

Report of a Dissemination and Validation Workshop on “The Role and Performance of the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development” in Nyeri South District, Kenya

June 2010

The workshop was held in the CDF Hall, Othaya, Nyeri South district, on 5th February 2010. The main objectives of the workshop were to disseminate and seek validation of the main findings of research into “The Role and Performance of the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development” in the district. This research was conducted during November and December 2009 and the resulting report can be downloaded from www.future-agricultures.org.

A total of thirty-one people, including 19 farmers, five officials from the Ministry of Agriculture within the district, one from Ministry of Livestock, two representatives of Equity Bank and one agrovet, attended the workshop, which was opened by the District Agricultural Officer, Mr Elphantus Mwangi. The full list of participants and the workshop agenda can be found in Appendices 1 and 2 of this report.

Research Findings

Booker Owuor presented the main findings of the research work on behalf of Future Agricultures. This portrayed Nyeri South as a high potential agricultural area - albeit one where agriculture is constrained by small holding sizes and declining soil fertility - where important output marketing chains work reasonably well (true for tea, horticulture and during 2003-09 dairy; the major exception at the time of the study being coffee) and where an above-average degree of development of input and financial markets has also taken place. In this context there is little demand or need for the state to play a catalytic role in market development, although some stakeholders would like it to play a more active role in market regulation, especially with respect to input quality. Similarly, if the Ministry of Agriculture does not provide strategic direction in tackling cross-cutting

problems such as declining soil fertility, no one else is likely to do so.

Provision of extension advice dominates the service charters of the Ministry of Agriculture and associated rural development ministries. In practice, a number of factors constrain the ministries' performance in delivering extension services. The budget available to the Ministry of Agriculture's district office did rise progressively during the years 2003-09, but there remain staff shortages (especially in front-line posts). Moreover, the efficiency with which extension services are delivered is reduced by two major imbalances: too many resources going to staff salaries in relation to operational expenditures, and too many staff in office-based positions (at district and divisional level) as opposed to in front-line posts. These inefficiencies have been exacerbated by the proliferation of rural development ministries since 2003. Whilst there is some coordination across the different ministries at district level, staff are not optimally allocated across ministries. In Nyeri South, for example, there are more staff in the Veterinary Department than seems justified by the level of animal diseases in the district (some end up acting as general extension staff in the absence of front-line workers within the Ministry of Agriculture), whilst the Ministry of Fisheries does not have any staff within the district and the Ministry of Cooperatives officer is hardly present. (This is in part due to recent sub-divisions of districts, which saw the previous Othaya division promoted to the status of district).

Taking a historical perspective, farmer focus groups all reported a decline in agricultural performance in the district during the 1980s and especially 1990s, as a result primarily of political interference in farmer support institutions such as Kenya Cooperative Creameries and local coffee cooperatives. Extension support also declined during this period, with the number

of extension workers declining and staff being less active in the field. Over the past decade a mixed picture was reported: the dairy sector in particular was revived (through the revival of New KCC), but coffee has declined dramatically. Farmers remained critical of the level of extension support offered, as front-line staff remain too few, whilst group meetings and public training are considered a poor substitute for individual farm visits.

It was difficult for the research to comment meaningfully on cross-stakeholder coordination within the district, as neither the District Agricultural Committee nor the District Agricultural Stakeholders' Forum had been formed at the time of the research (seven months after the creation of Nyeri South as a district).

The main plenary discussion of the workshop offered little in the way of critical comment on these findings. Instead, much of the debate focused on the availability of credit services for smallholder producers within the district. Whilst Equity Bank considers its Kilimo Biashara loan product to have been very successful, this had limited uptake within Nyeri South as it was targeted towards maize producers. Meanwhile, the main argument advanced by farmers during the plenary discussion was that, whilst available loan products carry attractively low interest rates, there are other conditions (for example, regarding having a bank account and a past savings history with the financial institution) that exclude many smallholders from accessing these products.

Group Discussions

Following the tea break, participants divided into three smaller groups to discuss in greater detail issues that had been selected by the research team. These were as follows:

Group One: Youth and the Future of Agriculture in Nyeri South

During the research work, a recurring theme was the alleged negative attitude of local youth towards agriculture. Older farmers complain that, once they are educated, young people are only interested in white collar jobs, shunning hard manual labour in the fields. A Kazi kwa Vijana (Jobs for Youth) programme, promoted during 2009 as part of the national economic stimulus package, failed to get local youth engaged in agricultural activities. Late payment of the scheme's money did not help, but local youth eventually protested that the scheme amounted to "work for youth, money for the elders".

The discussion group defined youth as people aged 18 – 35 years. Out of the 9 member group only three fell in to this category. The group had a rich discussion on why the youth are not very keen on agriculture, what can be done to bring them back to agriculture and the possible consequences should they continue with their supposedly negative attitude.

The group resolved that the problem emanated from the parents who teach their children to work hard and get white collar jobs (office jobs). Their parents don't take farming seriously and mostly end up dying poor. The youths watch their parents toil on their farms and die poor and this impacts negatively on the children/youth's attitude. Parents are also not so willing to hand over their farms to their children, fearing that the children would end up selling these parcels of land.

The government was also blamed as part of the problem. The school agriculture curriculum needs to be changed to make agriculture a more practical subject. Children over the age of four should do two hours' practical farm work per week. The need for the Ministry of Agriculture to work closely with the Ministry of Education was emphasized so that pupils can be incorporated into field days. It was also argued that the

Ministry of Education should re-introduce “4K”¹ clubs and young farmers association to engage children in agriculture at an early age, so that they can know and develop an interest in farming. It was also suggested that the Ministry of Agriculture should occasionally train young farmers/school children on farming as a business.

Looking towards 2030 (the perspective of the government’s Vision 2030 strategy), the group saw dire consequences should no concerted effort be made to engage youths in active and productive agriculture. Without such effort, the economy of Nyeri South, which is mainly agri-based, will definitely come tumbling down. High mortality due to malnutrition, high food insecurity rates and high agricultural commodity rates will characterize the district.

Group Two: The Status of, and Constraints Facing, the Major Commodity Chains in Nyeri South District

Nyeri South district is an important producer of a number of major commodities. Performance of the respective commodity chains is a major determinant of the overall health of the agricultural sector within the district. Whilst the tea and horticulture subsectors were performing well at the time of both the original research and the workshop, and the output marketing chain for dairy worked well during 2003-09, a crisis of seasonal under-capacity in dairy processing had developed by the time of the workshop and the coffee sector was in medium-long run decline (attributed primarily to poor management and politicisation of local coffee marketing cooperatives). This group, therefore, discussed the status of three of the major commodity systems within the district and identified issues that needed to be addressed if they were to continue to have a bright future. The outcomes are summarised in the following table:

Commodity	To be better by 2020/2030 or else situation will deteriorate
Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular payment • convert fresh milk to powder • add value to milk at farm level • quality animal feeds • facilitate veterinary officers with transport, drugs, equipment
Horticulture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contracted group farming • adopt irrigation technology • giant irrigation dams • quality farm inputs • accessible credit • extension on high technology horticulture • improved accessible roads
Coffee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good agronomic practices • affordable farm inputs • improved management at factory and auction • Write off historical loans from 1997-98 • regular payment 3 times a year to coincide with school fees calendar • Form a Kenya Coffee Development Authority • start local Othaya Coffee Mill

Group Three: Extension

Provision of extension advice dominates the service charters of the Ministry of Agriculture and associated rural development ministries in the district. However, the ministries' performance in delivering extension services is widely considered to be poor, despite some increase in budget for district offices over the past decade. This group, therefore, discussed what needs to be done to improve the quality of extension services provided to farmers in the district.

The starting point for farmer members of the group was that more extension workers are needed, so that the number of farm visits can be increased. One member argued that farm visits can provide practical help on issues such as soil erosion (how to control it), manure making, fertiliser and chemical use. The latter was offered as a good example of something that can be demonstrated on farm, whereas it is harder to grasp good practice from a public presentation. The same farmer noted that farmers get discouraged going to the chief's office to try to find an extension worker to come to their farm (the way that the current "demand-driven" extension approach is supposed to work). Another farmer – a member of a farmers' group – reported that, in their experience, if they called for an extension worker to come and help them, they did receive help. If the extension worker could not answer their question, s/he would seek further advice. However, he acknowledged that his group is located close to Othaya town, so their experience may not be typical of farmers across the district. Other farmers suggested that additional extension visits could assist groups of farmers to organise small-scale irrigation or assist individual farmers to plan their production activities more carefully (farm planning advice used to be a major part of the extension support offered to farmers). There was also a call for more field days – widely held to be amongst the most useful of the current

extension activities – but at sub-locational level for easier access. (Most are currently district or location-level events).

A district official observed that farmers have been slow to change their practice in response to the introduction of the "demand-driven" extension approach. He noted that farmers will rush to seek a vet if an animal is ill, but are reluctant to actively seek out an extension officer for advice at planting time. As he sees it, this is related to the fact that few farmers are business minded in their agriculture. They neither calculate gross margins for the crops that they grow, nor select crops on the basis of returns. However, it was also observed that, if output marketing opportunities for local produce improved, farmers would demand more extension advice to respond to those opportunities.

When confronted with the realities of extension service resourcing and motivation (hence the realism of prescriptions for increasing the number of staff and farm visits), farmers accepted that front-line workers no longer have bicycles and may find it difficult to make large numbers of farm visits. When presented with the hypothetical alternative of there being fewer Ministry of Agriculture staff within the district, but all of them equipped with transport (preferably motorbikes) and able to respond to requests for assistance made by mobile phone, farmer members within the group responded positively. A district official was similarly positive. Of the 10 "technical" staff currently employed in the district (out of 37 positions on paper), only four are front-line staff. Inadequate transportation means that the others are often office-bound. Meanwhile, the current sense of hierarchy, whereby field work is considered the job of the lowest paid staff, undermines the motivation of the latter. Having fewer officers, all properly resourced and motivated, would be much better. Whether an officer has a degree, diploma or certificate is much less important

than their willingness to serve and advise farmers.

There also emerged a consensus between farmers and district officials over the desirability of greater local, bottom-up planning of agricultural extension priorities. It was suggested by one farmer that extension priorities should be determined by a consultative process, starting at sub-locational level and feeding up to the District Agricultural Committee, and that local stakeholders should exercise some control over the use of the Ministry of Agriculture district budget. Where local staff lack expertise in a particular topic, some of the budget could be used to invite in expertise from outside the district.

One interpretation of the discussion is that farmers think that they will be best served by there being more extension staff, as this will allow more farm visits to take place. However, this view is not necessarily informed by a critical assessment of the constraints facing the extension system or of feasible alternative approaches to service delivery. If reforms, such as the “demand-driven” extension approach, are introduced without adequate farmer consultation, they are likely to be greeted with scepticism by farmers. However, prior consultations with farmers could produce a much greater willingness to work with new structures, not to mention useful inputs into what an effective extension system (within unavoidable constraints) might look like.

As noted, the group discussion produced a consensus between farmers and district officials over the desirability of greater local, bottom-up planning of agricultural extension priorities, including decentralised input into budgeting. This suggests that a pre-condition for effective reform could be a strong District Agricultural Committee and District Agricultural Stakeholders’ Forum in each district. What capacity building input is required before these can assume fuller

responsibility for extension planning and budgeting?

Report Finalised April 2010

Appendix 1: List of Workshop Participants

No	Name	Location/portfolio
1	Kibui Gichigi	Karima (farmer)
2	Samuel Githinji	Chinga (farmer)
3	Joseph Wahome	Chinga (farmer)
4	John Munge	Chinga (farmer)
5	S. P Mwangi	Karima (farmer)
6	Anne Wambugu	Gatugi (farmer)
7	Stephen Macharia	Iriaini (farmer)
8	Ibrahim Wamugu	Iriaini (farmer)
9	Patrick Maina	Iriaini (farmer)
10	M. Mimano	Mukurweini (farmer)
11	Patrick G Maina	Karima (farmer)
12	Allan R. Wambugu	Karima (farmer)
13	John Githumbi	Chinga (farmer)
14	R M Kiragu	Karima (farmer)
15	Mathew Kariuki	Karima (farmer)
16	R M Kamau	DAO's office
17	C M Kabia	DAEO's office
18	L N Muguchia	DAO's office
19	Stephen Mwangi	Equity Bank
20	James Gachina	Equity bank
21	Festus Gaku	Mahiga (farmer)
22	Festus Githinji	Mahiga (farmer)
23	Rosemary Ndiritu	Iriaini (agrovet)
24	Teresia Njeri	Kiaguthu (farmer)
25	Lwangu Saul	FEO Kiaguthu
26	Ayub Matindi	Mahiga (farmer)
27	Elphantus Mwangi	DAO
28	James Nduati	Ministry of Livestock
29	Colin Poulton	FAC Research Team
30	Gem Kodhek	FAC Research Team
31	Booker Owuor	FAC Research Team

Appendix 2: Workshop Programme

Future Agricultures Seminar

Nyeri South District

February 5th 2010

CDF HALL, OTHAYA

9.00	Registration
9.15	Introduction
9.30	Introductory Speech: DAO, Mr Mwangi E. Ministry of Agriculture
9.45 – 10.15	Presentation of Findings: Booker Owuor
10.15 – 10.45	Discussion
10.45 – 11.15	Tea Break
11.15 – 12.15	Group Discussions
12.30 – 1.00	Report Back
1.00 – 1.30	Closing

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