

Research Application Summary

An evaluation of the operations of three farmer associations in Western Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the operation of three contrasting farmer association in western Kenya in order to recommend ways in which to improve the economic performance of the associations. Secondary data were obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture records while primary data were collected through administration of a questionnaire to a sample of 223 households. The sampled households were randomly selected using the multi-stage sampling procedure. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) to identify the relationship between variables (operations and activities of the farmer associations) and their influence on economic viability and sustainability of the farmer associations. It was found that more women were members of FAs than men. Farm size was important in influencing the range of services farmer associations provide to their members. It is important to enhance the capacity of the FAs to develop and implement viable economic activities to reduce over reliance on donations.

Key words: Farmer associations, gender, management, western Kenya

Résumé

Le but de cette étude était d'évaluer le fonctionnement de trois associations d'agriculteurs contrastées à l'ouest du Kenya, afin de recommander des moyens d'améliorer la performance économique des associations. Les données secondaires ont été obtenues des rapports du ministère de l'Agriculture alors que les données primaires ont été recueillies par l'administration d'un questionnaire à un échantillon de 223 ménages. Les ménages échantillonnés ont été choisis au hasard à l'aide de la procédure d'échantillonnage à plusieurs degrés. Les données ont été analysées en utilisant le logiciel statistique pour les sciences sociales (SPSS) afin d'identifier la relation entre les variables (opérations et activités des associations d'agriculteurs) et leur influence sur la viabilité économique et la durabilité des associations d'agriculteurs. Il a été constaté que beaucoup de

femmes étaient membres des Associations d'Agriculteurs (FAs) que les hommes. La taille des exploitations a été importante pour une influence sur la gamme de services que les associations d'agriculteurs fournissent à leurs membres. Il est important de renforcer la capacité des FAs dans le but de développer et mettre en œuvre des activités économiques viables permettant de réduire la dépendance sur des dons.

Mots clés: Associations d'agriculteurs, genre, gestion, Kenya occidental

Background

Food security is a major social and economic issue across many sub-Saharan African countries. New strategies and policies focusing on increased and sustainable food production emerge at national or international levels emphasizing on modernizing agricultural production through using improved production technologies and more innovative service provision. Modernizing agriculture is a complex and demanding task (Eicher, 1999), therefore there is need for inclusive and authentic participation of farmers in adapting and implementation of strategies to improve agricultural production.

A main feature of farmers in western Kenya is that they make production and marketing decision privately to optimize their household needs. Crop production remains far below the potential reported in many research experiments. Production of crops is carried out primarily to meet household food needs in small-scale farms that are fragmented and scattered geographically. In such circumstances, farmers become susceptible to exploitative tendencies by other economic agents when acquiring inputs or selling their produce leading to diminished profitability of their farming enterprises. Agricultural yields have fallen in the last decade in this region in spite of the widespread availability of better yielding technologies that can increase yields immensely.

Because of the reducing role of government following liberalization of the economy and institutional reforms, farmers are now required to take over some of the roles previously played by governments. In order to effectively take up these roles, farmers need to acquire additional skills and resources. By joining farmer groups, farmers can pool resource to meet the cost of providing services to the members and invest in order to earn additional incomes for their members and enhance their bargaining power in marketing and accessing inputs.

Indeed, agricultural technologies and other information could be channeled through these organisations to supplement efforts of extension workers (Irungu, 1998; Catley and Leyland, 2000). In this paper, we share the experiences on the operations of three farmer associations in western Kenya and how their activities and management structures affect the sustainability of the farmer groups.

Literature Summary

The technology adoption patterns among farmers have been shown to start with more progressive farmers that are better endowed causing a lot of disparities in yields among farmers in the rural areas. “Farmer Groups” remain the cost-effective way of delivering and implementing agricultural programmes (Brigtwell *et al.*, 2001). The power of Farmer Associations (FAs) in influencing technology adoption is by allowing members to participate in solving their common problems as equal partners.

The supportive and informal atmosphere of networks such as those formed when farmers work together in groups, facilitates the exchange of ideas, information sharing and facilitates change in farming practices and the management methods (Rittman, 1996). In this way, “Farmer Groups” offer an entry point into a community to improve efficiency, effectiveness of research, equity and build social and human capital with spill over effects (CIAT, 2004). Use of existing community groups in implementing agricultural activities has been found to ensure sustainability of the groups’ programmes (Okoth *et al.*, 2002). There are few farmer organizations in developing countries that have a systematic influence on the way in which agricultural systems evolve (Garforth *et al.*, 2003). However, a case study drawn from experiences in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) show that agricultural research and advisory services are increasingly channeled through farmers’ associations (Wennink and Heemskerk, 2006).

Study Description

This study used both primary and secondary data collected from three counties in western Kenya, namely, Vihiga, Bungoma and Busia. Secondary data were obtained from publications from the Ministry of Agriculture. Primary data were collected through administration of a questionnaire to a sample of 223 households. Of the sampled households, 132 were from three farmer association, namely, Mwangaza farmers group (MFAGRO) in Vihiga, Bungoma small scale farmers organization (BUSSFO) in Bungoma and Angurai farmers

development project (AFDEP) in Teso. Eighty nine (89) were not affiliated to any of the farmer associations. The sampled households were selected randomly using the multi-stage sampling procedure to select the sampling area and systematic random sampling procedure to select households from the sampled areas. Data collected included households' farming resources and farming technologies, aspects of farmer association management, access to agricultural services, marketing, and farmer perceptions about specific crop production technologies. The questionnaire was used with other data collection methods such as the use of key informants as a triangulation method intended to validate survey results. Data were entered into Excel and checked for consistency and outliers and exported into the SSPS for analysis.

Research Application

In western Kenya, FAs' membership is composed of small-scale farmers from the neighborhood. Farmers were accepted as members upon payment of registration and annual subscription fees that varied among farmer associations. The most prevalent criterion for membership was proof of residence in the area and practicing farming. For these reason, all the associations were made up of members of the same ethnic group where local language and culture applied to all. This is potentially a good starting point in forming sustainable farmer associations where achieving homogeneity is a prerequisite in itself. Results in Table 1 shows the management structure and the characteristics of the farmer associations.

While female farmers form over 50% of the membership in all the associations, males dominates the executive committees, the decision making organs of the associations. Larger proportions of members of the farmers associations in Bungoma

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of the three farmer associations in western Kenya.

Counties	% representation by gender in FAs membership and management		Mean land size	% of farmers using fertiliser	% of farmers using certified seed
	Male membership in FA	Male membership in executive committee			
Bungoma	40	66.7	3.49(2.7)	73.2	81.5
Busia	35.9	66.7	4.01(3.6)	59	66.3
Vihiga	43.4	70	1.01(0.6)	68.4	72.6

Figures in brackets are standard errors.

used fertilizers and certified seed for maize production. Farmers in Vihiga had significantly lower farm sizes (1.01 acres) compared to 4.01 and 3.49 acres in Busia and Bungoma, respectively.

The land sizes influences the range of services that the farmers demanded from their respective farmer associations. Results in Table 2 shows that access to inputs was the main economic activity of the farmers association. Access to inputs for improved production is paramount to the growth and sustainability of the FAs because it will have a multiplier effect through increased activity at the household and farmer associations' levels.

Table 2. Services provided by farmer associations in western Kenya.

Farmer association/ County	Input supply	Services provided by farmer Association		Total
		Agricultural information & service provision	Promotion of new technologies	
BUSSFO, Bungoma	25.0	9.4	12.5	46.9
AFDEP, Teso	14.1	4.7	4.7	23.4
MFAGRO, Vihiga	17.2	8.6	3.9	29.7
Total	56.3	22.7	21.1	100.0

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