

The Impact of Improved Bean Varieties on the Social and Economic Lives of Farmers in Embu District: A Gender Focused Analysis

Abstract:

The agricultural sector plays a significant role in the lives of the rural population in African countries. It not only acts as their major occupation but it also supplies them with the basic needs for survival. Research has shown that persistent rural poverty in most African local communities is rooted in the impoverishment of women since they carry the lion's share of family production. Not only are women a growing proportion of the rural poor, but also, the welfare of the rural children and overall household food security in poor countries is largely affected by women's access to resources and technology for food production and income generation. One major obstacle that has for long hindered women from accessing agricultural technology is the use of conventional methods of disseminating technology which have been discriminatory towards women, in recent years, KARI which is Kenya's premier agricultural institute has come up with all approach that has ensured active participation by farmers in identifying varieties of crops that suit their circumstances. It has proved to be an effective mechanism to not only provide women with opportunities to participate in agricultural technology development but has also enhanced their access to technology, Climbing bean is among the crops that underwent this participatory research process and it involved farmers in Embu, Nyeri, Murang 'a, Mbeere, Kirinyaga & meru districts, However, no study had been done to determine the impacts these Improved Climbing Bean Varieties had on farmers especially women farmers who In most of the developing world have been on the forefront in the fight against hunger & poverty, This study hence attempted to bridge this gap, limiting itself to Embu district. The major objective of the study was to undertake a gender focused analysis of the impacts of Improved Climbing Bean Varieties on farmers in Embu. The study involved a sample of 71 farmers selected from a total of 120 farmers using simple random sampling. Personal interviews with farmers & other key informants and document reviews were the methods used to collect data. The researcher administered questionnaires during these interviews. The findings of this study were that there had been no significant impact on the economic lives of farmers in Embu. Farmers were still facing market problems and their income was still very little. However, there had been some impact on their social lives though very low. There had been some positive change not only in their food and nutrition but also where who makes decisions in the house and sharing of farm workload is concerned. The major constraints farmers were still lacing were lack of market for their produce & lack or proper follow-up by KARI officers. The recommendations this study has are that KARI officers & extension workers should do regular follow-ups with the farmers. The farmers should also be given more training not only on climbing beans but also on other crops. This will improve the quality of their produce in the farm and in turn increase market opportunities.