Factors influencing small holder households access to extension education and its impact on food security in Kalama location, Machakos County

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Abstract:
Extension Education was designed to empower the rural population with skill and knowledge that would improve their lifestyles as well as improve farming methods. Extension is a non formal educational function that applies to any institution that disseminates information and advice with the intention of promoting knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations, although the term 'extension' tends to be associated with agriculture and rural development (Rivera and Qamar 2003). Agricultural education, extension and training programmes ensure that information on new technologies, plant varieties and cultural practices reaches farmers and -those who need them most. Extension is extremely important in helping to confront problems of availability, access, and utilization. It helps to enhance the productivity and consecutively the production of food. It can assist in providing opportunities for income generation. And, it generally provides improvement of nutritional advice through home economics programmes and enhances the quality of rural life by way of community development. The research problem was as a result of the need to assess the factors affecting access to extension education, the process employed by different stakeholders to disseminate extension education and the impact of extension education on food security levels at the rural household. The main objective of the study was to assess factors influencing small holder households' access to extension education and its effects on achieving food security. The research took the form of a case study of Kalama Division in Machakos County. The target population comprised of heads of households in Kalama Location, Machakos County, Kenya. Random sampling method and snowballing method was used to select the sub locations and households from where data would be collected. A questionnaire was distributed as well as administered in areas where informants requested that the researcher takes them through the questions for better understanding. The research findings were presented inform of frequency tables, graphs and pie charts. The research findings established that the level of food security in the area has declined over the years. The findings also established that household participation in extension services is poor due to lack of awareness that these services exist and households had other income generating activities that took precedence over attending an extension education session. The research also established that extension service providers only visited the area once or twice a year, making it impossible to follow up on farmers' progress. The conclusion of these findings shows that while there is significant amount of work in extension services, the sector still lags behind due to issues of financial and human resources. While much funding has gone towards formal education, policy makers should direct a similar amount in both finances and human resource to non formal education of which extension fall under this category. This will ensure that all citizens are provided with equal opportunities that lead to self sustainability.