amendments established licensing, inspection, marketing controls, leading to the formation of the Coffee Board of Kenya in January 1933 (Agriculture and Food Authority, 2015). The institutional apparatus shaped who could grow coffee, where it could be grown, how it was processed, and how it entered markets. Evidence production during the era was centralised, too, informing a legal framework that combined phytosanitary logics with political-economy objectives, notably maintaining settler dominance, enforcing quality and discipline, and challenging foreign exchange through approved intermediaries.

Operationally, colonial coffee governance drew on detailed administrative procedures and technical rules, developed mainly by colonial officials. Estate inspections, compulsory grading, centralised curing and standardised export document served as operating procedures, while extension manuals and estate management guidelines circulated via settler colonial associations and government departments, embedding agronomic advancements and quality protocols into daily farm operations. These early operating procedures were not farmer-oriented capacity building tools. Alternatively, they served as disciplinary mechanisms for eliciting compliance with export standards and imperial market demands.

The combination of the legal and operational instruments during this era created a vertically integrated system that positioned coffee mainly as an imperial asset, with evidence flow structured to shape law and technical guidance that reproduced surveillance and quality enforcement. This system laid the basis for mechanisms like the auctions, grading and inspection routines that continue to shape evidence production for Kenya's coffee governance today, even as their political purposes have changed slightly with the post-colonial government.

2.2 Post-colonial era: smallholders, cooperatives and parastatal governance (1964 to 2010)

Following political independence, Jomo Kenyatta's administration's development policy reframed coffee from a settler export domain into a bedrock of smallholder-led rural development. Kenya's national development plans from the mid-1960s to the 1980s and highlighted cooperative growth, income redistribution, and Africanisation of agricultural production (International Coffee Organization, 2019). Coffee became embedded in a state-driven modernisation paradigm, where productivity, cooperative participation, and foreign exchange earning were mutually reinforcing objectives.

This vision was translated into laws via a consolidation and adaptation of various colonial statutes. For example, the Coffee Act #9 of 2001 (Cap 333) formalised the sector's regulatory structure around licensing, marketing, and quality control, while retaining ministerial oversight and parastatal authority. The Kenya Coffee Board and affiliated institutions supervised milling, auctioning, warehousing, and export, while cooperatives became intermediaries between farmers and markets. Liberalisation reforms in the 1990s, post the Uruguay round of negotiations on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, including the Agreement on Agriculture in 1994, laid the grounds for the Structural Adjustment Program which prioritised a liberalisation of the coffee sector and the emergence of multinationals.

Although regulatory authority remained upstream and concentrated within public institutions, the liberalisation agenda brought new actors into the sector, shaping not only the forms of evidence produced but also who could influence policy decisions. Cooperative by-laws, marketing rules during the period expanded governance, with pulping station manuals, cooperative accounting guidelines and auction trading rules used to standardise operations across thousands of smallholder factors. State and private sector extension services disseminated various agroeconomic recommendations and pest-control protocols, aimed at stabilising quality and farmer participation, but also created bureaucratic complexity and opportunities for rent-seeking (International Coffee Organization, 2019).

By the 2000s, tensions between farmer welfare, cooperative governance irregularities and market liberalisation had become key concerns. Recurrent scandals, declining productivity and coffee farmers' dissatisfaction prompted successive reform attempts. However, the central institutional rationalities persisted, with a strong focus commercialisation, central oversight, and standardisation through cooperative mediated production. Essentially, the post-colonial systems became at best a partial democratisation of the colonial regime, notably the expansion of actors in the coffee sector while preserving state-dominated, hierarchical control.

2.3 Contemporary era: devolution, value chain governance and green trade integration (2010 – present)

Since around 2010, Kenya's coffee policy landscape has been redefined by constitutional devolution, value chain thinking, and sustainability-focused development strategies. For example, the country's 2010 Constitution mandates multi-stakeholder consultation be organised during policy formulation. In principle, this further expanded not only the nature of actors to be involved but also the epistemic systems to inform policies. Implementation of the Kenya Vision 2030, the Agricultural Sector Development Strategy (2010-2020), and its successor, the Agriculture Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (2019-2029) frame coffee within broader agendas of agribusiness competitiveness, private investment, and climate resilience (Government of Kenya, 2010, 2018). Coffee is recognised today as a livelihood crop and a high-value export connected with industrial and trade objectives within the country's Coffee Development and Marketing Strategy (2024-2029) (MoALD, 2024).

Reforms emphasising this including the Crops Act (Cap 318), 2013 and various coffee-specific regulations. For instance, the Coffee (General) Regulations # 120, 2016; revised 2019 and 2022) reorganised licensing, registration, marketing and traceability across the value chain. This legislation formally recognises direct coffee sales, speciality markets, and county-level roles, while strengthening data reporting and compliance mechanisms. Central to this was the establishment of the Coffee Directorate via the Agriculture and Food Actor of 2013 to develop and ensure coffee remains a key contributor to the Kenyan economy. The nascent Coffee Bill (2023), passed in March 2026, aims to further rationalise institutions and restore a dedicated Coffee Board within a devolved governance context, while also providing for a creation of a Coffee Research and Training Institute.

Operational governance of Kenya's coffee has become increasingly codified and digitalised, within licensing checklists, inspection protocols, grading schedules and electronic trading systems now part of the coffee sector architecture. Fig 3 shows the different licenses, permits and certificates governing Kenya's coffee production and trade and the institutions authorised to issue them. Sustainability and certification schemes have also grown, aimed at embedding environmental and social standards into coffee production. Unlike the previous eras, current guidelines now explicitly reference climate-smart agriculture, agroforestry, and low-carbon processing, all of which introduces new actors and calls for mobilising new evidence.

These changes align directly with Kenya's AfCFTA Green Supplement strategy for its tea and coffee sectors. The Green Supplement connects Kenya's domestic regulatory instruments like traceability rules, quality standards, sustainability certification, and value addition to the Africa continental trade objectives (UNECA, 2024).

Coffee policy, thus, functions at the intersection of agricultural governance and trade diplomacy, where environmental compliance and value chains upgrading are framed as competitive advantage in African markets, with a contemporary coffee regime that appears to be caught between older structures of parastatal-cooperative control of the early post-colonial era and more contemporary network and standards-oriented governance. Indeed, the primary logic of navigating coffee as crop for securing foreign exchange remains. This export-dependency dictates that various actors must align with broader landscape shifts in coffee governance, with the most consequential in recent years being the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).

Promulgated by the European Union in June 2023, the EUDR aims to eliminate crops connected with deforestation against the cut-off date of 31st December 2020 from the Union's market. The regulation uses a benchmarking system to classify countries. While Kenya has been designated a low-risk country, like other producer-countries, it needs to develop an institutional mechanism for providing the geo-location, due diligence statement and other requirement with coffee shipments to be verified by the designated authorities of relevant EU countries importing the coffee. About 55-60% of Kenya's coffee exports are to the EU, which makes the EUDR compliance consequential for the country.

As the Kenyan coffee sector policies, laws and operational procedures evolve over the from state-dominance to stronger market and polycentric imperative while navigating external systemic shocks like the EUDR, the nature and scope of actors engaged have expanded, each coming not only with expectations but also resources for producing and contending evidence and its use (or not) in shaping what is likely to become in the post-EUDR regime over time. Recognising this, the next section applies the evidence-informed policy framework, developed in Section 1.3.1, to examine the various actors operating the Kenyan coffee evidence economy and the mechanisms and pathway to draw on to ensure their evidence counts within the broader coffee policymaking arena in the country. This is done within the context of the Green Supplement policy document.



Table 1: The permits, licenses and certificates moderating coffee production and trade in Kenya. Source: Coffee Bill (2023), passed in March 2026.

No.	Type of licence/permit or certificate	Issuing authority
1.	Coffee buyer's licence	Board
2.	Independent cupping laboratory licence	Board
3.	Warehouse operator's licence	Board
4.	Coffee liqueur's licence	Board
5.	Processed coffee import permit	Board
6.	Clean coffee movement permit for exports	Board
7.	Coffee trading licence	Board
8.	Commercial coffee miller's licence	Board
9.	Warehouse licence	County government
10.	Coffee nursery certificates	County government
11.	Pulping station licence	County government
12.	Grower's milling licence	County government
13.	Coffee roaster's licence	County government
14.	Parchment permit from the county of origin	County government
15.	Clean coffee movement permit from the county of origin	County government
16.	Coffee exchange licence	Capital Markets Authority
17.	Brokers licence	Capital Markets Authority

3. The actors ecosystem influencing Kenyan coffee policymaking, with emphasis on the Green Supplement

Evidence within Kenya's coffee sector is managed by four main groups: (i) government ministries and statutory institutes, (ii) research and academia, (iii) civil-society and private-sector platforms, and (iv) producers themselves (farmers, cooperatives and unions). The Green Supplement formalises many of these roles, clarifying responsibility along knowledge generation, awareness, standards alignment and monitoring across the coffee value chain. Drawing on our interviews, workshops and literature review, this section demonstrates how it achieved this by first highlighting the evidence mobilisation process that informed the Green Supplement before characterising the future evidence ecosystem it seeks to promote or institutionalise.

3.1 Evidence architecture in formulating the Green Supplement

3.1.1 Evidence producers

During formation, the Green Supplement's evidence base was assembled mainly through centrally generated datasets, commissioned research and selected civil-society studies on coffee. Key evidence producers included Kenya's Agriculture and Food Authority, the State Departments for Agriculture and Trade, and the National Environment Management Authority, wich supplied administrative records, coffee production statistics, and regulatory reports. Further research evidence was also provided by the KALRO Coffee Research Institutes and university-based researchers through agronomic studies, climate assessment, and market analyses. Various civil society organisations, notably Solidaridad and the Kenya Climate Change Working Group (KCCWG) generated programme evaluations and policy briefs that were widely cited in preparatory documents and multi-stakeholder workshops.

Farmers and coffee cooperatives appear to have participated primarily as respondents rather than systematic data producers. Their experiential knowledge centred the evidence base indirectly, mediated through consultants and CSOs. As one key informant noted, "*the most influential content came from some of the publications that were consulted … They had collected a lot of information that was needed*." (KO2, 08, 25). The resulting evidence composition while arguably expert-heavy and institutionally concentrated was also reflexive of the shortcoming of the approach with one expert pointing out that "*experiential evidence from grassroots actors emerged as crucial for verifying the information gathered in the literature… Evidence is sometimes a feeling, observing the farmer can tell you a lot*." (KO3, 08.25). This highlights the need to broaden not only the scope of actors involved but also what actors consider to be evidence to render it more inclusive and contextually relevant for the Green Supplement implementations.

3.1.2 Evidence intermediaries

Intermediation during the Green Supplement formation was dominated by international and national consultants operating under the coordination of UNECA's Africa Trade Policy Centre and the State Department of Trade. These teams curated government statistics, research outputs, and stakeholder inputs into diagnostic reports and draft Green Supplement texts. Ministry-based technical units served as secondary intermediaries, translating consultant analyses into policy language suitable for cabinet and inter-ministerial reviews.

Workshop and validation meetings served as key translation spaces, where field-level observations were reframed into standard policy categories like "resilience", "competitiveness", and "market access". However, this mediation process concentrated interpretative authority to a relatively small group of experts and facilitators, with evidence appearing to have flowed upward through filtered channels rather than horizontally among producers. This reinforces a technocratic mode of knowledge brokerage.

3.1.3 Evidence users

The key users of evidence in the formulation phase of the Green Supplement were senior officials in the Ministries of Trade and Agriculture, the National Treasury, and AFA. Evidence was mobilised to justify the Supplement's alignment with AfCFTA, Kenya's climate commitments, and Vision 2030 priorities. Development partners and regional bodies served as secondary audiences, as analytical outputs were designed to demonstrate strategic coherence and readiness for external support.

Private sector actors, cooperatives, and farmers groups engaged mainly via consultative forums, with limited influence in analytical framing. Consultants also served as proximate users of evidence, assembling desk studies and triangulating sources before drafting policy texts. As one consultant observed "*before composing the document for the first workshop, a desk study was done to compile evidence on the coffee sector.*" (KO2, 08.25). Evidence, thus, functioned mainly as an instrument of legitimisation and agenda setting within the Green Supplement formulation.

3.1.4 External actors

UNECA served as a key external actor within the Green Supplement formulation, providing methodological templates, benchmarking frameworks, and convening power. Bilateral partners and development agencies, particularly the Danish Embassy in Kenya supported consultations, indirectly influencing the scope and framing of evidence. International climate and trade regimes informed indicator selection and normative prioritise, with one workshop participant observing that the "*Africa Trade Policy Centre floated the assignment … it was agreed that countries … develop an annex focusing on priority sectors.*" (CSO2, 08.25). This upstream influence anchored the Green Supplement within globally circulating models of green trade and climate governance, enhancing technical credibility but with a trade-off of narrowing epistemic diversity.

3.2 Evidence architecture for Green Supplement implementation

3.2.1 Evidence producers

In the implementation phase, the Green Supplement institutionalises and decentralises evidence production across the coffee value chain (Table 2). Coffee farmers, cooperatives, and processors are expected to generate continuous data on practices, resource use and productivity through audits, digital reporting systems, and extension monitoring. AFA and county governments are expected to coordinate registration, inspection, and licensing records, while NEMA and the Kenya Forest Service (KES) produce carbon, water and land-use data.

Research institutions like KALRO-Coffee Research Institute and partners university, are tasked with generating applied evidence on climate-resilience coffee varieties, and sustainable production systems, linked to adoption targets. Coffee exporters and marketers are expected to compile traceability and certification records in collaboration with the Kenya Bureau of Standards and accredited bodies. Evidence production is thus envisioned to become embedded in routine production, regulator and commercial operations.

3.2.2 Evidence intermediaries

Intermediary functions during the Green Supplement implementation is expected to move from ad-hoc consultancy teams to permanent regulatory, technical and market institutions. For example, AFA is expected to aggregate and verify data across farm and factory levels. The Kenya Bureau of Standards and certification bodies will translate audit results into compliance marks, with the Ministry of Trade consolidating export and sustainability data for AfCFTA reporting.

Across these actors, digital platforms, warehouse receipt systems, and traceability databases will increasingly mediate evidence flows between actors. CSOs and business association continue to perform brokerage roles, but within formalised programme structures tied to RBME targets. Intermediation will thus be bureaucratised and routinised, creating stable channels for evidence circulation.



3.2.3 Evidence users

Within the framing of the Green Supplement, evidence users are expected to expand and become more diverse and functionally differentiated. Policymakers across the Ministries of Trade, Agriculture, and the National Treasure will use monitoring data to design incentives, subsidies, and regulatory reforms, with AFA and NEAM relying on audit outcomes for license and enforcement decision-making. Exporters and buyers will use certification and traceability data to secure market access and potentially premiums.

AfCFTA institutions and regional bodies will draw on national reports to assess compliance and integration. Locally, coffee farmers and cooperatives are encouraged to use performance data for their management decisions and accessing finance. This vision positions evidence use not only as a governance tool but also an economic resource for decision-making at all levels.

3.2.4 External actors

These actors are positioned as validators, financiers, and systems enablers rather than primary policy formulators. International certification agencies, climate finance institutions, and carbon market platforms will rely on Kenyan-generated data for verification and funding decisions, with AfCFTA institutions using Ministry of Trade submission for peer review and coordination, while development partners support funding of digital infrastructure, MRV systems, and institutional capacity development rather than direct, on-the-ground data gathering. External engagement within the current framing is expected to become performance-based, contingent on the credibility and concurrence of domestic reporting systems. This reinforces incentives for compliance while embedding Kenyan coffee evidence within transnational governance regimes.



Table 2: The Green Supplements Evidence governance map

Governance level	Nature of evidence	Purpose	Key actors
Farm and processing level	• Farmer practice reports • Input-use records • Water and energy audits • Factory inspection reports • Productivity and yield surveys	• Verify adoption of climate-smart practices • Monitor resource efficiency • Support sustainability certification • Establish production baselines	• Smallholder farmers • Cooperatives • Processing factories • KTDA / private millers
Environmental and resource governance level	• Carbon audit reports • Deforestation and land-use data • Water-use assessments • Environmental impact reports	• Validate mitigation and adaptation claims • Support NDC and REDD+ reporting • Monitor ecosystem impacts • Enable green trade verification	• NEMA • Kenya Forestry Service • Ministry of Environment • Ministry of Water
Regulatory and standards level	• Certificates of compliance • Quality marks • Licensing and registration records • Policy revision documentation	• Enforce green standards • Harmonise regulations • Ensure export eligibility • Maintain quality assurance	• Agriculture and Food Authority • Kenya Bureau of Standards • Coffee Board / Tea Board • Certification bodies
Market and trade Level	• Export statistics • Certification reports • NTM/NTB assessments • AfCFTA compliance reports	• Demonstrate market access • Monitor trade barriers • Track competitiveness of green products • Support regional integration	• Exporters associations • Ministry of Trade • EAC Secretariat • AfCFTA institutions
Social and inclusion governance level	• Cooperative governance reports • Gender participation data • Employment and training records • Inclusion monitoring reports	• Track women and youth participation • Validate social safeguards • Support inclusive trade commitments • Monitor governance reforms	• Cooperatives • Gender Empowerment Platform • Ministry of Youth • Civil society organisations
Knowledge, learning and capacity level	• Training toolkits • Awareness campaign reports • Impact evaluations • Baseline and follow-up surveys	• Measure behavioural change • Improve policy design • Support adaptive management • Strengthen institutional capacity	• State Department of Agriculture • State Department of Climate Change • NGOs • Research institutions

3.3 Inter-linkages of the actors in the Green Supplement and Kenya's agriculture-forest evidence economy

Kenya's agriculture and forest policy system already operates as a multi-layer evidence economy: biophysical monitoring (forests, water, climate), agricultural research and extension, regulatory compliance, and market documentation interact to shape incentives and enforcement. The Green Supplement plugs the coffee sector into this broader machinery by explicitly organising how evidence will be generated, translated, and used across institutions that routinely govern land-use and commodity trade, AFA and county governments (regulatory and extension intelligence), KEBS (standards and conformity), NEMA and the Kenya Forest Service (environmental and land-use evidence), and the State Departments for Agriculture, Trade, and Climate Change (policy alignment, budgeting, and reporting). The result is a governance model in which green trade is not only a trade ambition but a documentation architecture that links farm and factory practices to national compliance signals and regional market access.

The distinction between Green Supplement formulation and implementation phases clarifies how this evidence economy is envisioned and articulated. In formulation phase, evidence largely moved through a classic Kenyan policy pattern: ministry datasets, regulatory records, research outputs (KALRO–CRI and universities), with a set of influential CSO and programme publications curated through UNECA/ATPC-led diagnostics and stakeholder workshops into a strategic narrative. Evidence use was oriented toward agenda-setting and legitimacy, indicating AfCFTA relevance, climate rationale, and institutional feasibility. Post-formulation, the Green Supplement is assembled to shift evidence from a planning input to a governing instrument. It manifest in the assigning of routine roles to actors across the value chain and embeds these roles in indicators, means of verification, and responsible entities (Table 2). Alternatively, the Green Supplement attempts to convert Kenya's episodic, workshop-driven evidence mobilisation into continuous, auditable evidence production tied to budgets, compliance, and performance targets.

Operationally, the system functions as a results chain that mirrors Kenya's wider agriculture–forest governance logic. This means that farm and factory data (practices, water and energy use, productivity), ecosystem and climate evidence (carbon, deforestation, water audits), and regulatory information (licenses, inspections, standards compliance) are translated by intermediaries into usable instruments like codes of practice, toolkits, SOPs, campaigns, and demonstration centres, and then reabsorbed by state and market users as enforceable rules and market signals. This is precisely what Table 2 captures: evidence is produced at multiple levels, intermediate institutions validate and package it, and downstream users convert it into standards, enforcement actions, trade reporting, and financing decisions. The result-based monitoring and evaluation (RBME) design makes the evidence chain governable by specifying what counts as verification (e.g. certificates, audit reports, survey reports, trade reports) and naming accountable institutions.

The key implication for Kenya's broader agriculture and forest evidence economy is that the Green Supplement advances a single evidence spine approach. A single auditable trail, from plots and processing facilities through environmental verification and standards certification to export reporting, expected to serve multiple policy and market purposes at once (climate action, forest protection, quality assurance, AfCFTA competitiveness, and inclusion).

Where this succeeds, evidence becomes economically meaningful because it may unlock certification, reduces non-tariff frictions, supports green finance, and strengthens the state's ability to steer land-use outcomes. Where it fails, the likely points of breakdown are familiar in Kenya's agriculture–forest governance and include fragmented data systems, uneven county capacity, compliance costs borne by smallholders, and weak interoperability between environmental verification and trade documentation. The Green Supplement's value, therefore, arguably is not only in its objectives, but in how it reconfigures institutional inter-linkages so evidence can move faster, and more credibly, from knowledge production to adoption, enforcement, and market outcomes.

3.4 Pathways of changing coffee policy in Kenya

The evidence informed framework (Section 1.3.1) treats evidence-to-policy as complex journeys that run through mutually reinforcing pathways as opposed to a linear pipeline. In Kenya's coffee case, those journeys were channelled into a defined formulation architecture, involving a UNECA and Ministry of Trade-commissioned desk study, semi-structured interviews with key actors, and a three-day multi-stakeholder consultation workshop, followed by a validation workshop approving the final Green Supplement (Government of Kenya, 2025). This section explains how evidenced moved through the various pathways, including stakeholders' reflections on the process to ground the pathways and what stakeholders themselves flagged as constraints and entry points.

3.4.1 Capabilities

Across the Kenyan coffee arena, three capability constraints repeatedly shape whether evidence can move from production sites into strategy text and implementation logic: (i) technical research and translation capacity, (ii) commissioning and appraisal capacity inside government, and (iii) last-mile extension and data capabilities. The EIPM framework is explicit that capabilities include not only technical research skills, but also synthesis, translation, appraisal, and commissioning skills among users, plus intermediaries' capacity to repackage evidence for different audiences. The various stakeholder interviews pointed to a perceived erosion in publicly funded research capacity "*funding cut by the government is also impacting CRI's ability to meet the information and germplasm needs of stakeholders*." (K03–DKUT). Some stakeholders associated this with unresolved agronomic questions and inconsistent advice between various actors that engage with coffee producers like state and county agencies, coffee companies, and civil society organisations.

Stakeholder inputs from the validation workshop reinforced the "*translation and last-mile*" bottleneck, which included conflicting advice on fertiliser regimes and shade trees. At the same time, low farmer awareness of new compliance expectations, were explicitly identified as constraints on policy effectiveness and uptake. This represents both knowledge and operational capacity gaps, as observed by stakeholders during the workshop: "*in many counties the staff assigned to do extension work do not even have the means like transportation like motorbikes to get out into the field*". This suggests that the movement of evidence (and consistent messages) depends heavily on resource and governance at the county level.

The Green Supplement's own formulation and implementation logic implicitly recognises this challenge by embedding learning mechanisms (workshops, toolkits, campaigns, demonstration centres) and results-based monitoring to make evidence production and uptake budgetable and trackable, rather than ad hoc (Government of Kenya 2025). In EIPM terms, this representing a cascading effects where building capability across producers, intermediaries, and users are required if evidence is to be generated, assessed, and applied repeatedly.

3.4.2 Relationships and networks

Relationships and networks serve as the routing infrastructure for developing the Green Supplement. The EIPM framework stresses that evidence use depends on trust, credibility, mutual understanding, and the ongoing cultivation of ties through dialogues and co-production, alongside informal networks that often determine whose evidence is privileged. Our interviews highlighted strong political embeddedness, with some key informants arguing that the "*coffee sector is the most politically connected sector … when the Mt Kenya region is affected, everybody will feel the impact*," and that "*evidence often circulates via both on-record consultations and "closed-door" circuits*" (K02, 08.2025). These circuits can accelerate alignment (rapid coalition-building) while also narrowing whose evidence is allowed to enter the evidence ecosystem as an authoritative narrative.

This point was iterated during our validation workshop, with stakeholders observing that evidence use is "rarely linear". The existing literature also observes that formal consultation requirements coexist with informal norms, networks, and political interests that shape participation and what counts as legitimate knowledge (Wangari, 2025). The workshops further highlighted the bridging function of intermediaries (consultants, associations, platforms such as KEPSA and KCCWG) in translating technical data into policy-relevant insights and ensuring circulation between researchers, policymakers, and private actors.

External network actors also mattered considerable within the relationships and networks that channel evidence use in the Green Supply because they created the policy window within which all deliberations, research and policy formulation happened. Various stakeholders note that UNECA/ATPC catalysed the Supplement as an AfCFTA-related "annex" to fill perceived climate gaps in the core framework, effectively convening ministries, consultants, and platforms around a shared problem definition. This is consistent with the EIPM framing that sustained networks and co-production are what convert evidence into agenda traction, but the Kenya case also highlights a standing risk: if network access is unequal, evidence diffusion becomes selective and implementation legitimacy weakens.

3.4.3 Structures and processes

On paper, Kenya's constitutional commitments to public participation provide a formal entry point for evidence. In practice, stakeholders described a persistent gap between statutory procedure and lived process (Wangari, 2025). The Green Supplement's formulation did use recognisable procedural anchors like desktop research, semi-structured interviews, a multi-day consultative workshop, and a subsequent validation workshop where stakeholders approved the final product. These served as formal mechanisms for evidence review and incorporation through which different knowledge streams are meant to be sifted, negotiated, and stabilised into strategy language.

However, the same system may be undermined when procedural openness does not translate into genuine incorporation. This tension emerged during various interviews: "*occasionally, government officials meet key stakeholders and key decisions are taken but such information may not necessarily be available to the public*," and some consultations were perceived as "tokenistic," with inputs "*filtered primarily to suit the interests of key policy actors, 'the people in power'*" (K02; K01). This corroborated the framing of structures and processes in the EIPM, which observed that they can either institutionalise evidence use (transparent review procedures, repositories, quality standards) or become performative rituals that privilege pre-selected narratives. Yet, stakeholders also flagged market-governance and regulatory structures also dampen evidence uptake by raising transaction costs and creating ambiguity. One example cited was the confusion created by inconsistent messaging from various stakeholders to coffee farmers. Another concerns the weak systems for traceability and documentation needed for emerging compliance regimes (Wangari, 2025).

3.4.4 Evidence culture

The evidence culture pathway is where power, incentives, and epistemic authority become visible. The EIMP framework treats culture as the values and norms that shape how evidence is perceived and whether it is used, and it emphasises that credibility can hinge as much on who speaks as on methodological rigour. Many of our interviews revealed a persistent top-down ethos, manifesting through observation like "*people sit somewhere, think what is good for farmers and push it down*," with "*big boys in the trade*" shaping outcomes, and yet they also insist that "*policy follows the evidence*" when proof is made legible and politically usable (K01; K02). This duality is common in contested commodity sectors where evidence is welcomed, but often only after it has been aligned with prevailing interests, narratives, and administrative convenience. Deliberations at the validation workshop pointed out that scientific evidence is not the only knowledge source for policymaking. On the contrary experiential knowledge from farmers and extension workers were flagged as highly relevant, albeit with the caveat that such knowledges struggle to enter official challenges. Some stakeholders repeatedly spoke about "practical credibility", for example, arguing that soil should be tested before fertiliser recommendations, and warnings that advice routed through agrochemical dealers selling banned chemicals produces unreliable and harmful "evidence".

These suggest that existing evidence culture embraced pluralist ways of knowing but is critical about which evidence is trusted, who is authorised to interpret it, and whether incentives reward truth-telling and transparency. For the Green Supplement, this means that there is a need to broaden not only what counts as evidence but also tighten verification norms such that coffee farmer observations, cooperative records, and field experiences can sit alongside research syntheses and compliance metrices without being dismissed as anecdotal, non-scientific, or niche.

Overall, the four pathways discussed reveal how evidence functions within the Kenyan coffee sector. At the same time, they also hold undertones of how the country's political economy, fiscal space, centre–county governance, cross-sector junctions, data systems and compliance pressures influence how evidence flows into coffee policymaking. The next section, therefore, interrogates some of these broader moderating and contextual factors before turning to priority issues flagged by the various stakeholders.

3.5 Moderating and contextual factors shaping coffee policymaking in Kenya

The EIPM framework posits that even when evidence exists and the main pathways are operational, contextual pressures can still affect how evidence is produced, framed and taken up. Moderating factors are real world conditions that influence the evidence ecosystem and the transition from evidence to policy, highlighting political interests, power relations, economic constrains and norms (Sempé et al., 2025). Four moderating factors stood out as the most influential in Kenya's coffee sector because they concurrently affect not only what evidence stakeholders demand and who can supply it, but also the potential to translate it into action.

3.5.1 Political economy and reform volatility in a politically salient commodity

Kenya's coffee sector is structurally political (see Section 2), and that politics moderates evidence use in at least two ways. Firstly, it shapes which problems are prioritised (and when), and it influences whose evidence is treated as authoritative. The EIPM framework flags political dynamics, patronage networks, and short-term incentives as classic inhibitors of evidence uptake, even where evidence is available (Sempé et al., 2025). Within the Kenyan coffee context, this manifests in how policy reform moments cluster around crises, electoral cycles and distributional bargaining, conditions that typically open policy windows, but also incentive the selective use of evidence. This was highlighted during the stakeholder workshop and interviews, with questions about how presence of "the big boys" and others influence who participates and whose knowledge counts in coffee policymaking (K01, K02, 08.2025).

The "big boys" politics is not restricted to the national level but also maps onto cooperatives. A well-cited case-study on the political economy of coffee cooperatives in the Nyeri area shows how prices, cooperative governance, and power relations mediate farmer welfare and resource decisions (Okech, 2019). This means that even technically strong evidence on issues like productivity, price transmission, or agronomy may struggle to shift policy unless it aligns with influential coalitions.

3.5.2 Devolution, fragmented mandates, and uneven county capabilities

The devolution of power and authority is another key moderating factor in Kenya's coffee landscape because it affects the institutional geography of evidence, particularly who collects it, who owns, and it who is expected to act on it. Decentralisation in Kenya from 2010 transferred several responsibilities from the state to counties, while others remain with the state, notably trade and export licensing and key oversight (Table 1, Section 2.3). This creates coordination burdens and uneven implementation capacity (Wangari, 2025). The EIPM frameworks anticipate this, pointing out that evidence use is inhibited when institutional environments are uneven, responsibilities are resources, and learning is weak. Evidence from sector analyses and strategy documents reinforces this. The devolution of responsibilities to counties implies changes in governance and coordination demands. Yet, various counties have different resource endowment and capabilities. While this report did not directly access the capacities of individual counties, it holds that the differential capabilities invariably impact their ability to engage coffee farmers and maintain quality standards. How exactly and to what extent is an area for future research.

3.5.3 Compliance-driven trade risk and the rise of documentary gatekeeping

A third moderating factor concerns the tightening of compliance environment around coffee, particularly the transitioning of evidence into a condition for market access rather than simply an input for deliberative policymaking. The Green Supplement notes that addressing non-tariff measures (NTMs) (technical, sanitary/phytosanitary, and administrative measures, raise trading costs), enhancing transparency, and improving regulatory alignment are central to reducing trade barriers and improving market access. It further outlines how policies and regulatory requirements generate additional costs in coffee trade and connects rise in costs to reduced competitiveness. Yet, evidence risks becoming an infrastructure through which market participation is granted or denied, especially where it is made a precondition.

The Green Supplement recognises the documentary burden associated with such a process by highlighting how multiple technical measures and certificates imposed by agencies such as KEPHIS, KRA, and KEBS, add fixed entry costs, and how multiple taxes and certificates can hamper value addition and export competitiveness. Stakeholders in across the two workshops echoed the risk sharply: since over half of Kenya's coffee exports (around 57–58% in 2024) go to the EU, weak readiness for EUDR-style compliance creates systemic exposure and yet awareness is "extremely low," and key mechanisms — traceability systems, deforestation monitoring, and farm-level documentation — are "underdeveloped or absent". In this context, evidence risks becoming a gatekeeping technology whereby only actors who can mobilise geolocation, traceability, and auditable records retain market access and attract green finance, while those who cannot become vulnerable to exclusion or deeper dependence on better-documented intermediaries. This point is elaborated further in stakeholders' prioritisation of the EUDR as key challenge in the coffee evidence ecosystem (Section 4,3).

3.5.4 Smallholder economics, cooperative performance, and evidence burden



Smallholder experiences moderate evidence use because they shape whether evidence requirements are feasible. The Green Supplement emphasises that coffee is produced predominantly by small-scale farmers (60–70% of the sector) and that climate change is already reducing yields and quality through droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall, increasing the urgency of adaptation and mitigation measures. Yet stakeholders across the board stressed that coffee productivity remains very low among small-scale farmers and that conflicting advice from extension officers, shifting fertiliser recommendations, and inconsistent messaging about shade trees have contributed to confusion and stagnation, while weakening trust and thus slow adoption of recommended practices.

Workshop participants also foregrounded a further central contradiction entailing how certification and verification costs have been burdensome for many coffee farmers relative to the benefits. They argued that certification alone does not guarantee returns (quality matters for price realisation) but also noted that certification supports essential record keeping (acreage, moisture levels, production data). The Green Supplement reinforces this duality: it recognises that standards can improve product quality and market prices (including evidence on certification impacts for small-scale coffee farmers), yet it also documents how regulatory barriers and fixed costs can discourage investment and undermine competitiveness. This means that unless evidence costs can be pooled (through cooperatives), supported by public programmes, or monetised through tangible incentives and premiums, its associated "evidence economy" risks entrenching unequal participation.

Together, the four moderating factors discussed demonstrate how Kenya's coffee evidence economy is conditioned by socio-political, economic and relational factors. While the Green Supplement provides an evidence architecture for its implementation, including roles and verification pathways (Table 2), these contextual forces will determine whether that architecture becomes enabling (improving resilience and market access) or extractive (shifting costs and risks downward to farmers).

Against this backdrop, the next section examines three stakeholder-prioritised pressure points where these contextual constraints become most visible in day-to-day sector dynamics. Firstly, it traces how transforming smallholder production depends on improving information transfer, through extension, intermediaries, and cooperative systems, and ensuring that benefits (price signals, premiums, support services) flow back to farmers in ways that make adoption rational. Secondly, it interrogates the tensions and complexities around certification, where promised market access and price premiums are often offset by labour demands, audit costs, and uneven cooperative governance, raising questions about who pays for compliance and who captures the returns. Thirdly, it examines how the EUDR as a new compliance frontier risk intensifying traceability and documentation burdens and reshaping power relations along the value chain by granting powerful actors able to produce auditable evidence at scale even more authority unilaterally.

4. Priority issues for navigating equitable climate resilient coffee in Kenya

4.1 Transforming smallholder coffee production

As noted in the Introduction, Kenya's coffee is overwhelmingly a smallholder crop: more than 700,000 farmers, mostly organised in primary societies and unions, support millions of livelihoods. Yet average productivity (around 300 kg/ha), lags far behind peer producers. This stems from a web of constraints, including costly or poor-quality inputs, ageing coffee trees, slow or uncertain payments for coffee beans, fragmented governance in some cooperatives, uneven extension services and mixed agronomic messages (shade vs. no shade; manure vs. subsidised fertiliser), and growing climate shocks. Across the two workshops, participants highlighted the need to empower smallholder coffee farmers to access and share knowledge and resources that improve productivity and resilience, without erasing the experiential and indigenous know-how that already exists in Kenyan coffee landscapes, and to need to expand the benefits smallholders drive from coffee.

4.1.1 Accelerate information transfer and uptake by coffee farmers

Reflecting on the need to improve the quality and timing of information coffee farmers mobilise for their farming practices, workshop participants identified four key pathways. Firstly, they argued for shifting from weak farmer reach and unidirectional information transfer to mutually enriching, two-way learning. Workshop participants argued that the prevailing extension systems have hollowed out. For example, levy-funded field visits have stopped, trainings are skewed to officers and cooperative leaders rather than ordinary members, technical language and pamphlets miss low-literacy audiences. The fix, they suggested, is not to emphasise the supply of "more messages," but work towards two-way knowledge systems. For example, county-level and research actors like KALRO–CRI and universities need to combine farmer panels and field visits with micro-experiments (e.g. stumping protocols by altitude; manure–fertiliser blends; shade bands by zone). Results from these need to be translated into short, pictorial scripts and available in relevant local languages, including audio and communicated via trusted, locally accessible media (radio slots; programmes such as *Kenya Gold* and *Shamba Shape-Up*) and "Gen-Z" media platforms (short-form video via TikTok/Citizen-TV segments), with youth creators as co-authors rather than mere relays.

Secondly, workshop participants called for coffee stakeholders to make coffee cooperatives engines for learning. Weak information flow within some societies was highlighted as a major obstacle to effective coffee production. Each society, workshop participants, argued needs to be designated a trained extensionist (or share at ward level) with at least three key duties: 1) run monthly member clinics that demonstrate post-harvest and climate-smart practices (mulching, water harvesting, pruning/shade, fermentation and drying), 2) document member innovations (e.g. effective organic sprays for CBD) so CRI can validate and scale them, and 3) maintain a simple "coffee notebook" per block for yields, inputs, and practice changes, evidence that can feed back into county-level planning.

Additionally, stakeholders called for the need to regulate extension advice in order to protect coffee farmers. This they reasoned is essential to reduce unregulated agrochemical agents whose business rests on peddling unvetted inputs to farmers. Stakeholders called for registration and accreditation (code of practice; disclosure of commercial interests; complaints channel), and blacklist/recall protocols when inputs fail quality, with some recalling the past instances where unapproved agrochemicals wreaked havoc on coffee and farmers' wellbeing. Quality assurance in this context, they argued would include, soil testing and guidance tailored to different coffee varieties and growth stages.

The fourth point workshop participants raised concerned the need to improve the quality of information coffee farmers use for their operations, workshop participants called for reviving the platforms that used to work in the sector. Examples cited include agricultural shows and ward or "Nyumba Kumi" meetings, with side-by-side demos (e.g. stumped vs. unstumped blocks; shade/no-shade quality cuppings), short audio explainers, and SMS or WhatsApp follow-ups linking to the pictorial scripts. Additionally, they suggested that various counties could co-finance this with levies or small earmarks on coffee. Alternatively, they pointed out the Green Supplement's standards/MRV orientation provides the policy context to justify budget allocation towards such activities. This was emphasised as important to avoid placing further burdens on farmers who already received little benefit from coffee relative to upstream actors. Stakeholders also identified some mechanisms that could be used to expand farmers' access to benefits from coffee.

4.1.2 Improve flow of coffee and related benefits to farmers

To improve the value farmers derived from coffee, workshop participants drew attention to the need to improve availability, quality and timing of input supply to farmers. According to them, many coffee farmers currently struggle to access the right inputs at the right time. Beyond subsidies, the stakeholders called for 1) the state to publish a transparent suppliers' lists, 2) batch and quality assurance testing with results publicly declared to create incentives for various agrochemical companies, and 3) QR-coded packaging that lets societies verify authenticity of various agrochemicals at the grassroots. It was also argued that debates and recommendations on inputs should match practice. For example, the state should not on one breath promote manure and inorganic fertilizer while subsidising inorganic fertilizers on the next. Thus, the state should offer vouchers coffee farmers can use for either manure (transport/composting) or inorganic fertiliser according to the prescription, while providing clarity on coffee varieties (e.g. Ruiru 11, Batian) that match such recommendations.

Secondly, to improve benefit flow, the workshop participants emphasised that the state needs to address questions about late payment of farmers because delayed payments disrupt farm investments, which is highly seasonal. They called for improvements to Direct Settlement System (DDS) to ensure near real-time settlement while working with societies to ensure farmers who contract loans repay without circumventing the system. Thirdly, the coffee market structure, participants held, requires better competition and accountability, with some participants citing border cash purchases and Uganda's liberalisation to call for more competition among coffee buyers. Kenya's reform path has already opened broker licensing and tightened exchange rules. The next step, stakeholders pointed out, is to work towards radical transparency by 1) publishing price build-ups and deductions by lot, 2) displaying broker performance dashboards, and 3) enforcing prompt-date sanctions.

A fourth point stakeholders raised concerned how to improve the governance mechanisms within coffee societies to make money more traceable. According to them, this could be achieved by mandating coffee societies to issue itemised e-statements to members, entailing gross price, deductions and nets, while subjecting themselves to independent audits, and organising information sections for members on payment calendars and deductions. Combining this with financial literature for cooperative board members and managers, according to the workshop participants, will improve their performance, building trust to stimulate further investments from farmers.

Many of the issues raised by the stakeholder call for regularising evidence transfer, evidence use to monitor compliance and to regularise behaviour across a broad range of actors in the sector. Indeed, many also transcend the scope of the Green Supplement but emphasise areas various actors in the coffee policy ecosystem need to reconsider and integrate in their operations. Thus, we return to them in the final part of the report. Meanwhile, the next section dissects the complex issue of coffee certification, which while framed as a mechanism to expand benefits from coffee to farmers appear to be achieving the opposite.

4.2 Complexities between coffee production and certification

Discussions at the multi-stakeholder workshop indicates that coffee certification sits uneasily in Kenya's smallholder-dominated coffee economy. On the one hand, schemes such as Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance and 4C (Certification for Climate, Conservation and Communities) have opened doors to premium buyers, strengthened record-keeping and good agricultural practices, and at their best channelled investments into clinics, schools and water points. On the other, the cost of compliance and audits, the paperwork burden on under-resourced cooperatives, and the dilution of premiums between farm gate and export have led some institutions to opt out entirely. Participants were explicit: certification can be a tool for resilience and market access, but only if designed as a business with clear returns to farmers, not as a logo whose costs are socialised and whose benefits are opaque.

Three tensions dominant tensions were pointed out by stakeholder in the stakeholder discussions. The first concerns capability and cost burden. Societies with weak governance were argued to struggle to meet documentation and continuous-improvement requirements, and devolved extension systems are often too thin to provide ongoing support. Secondly, credibility and control was an issue because liberalisation is argued to have shifted the day-to-day discipline from state marketing boards to a patchwork of private standards, raising legitimate questions about who sets the rules, who advises farmers, and whose audit counts. Thirdly, the lack of a fit of certification with emerging public rules was flagged as a key challenge. EU due-diligence expectations and Kenya's own Green Supplement now require traceability and landscape safeguards whether or not a private logo is present. Certification schemes that duplicate these demands raise costs while those that negotiative interoperability with them can lower the transaction burden for farmers and exporters.

A pragmatic way forward might be separating national and mandatory from private and voluntary. The national layer, under the Green Supplement, need to define a Green Kenyan Coffee Baseline, entailing a minimum set of production, landscape and social safeguards that every EU-or AfCFTA-bound lot must meet, irrespective of private certification.

Such a baseline would codify no conversion after 31 December 2020, zone-appropriate shade/structure proxies, riparian protection, and basic human-rights due diligence; and it would specify a minimal data package for traceability (WGS84 geolocation, legality artefacts, chain-of-custody, and simple social safeguards). Crucially, the participants held that the baseline needs to be recognised against external regimes (EUDR) so that one auditable data trail serves many compliance needs. Private certification could then sit on top, as an optional brand differentiator.

Participants also urged government and industry to stop treating certification as the only path to better practices and instead professionalise advice. Today, unregulated agronomists often reach farmers faster than KALRO–CRI or county officers, sometimes selling unnecessary inputs and concoctions. A registration and accreditation regime (code of practice, disclosure of commercial interests, complaints channel) is needed to protect farmers while preserving private advisory capacity. Meanwhile, extension remains devolved, with several coffee counties lacking the resources to field sufficient officers. In the interim, society-level extensionists and youth media teams may be used to close the information gap, turning scientific guidance and farmer innovations into short form video, radio and audio explainers, and feeding back plot-level evidence (e.g. stumping recovery curves; shade bands by zone; manure–fertiliser blends by variety and growth stage) into cooperative SOPs.

Regional differentiation was raised as another lever. Stakeholders from Mount Kenya region argued for streamlined reporting in landscapes where deforestation risk is demonstrably low, “don’t make low-risk regions pay high-risk paperwork costs.” The rationale behind this is that where credible MRV shows stable or improving tree cover, sampling rates and document depth can be lighter, while effort is concentrated in higher-risk corridors. The same logic applies to reforestation, with workshop participants arguing for Kenya’s tree-planting drive to be recognised in due-diligence narratives, without conflating plantation gains with natural forest recovery.

Finally, participants argued that the Kenyan coffee sector could learn considerably from its local domestic standards in the horticulture sector. The argued that the horticulture sector did not clean up because external firms loved paperwork. On the contrary, it changed when a Kenya standard was developed, aligned to buyer expectations, and enforced with political will. A Green Kenya Coffee Baseline embedded in the Green Supplement, mutually recognised with Fairtrade/RA/4C requirements and EUDR due diligence, participants held, could shift the centre of gravity back to public, transparent rules, reduce duplication, and let private schemes compete on value-add (brand and buyer access) rather than on gatekeeping compliance.

Seen through the EIPM lens, a question from the stakeholder reflection on certification is about who sets and own the baselines and standards (local or external actors), how evidence moves (cooperative-centred data stewardship, accredited agronomy, interoperable digital forms), and when choices are made (audit calendars, export cycles, budget windows, externally imposed deadlines). If those choices are made well, certification could stop being a pass/fail toll and become a transparent accelerator for lowering costs, raising credibility, and ensuring that differentiation translates into measurable gains at the farm gate and for farmers.

4.3 The European Union Deforestation Regulation: status, actors' readiness and critiques

The EUDR has shifted from being a policy headline to becoming an operational constraint because, unless something changes considerably, it now conditions EU market access. In the context of Kenyan coffee, once operational in late December 2026, each coffee shipment from large scale coffee estates must be backed by geolocation of production plots, evidence of legality, and a due-diligence statement, moving to small-scale farmers by June 2027. Kenya's initial low-risk benchmarking does not remove compliance obligations; it merely lowers the frequency of checks. Interviewee and workshop participants shared various insights on the level of readiness and implications of the EUDR for the coffee sector.

Interviews and the workshop exposed a familiar pattern: EUDR-awareness is thin, messages conflict, and tooling is inconsistent. The Coffee Directorate holds that about 93% of coffee farmers have been mapped; however, multiple concerns were raised, including enumerators "collecting coordinates," but not the metadata that makes traceability auditable (producer IDs, plots linked to societies/lots, legality artefacts, custody hops). Different apps capture different decimal precision, some teams record points for large farms that should be polygons, others collect both "to save costs," then face mismatches when files are tested. Private actors, counties and national agencies are mapping the same farmers twice, and collisions appear when data are uploaded to buyer systems. On the ground, CSO participants observed that many coffee farmers (and some professionals) think the EUDR is just another certificate, expecting a logo rather than a shipment-level evidence package.

Some stakeholders called for societies and unions to be seen and treated as only actors with the reach that can help maintain "living registries" (producers, plots, lots) and refresh coordinates annually. Thus, they argued for the government to provide them with support to perform this role. At the same time, they also recognise and cautioned against the logic and demands of sensitive information by the EU from producer countries under the EUDR. While the Agriculture and Food Authority involved other agencies, including the Kenyan Space Agency and the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC) to manage some of the risks, there were also considerable concerns about the high upfront cost of developing an operational and credible system. The dying up of investments by the government had stalled progress on the process.

At the same time, participants referenced Kenya's globally enviable position in wildlife conservation to critique the EU's over reach and abuse of its economic and structural power to unilaterally impose the EUDR on Kenya and other producer countries despite their conservation records far outweighing the EU's own records on conserving its forest resources. Building on this, some workshop participants argued for more diplomacy and discussions to rethink the EUDR and its impacts, including financial drain on producer countries. Any further development of a due diligence, they conceived needed to be paired with exploring a regional standard that recognises the contextual realities in coffee while providing for interoperability in order to reduce duplication and the imposition of multiple burdens on producer, particularly smallholder coffee farmers.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This report examined how evidence is generated and used in Kenya's coffee policymaking system at a moment of overlapping transitions, including domestic sector reforms aimed at rebuilding incentives and governance, rising climate and productivity pressures, and new compliance frontiers (notably EUDR) that turn traceability and legality evidence into market access requirements. Using the EIPM framework, the report mapped the coffee evidence actor ecosystem, traced how evidence moved into the Green Supplement through capabilities, relationships, structures/processes and evidence culture, and identified the contextual moderators shaping when and why evidence influences decisions. This concluding section synthesises (Section 5.1) those findings and offers stakeholder-specific recommendations (Recommendations) to strengthen climate-resilient coffee policymaking and practice, while keeping reforms implementable and inclusive.

5.1 Towards effective climate resilient coffee policymaking and praxis in Kenya: A synthesis of key findings

5.1.1 Climate-resilient coffee becoming not only a production issue but also an evidence challenge

Kenya's coffee sector problems are often narrated as agronomic decline (ageing trees, pests/diseases, climate stress) and market dysfunction (low returns, delayed payments, rent capture). The deeper finding from this work is that the current moment is also an evidence transition. This is because policy credibility and market access increasingly depend on auditable proof rather than intention. The Green Supplement frames coffee as an economically vital, smallholder-heavy sector facing climate impacts like reduced yields, quality loss, and heightened pest/disease pressures linked to droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall, all of which imperils the foreign exchange Kenya derives from coffee (Government of Kenya 2025).

Our interviews and stakeholders' workshop deliberations reinforced the urgency framing. Kenya once produced over 140,000 tonnes annually in the late 1980s but now fluctuates around 40,000–50,000 tonnes (Figure 1). That decline is not just a case of agronomic failure, but also a story of weakened farmer agency and incentives, contested governance, and fragmented support systems. These conditions also degrade the quality of information flows and the credibility of claims made by different actors. As a result, even when evidence exists, e.g. from KALRO–CRI trials, county extension experience, buyer requirements, cooperative records, or farmer innovations, it does not adequately translate into implementable consensus. [KJ3.1] The practical issue, therefore, is how to assemble a shared, decision-ready knowledge base that makes climate resilience legible to both farmers and markets without turning documentation into a new form of exclusion, or exploitation.

5.1.2 Governance is transitioning toward a standards-based regime, driven by evidence

Findings across the report indicate that Kenya's coffee sector appears to be transitioning into an emerging networked and standards-based regime, where sustainability, traceability, and compliance are not peripheral add-ons but central to how power is exercised in value chain governance. Stakeholders demonstrated that structural reforms have created more specialised, decentralised roles across milling, marketing, and export – distinct actors are now controlling distinct segments, rather than a single actor holding multiple roles (Wangari, 2025). This increases the need for shared data standards and interoperable verification because coordination becomes harder precisely when evidence demands are intensifying.

The Green Supplement accelerates this trajectory by explicitly positioning green trade as a documentation and verification architecture. It frames non-tariff measures, like technical, phytosanitary, and administrative, as major determinants of market access and trade costs, arguing that transparency and regulatory alignment are crucial to reducing barriers (Government of Kenya, 2025). Additionally, it makes concrete the ways regulatory systems can impose fixed entry costs through multiple agencies and certificates. This includes Kenya Bureau of Standards and other agencies-related measures, which may dampen competitiveness and value addition.

This indicates that the Green Supplement is not only a strategy document. On the contrary, it is an attempt to institutionalise a new evidence economy. In that economy, proof such as traceability records, standards compliance, environmental safeguards, and credible metrics are the media for allocating opportunities and risks like market access, finance, premiums, enforcement, and legitimacy. If Kenya can create one auditable trail from plot through cooperatives/factories to exporters and the market, the same evidence can serve multiple purposes (climate resilience verification, forest safeguards, AfCFTA reporting, and EU due diligence). However, if Kenya is unable to do this, fragmentations, duplicative audits and contradictory datasets are likely to raise costs and create new gatekeepers. Broader questions of who controls and how benefits from this new economy are distributed are important questions that deserve future research attention.

5.1.3 Shift from evidence use for legitimation to evidence use for governing

The report shows a strong transition between formulation evidence and implementation evidence. Formulation relied on the familiar policy pattern like curated desk studies, selective synthesis, workshops, and validation. That approach builds legitimacy and produces a coherent narrative. However, it can also concentrate interpretive authority in a relatively small set of brokers and can translate diverse knowledge into policy categories that are legible to ministries and donors while filtering out harder distributional questions such as who pays and who carries compliance risk.

This changes fundamentally when it comes to policy implementation where evidence becomes procedural and enforceable. The EIPM framework is explicit that evidence can shape policy through multiple outcomes, including conceptual, behavioural, procedural, and content, based on institutionalised review procedures and changes in how stakeholders are consulted and how decisions are evaluated (Sempé et al., 2025). Kenya's Green Supplement logic is aligned with this given that it anticipates routinised evidence generation from audits, toolkits, monitoring, standards, and results-based tracking, which turns evidence from being information into infrastructure for eliciting compliance and governing more broadly.

This change means that evidence can either become a tool for learning and improving equity, or become the mechanism through which upstream actors shift burdens downward while preserving rents upward.

5.1.4 The compliance turn and transitioning of evidence into a gatekeeping technology

Perhaps the strongest contextual shock is the rise of unilateral regulation like the EUDR. Stakeholders correctly frame this as systemic exposure given that over half of Kenya's coffee exports (around 57–58% in 2024) go to the EU (Wangari, 2025). At the same time, workshop participants highlighted extremely low grassroots awareness and the underdevelopment or absence of traceability systems, deforestation monitoring, and farm-level documentation.

The European Commission's current public guidance indicates the EUDR's application dates are 30 December 2026 (large enterprises) and 30 June 2027 (micro and small enterprises). This creates a policy window to design interoperable systems to generate the required evidence in order to avoid exclusion. This means that evidence is no longer simply an input for coffee policymaking in Kenya. On the contrary, it has very rapidly become a market permissioning mechanism. If Kenya can produce geolocation, legality artefacts, and chain-of-custody records, it may retain market access. However, it it cannot, it risks either exclusion or dependence on alternative, non-EU markets. This raises equity questions because within a smallholder-dominated sector like coffee, compliance costs typically concentrate at the farm and cooperative levels, while compliance benefits (risk reduction, market access) are more easily captured by exporters and buyers unless rules for premium transmission and cost-sharing are explicit. At the moment, such cost-sharing rules and benefits transmission are missing, while the Kenyan government's efforts to shoulder the initial costs of developing systems for producing such evidence is severely constrained.

5.1.5 Smallholder economics and cooperative performance determine whether the evidence economy becomes enabling or extractive

Another point raised by the findings across stakeholders is the need to treat smallholders not only as producers but also the feasibility linkage of the involving evidence architecture in Kenya's coffee sector. The Green Supplement highlights that coffee is predominantly produced by smallholders. Various NGOs and government stakeholders emphasise that evidence does not travel well where farmers receive contradictory agronomic information and where extension is not adequately developed and financed. This matters because implementing policy requires behavioural change. Where evidence is inconsistent, farmers may rationally discount or neglect it completely.

One manifestation is farmers' reported discounting, or non-adoption of certification on grounds that its data requirements, labour burden, audits transcend any benefits by way of premiums. Another concerns governance quality where inadequate and corrupt leadership may dissuade farmers from effectively participating in cooperatives. Similarly, where cooperatives are weak, the evidence economy becomes extractive because potential benefits may be captured by local elites. Alternatively, where cooperatives are strong, they can become evidence stewards, harnessing their power to negotiated by conditions for their members.

The broader literature on smallholder economics aligns with this mixed picture. For example, multi-country sustainability standards research frequently finds that outcomes depend on baseline conditions (organisation, market access, governance) and that benefits can be uneven and contingent rather than automatic (Amuzu et al., 2022; Dompreh et al., 2021; Iddrisu et al., 2020; Wiersum et al., 2008). For Kenya specifically, evidence from sustainability standards work in Western Kenya shows heterogeneous results and reinforces the importance of local institutional capacity and market configuration (Jahan et al., 2023; Ruben & Hoebink, 2015; Van Rijsbergen et al., 2016). This indicates that evidence requirements must be paired with institutional mechanisms that make compliance pay, for example, through premium transparency, pooled costs, and services that improve productivity and quality.

5.1.6 Strategic opportunity to convert compliance into competitiveness via integrated an evidence spine?

Kenya is increasingly being pulled into a global coffee governance front where auditable evidence a pre-requisite for market access. Indeed, the idea is not new but has operated through voluntary schemes until now. The hardening of supply chains is not unique to Kenya, or its coffee sector. Instead, it applies to many commodity-producing countries with requirements argued to be significantly indifferent from those of existing certification initiatives (Partzsch, 2025). At the same time, climate change is already reshaping coffee suitability, with research showing substantial shifts in where Arabica can be grown and increasing risk to coffee-dependent livelihoods under warming scenarios (Davis et al., 2012; Moat et al., 2017). An insight from other contexts is not that data solves politics, but that institutions that successfully coordinate learning and verification are likely to reduce transaction costs and raise farmer bargaining power. Colombia's coffee system is often cited for how a strong producer institution can deliver extension, quality systems, and market coordination at scale (Jacobi et al., 2024; Samoggia & Fantini, 2023; Yepes-Lugo et al., 2025). This indicates how evidence routines can be embedded as service delivery rather than imposed as compliance. Conversely, contexts where documentation is fragmented across competing intermediaries tend to reproduce gatekeeping and duplication.

In Kenya, stakeholders themselves point to horticulture as an instructive analogue, involving the KenyaGAP systems which appears to be more effective than coffee's domestic certification standard (Park & Gachukia, 2021). This suggests that the Kenyan state can create nationally recognised, enforceable standards when rejection risk and market pressure align incentives, providing minimum interoperable layer beneath optional private certification such that data captured once can be reused many times. The Green Supplement already gestures toward this direction by emphasising regulatory alignment, while recognising that limited traceability undermines premium-market competitiveness (Government of Kenya, 2025). Yet it is important to ensure that a data architecture in coffee can only work if it designed around farmer-oriented usability, cooperative-centred ownership, or stewardship, local county realities, and open, transparent cost and benefit sharing rules.

5.1.7 Action will be the ultimate determiner of climate-resilient coffee

A final conclusion from the analysis of the evidence economy in Kenya's coffee sector is that the country is not in want of written policy. Indeed, it has many relevant policies in the sector, as demonstrated in Section 2.1. The main issues is a combination of barriers, including a lack of clarity on credible agronomic governance, transparent benefit flows, and weak inter-institutional coordination for documentation. Section 3 has not only diagnosed these issues but provided entry points for navigating them, highlighting how moderating and contextual pressures become concrete and where evidence pathways are likely to work or fail in practice. Transforming smallholder production depends on information transfer and benefit transmission. Certification debates and inequities expose the political economy of who pays for evidence and who captures returns while the EUDR highlights and illustrates compliance turn, privileging actors who can generate auditable evidence at scale, and therefore reshaping power relations along the value chain.

Basically, Kenya's climate-resilient coffee transition is becoming a contest over what counts as proof, who can produce it, and who benefits from it. If the Green Supplement's evidence architecture is implemented as a shared public-good infrastructure, interoperable data standards, cooperative-level stewardship, risk-based verification, and credible extension, evidence could become enabling. This is because it could lower transaction costs, improve quality and productivity, and protect smallholders' place in premium markets. If not, working poor and uncoordinated evidence ecosystem will introduce new burdens that render it extractive, becoming a gatekeeping tool that shifts burdens downward and reinforces inequality.

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations that follow translate the report's evidence-use analysis into practical actions for implementation. They are organised by stakeholder group because Kenya's climate-resilient coffee transition will not be delivered by a single institution. In contrast, it depends on coordinated roles across national and county government, research bodies, cooperatives, private companies, civil society platforms, and development partners. Consistent with the Green Supplement's logic, the recommendations focus on strengthening the evidence spine of the sector, namely how data and learning move from farms and landscapes into standards, incentives, finance, and market access, while reducing duplication and preventing documentary requirements from becoming a new form of exclusion.

Rather than proposing new policy text, the recommendations prioritise operational levers, including interoperability of traceability and verification systems, clearer standards and rulebooks, sustained extension and translation capacity, transparent benefit and premium flows to farmers, and risk-based approaches to auditing and compliance. Each set of actions is intended to be implementable within existing mandates, aligned to real decision windows and designed to ensure that evidence improves outcomes at the farm gate as well as in trade performance and environmental integrity.

5.2.1 Government (national and county)

- Build a national coffee evidence spine aligned to the Green Supplement and EUDR. A shared data dictionary (unique producer/plot IDs; WGS84 geometry standards; chain-of-custody links), a Quality Assurance (QA) de-duplication layer, and interoperability so private tools can plug in without fragmenting systems.
- Clarify mandates and standardise county delivery by defining minimum operational standards for extension, demonstration sites, and data capture across coffee counties, including publishing simple operating producers and ensuring various counties have resourcing for transport and field presence.
- Protect farmers from harmful or conflicted advice by introducing registration/ accreditation for agronomy advisory providers and enumerators (code of practice; disclosure of commercial interests; complaints and sanctions mechanism), while aligning input subsidy policy with evidence-based prescriptions.
- Make benefit flows auditable via requiring itemised digital statements to farmers (gross price, deductions, quality bonuses, certification premiums where applicable) and integrate payment-tagging through direct settlement systems so farmers can verify whether value reached them.
- Use risk-based verification: apply lighter audit intensity in demonstrably low-risk landscapes, while concentrating scrutiny and support where forest/conversion risks and documentation gaps are higher.

5.2.2 Coffee companies (exporters, marketers, millers, service providers)

- Align buyer requirements with the national evidence spine by adopting the shared data dictionary and QA rules and stop parallel mapping and non-interoperable systems and provide support for rather than proprietary lock-in.
- Reduce transaction costs for smallholders by employing group verification via cooperatives/unions and provide simplified digital templates in local languages.
- Improve premium transparency and credibility by publishing premium-sharing logic and integrate premium flows into direct settlement systems tagged payments.
- Invest in two-way learning systems, including co-financing micro-trials and demonstration blocks with the Coffee Research Institute, counties, and cooperatives; disseminate results via farmer-trusted media and short-form content, not only compliance manuals.

5.2.3 Civil society organisations and multi-actor platforms

- Act as evidence translators and conveners with a sharper operational focus by converting research and policy into farmer-ready operating procedures, scripts, and tools, while structuring dialogue around decision windows (budget cycles, standards updates, export calendars, compliance deadlines).
- Support cooperative governance and accountability by strengthening member literacy on deductions, premiums, and audit requirements and enable societies to design governance reforms that make evidence trustworthy.
- Champion inclusion as measurable practice, including expanding vulnerable groups access to training, leadership roles, benefit capture.

- Broker interoperability and reduce duplication by monitoring and reporting where parallel data systems are increasing costs.

5.2.4 Development partners

- Fund the public-good layers of the evidence economy like national basemaps, QA infrastructure, interoperability standards, and training systems.
- Support county capability and last-mile delivery, including targeted financing for extension logistics, demonstration infrastructure, and data stewardship, particularly in weaker counties to improve evidence flow.
- Enable credible, low-cost verification models by financing group verification approaches and risk-based auditing.
- Support independent learning and adaptive management by investing in evaluation that tests what works (e.g. shade bands by zone, stumping recovery curves, blended fertiliser/manure regimes) and ensures evidence feeds back into policy revision.

5.2.5 Other relevant stakeholders

Cooperatives and unions

- Become first-mile evidence stewards and help maintain living registries (producer–plot–lot links), run member clinics, and adopt simple coffee notebooks that track yields, inputs, and practice changes.
- Institutionalise transparency by issuing itemised e-statements, publishing deductions and timelines, while strengthening audit compliance and member engagement routines.
- Pool evidence costs by negotiating group audits and shared documentation and using pooled funds to reduce per-farmer burdens where governance is strong.

KALRO–CRI and universities

- Prioritise translation and converting trials into zone-specific decision aids (variety selection, stumping protocols, shade guidance, disease management), packaged for extension and cooperative operating procedures.
- Validate farmer innovations and formalise mechanisms to test and scale practice-based solutions emerging from farmers and factory operators.
- Support the Green Supplement result-based monitoring and evaluation, aligning research outputs with adoption metrics and real decision cycles.

AfCFTA Secretariat, UNECA, and regional bodies

- Encourage mutual recognition and interoperability by supporting cross-border alignment of green standards and documentation so Kenyan coffee can access regional markets with credible, comparable evidence.

Annexes

Annex 1: List of stakeholders interviewed

Stakeholder group	Institution
Government	Coffee Directorate, Agriculture and Food Authority
	State Department of Trade
Academia	Dedan Kimathi University of Technology
Private sector	Rovil Coffee
	Green Supplement Consultant
	Agrisolutions Enterprises

Annex 2: List of workshop participants

14 October 2025

	Name	Organisation
1	Dan Muoki	Independent Consultant
2	Lynda Ouma	State Department of Trade
3	Kamau Mbarire	Agrisolutions Enterprises Ltd
4	Kinuthia Chuaga	Dedan Kimathi University of Technology
5	Melvin Mulamo	State Department for Trade
6	Anne M Mwai	Rovil Coffee
7	Samuel Thuo	Agrisolutions Enterprises Ltd
8	Martin Macharia	Hill Farm
9	W Emily Joy	Rovil Coffee
10	Jane Cheserek	Coffee Research Institute
11	Mary Wairimu Mbuti	Palladium Group
12	Anne-Lily Kamau	Strathmore University
13	Alice Karuri	Strathmore University
14	Joe Abala	Strathmore University
15	Jacinta Wangari	Strathmore University
16	John Muiru	Youth in Coffee

	Name	Organisation
17	Frankline Aloo	State Department for Industry
18	Caroline Kungu	State Department for Industry
19	Karugu Macharia	Kenya Coffee Platform
20	Alex Maina	State Department for Trade
21	Caterine Gateri	British Institute in East Africa
22	Owatte Lelli Evrell	Strathmore University

18 March 2026

	Name	Organisation
1	Alex Maina	State Department for Trade
2	Daniel Muoki	Independent Consultant
3	Calvin Baraka	AFA Coffee Directorate
4	Samuel Thuo	Agrisolutions Enterprises Ltd
5	Caroline Kungu	State Department for Industry
6	Owatte Evrell Lelli	Strathmore University
7	Melvin Mulamo	Department of Trade
8	Kamau Mbarire	Agrisolutions Enterprises Ltd
9	Frankline Ogola Aloo	State Department for Industry
10	Anne M. Mwai	Rovil Coffee
11	Lynda Ouma	State Department of Trade
12	Chuaga Kinuthia	Dedan Kimathi University of Technology
13	Kamau Mbarire	AgriSolutions Enterprise Ltd.
14	Catherine Gateri	British Institute of East Africa
15	Rita Njeru	University of Oxofrd
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Funder acknowledgement

The work of the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery is made possible thanks to the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust.

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