An assessment of the contribution of the shifting focal area agricultural extension approach in Kiambaa Division of Kiambu District

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Abstract:

This study focused on the Shifting Focal Area Agricultural (SFAA) extension approach that has been applied by the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP) since the year 2000 and funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). SFAA entails the concentration of resources and effort in a specified geographical location for one year and then moving on to another area. The approach aims at transferring more responsibility to individual farmers, farmers' groups and organizations in owning and managing their extension activities. The overall objective of the study was to establish the contribution of the shifting focal area agricultural extension approach in the delivery of extension services. The study was carried out in Kiambaa division of Kiambu district which was among the first areas where the SF AA was implemented. Descriptive survey research design was used to collect data from respondents on their attitudes and opinions towards the shifting focal area extension approach. The study collected primary data from farmers, extension workers and focal area development committee members. A case study was also carried out on a successive farmers' group that was established in the year 2000 when the programme was launched. Secondary data was obtained from published materials and reports. The study established that the programme has been able to reach many farmers and of the 74 farmers interviewed, 81.1% of them said they knew of NALEP while 18.9% said they did not know the programme. Further, 77% of the farmers said they had received various trainings through the programme. The study also found that many of the farmers who had received training had adopted various new technologies learnt. Of the 57 farmers who had received training, 49 indicated that they had adopted new technologies such as value addition, crop rotation, fodder production, apiculture, and fish farming among others accounting for 66.2% of the farmers. In addition, 50% of the farmers said they had witnessed improvement in farm productivity and income levels. However, the farmers were not able to quantify the increment as they had not kept any records. The concept of promotion of opportunities and formation of farmers' group usually referred to as Common Interest Groups (CIGs) is a key strategy applied by the programme to reach farmers. The strategy aims at encouraging the farmers in the focal areas to take up agribusiness opportunities which can improve production and consequently their incomes. CIGs are formed during the development of Community Action Plans (CAP). The extension officers promote viable agricultural enterprises and farmers are encouraged to choose enterprises which they feel are suitable for them and form groups. It was envisaged that these groups would eventually grow to become marketing entities. The research found that 47 of the farmers interviewed had joined CIGs accounting for 63.5%
while 10 or 13.5% had never joined any CIG. However, 18 of the farmers who had joined eIGs indicated that the CIGs were no longer active accounting for 24.3% of the farmers. Further analysis of the farmers belonging to active CIGs showed that 10.8% of the farmers were not actively participating in the groups' activities. This implies that 35.1% of the farmers were no longer participating in CIG activities. The NALEP programme envisaged a scenario whereby other stakeholders would be mobilized to participate actively in agricultural extension service delivery such as the private sector and civil society. The inclusion of other stakeholders was to ensure that many more farmers got access to extension service provision. It was also expected that the government would gradually leave the role of extension service provision to the private sector and civil society and play mainly a regulatory role. The study found that 95% of the farmers interviewed had access to extension service provision. However, the research found that the government is still the main extension service provider with 74.6% of the farmers indicating that they received agricultural extension services from the government. 11.2% of the farmers said they received services from the government and the private sector and only 9.8% of the farmers indicated that they received extension services from the private sector alone. The Focal Area Development Committees (FADC) formed in the year 2000 are still active although some of the members have dropped out. The role of the FADC was defined as spearheading development activities in the focal areas and follow up of focal area activities once NALEP moves to another area. The study established that there has been various projects implemented in the two focal areas as a result of FADC initiatives. In Waguthu focal area, the FADC mobilized funds from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to drill a borehole which is currently supplying water to the community. In Njiku focal area, the farmers formed a CIG and they are keeping bees and growing vegetables as a group. However, the FADC members have not been able to make follow up on NALEP activities as it had been intended due to various limitations such as lack of facilitation, time and skills. The FADC members have nevertheless assisted the extension workers in mobilization of the farmers and have served as a linkage between the farmers and extension staff. It can be concluded from the research findings that NALEP through the SF AA has had a positive impact in the focal areas. Many of the farmers have received various trainings in crop and livestock husbandry practices and a good number have adopted various technologies and extension messages received from extension workers. The research recommends that the programme makes concerted effort to have farmers not only trained in record keeping but also encouraged to adopt the practice. This will enable the farmers to track inputs and outputs and hence be able to ascertain if they are making any returns or not. The programme should also explore ways of funding CIGs to implement identified enterprises. Funding was identified as a major constraint in the progression of CIGs and this can be addressed through provision of soft loans to groups or connecting the groups to micro financing institutions. The research also recommends that the time spent in a focal area be reviewed to two years. This will give sufficient time for farmers to take up technologies and for extension staff to follow up farmers activities. One of the reasons given for CIG breakup was insufficient preparatory period and follow-ups to enable the groups go through the forming process. The programme should continue to mobilize other stakeholders to provide extension services while the government should provide an enabling policy environment to facilitate the entrant of other extension service providers.