

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN NATIONAL AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK EXTENSION PROGRAMME: THE CASE OF CHUKA DIVISION, MERU SOUTH DISTRICT IN KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

The study assessed the level of community engagement in an agriculture extension programme called National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Program (NALEP) in Chuka Division, Meru South District, Eastern Kenya. It focused on the community's knowledge of the programme, their participation and evaluation of the programme, including their suggestions for improving it. The total population for the study was 3840 farm families, with 2040 and 1800 farm families from Mugwe and Gitareni Locations (focal areas), respectively. Each Location was divided into 4 blocks as per the design for the implementation of NALEP. Simple random sampling method was used to obtain one block from each of the two Locations. The pre-tested questionnaires were then administered systematically at every 25<sup>th</sup> home in a block. This resulted in 20 questionnaires in each of the two Locations. Three focus group interviews were conducted; two in Gitareni and one in Mugwe. Quantitatively and qualitatively analysis of data with emphasis on descriptive analysis was done. The two communities were engaged in the programme and that only a small proportion (15%) of the participants had low engagement. The engagement was across all occupations, age and gender. The main reason given for participation was to improve their farms (82% and 74%, respectively). The organizational structure in the community affected participation. There was no significant difference in the level of engagement of the two communities. There is need to design training programmes to suit the needs of the people with flexible modes of engagement other than a 'one size fits all' approach. There is also a need for stakeholders to work collaboratively.

**Key words:** Community engagement, Participation, Collaboration, Organizational structures, Sector coordination, Community knowledge, Agricultural extension.

## INTRODUCTION

The role of agriculture in the Kenyan economy is very significant. Agriculture directly contributes 26% of GDP and a further 27% indirectly through linkages with manufacturing, distribution and other service related sectors. About 45% of government revenue is derived from agriculture, while the sub-sector contributes over 75% of industrial raw materials (Republic of Kenya, 2006). Of more importance is agriculture's contribution to achievement of national food security, foreign exchange earnings and off-farm income generating activities. In Kenya, 82 % of the population live in the rural areas and derive their livelihood from agricultural activities (Government of Kenya, 2005). The high and medium potential areas cover 16% of the land, while the area considered of low potential for rain-fed crop production, the Arid and Semi-arid Lands (ASALs) covers 84% (Government of Kenya, 2011).

The importance of agriculture extension in rural development is widely acknowledged. In developing countries such as Kenya, where the majority of the population lives in rural areas and agriculture is the main source of livelihood, agricultural extension is

considered to be one of the key drivers and a vital catalyst in rural development (Wanga, 1999). Agricultural extension services aims at increasing farm productivity and improving the welfare of the rural people by educating farmers on advanced farming techniques and promoting an innovative environment. This is achieved by linking researchers, government planners, non-governmental organizations, community based organizations and private sector with farmers by offering an open platform for exchange of ideas and services (Barrett *et al.*, 2007). In this regard, the role of agriculture extension has been evolving to integrate farmer knowledge with formal science and build a culture of dialogue among various actors and planners. This evolution is due to the realization that sustainability is best achieved if farmers take more active and participatory roles in agricultural extension. In addition, there is an increasing recognition that the socio-economic and agro-ecological conditions of resource-poor farmers are complex, diverse and risk-prone (Farrington 1998 cited in Amudavi, 2003) and the general realization that research and extension agencies do not have the capacity to generate a mix of technologies to the level required by farmers

(Thrupp & Altieri, 2001 cited in Amudavi, 2003). Moreover, the diversity and complexity of rural livelihoods means that efforts to alleviate poverty in rural areas will have to be multifaceted and holistic (Carney 1998 cited in Amudavi, 2003).

In Kenya, the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP), a policy framework that assisted in the implementation of the National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP), was an attempt to find a different path of adequately resolving the complex, systemic issues that face rural communities (Amudavi, 2003). NALEP was founded on three pillars; participation, collaboration and partnerships. It was implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Development (MOLFD) and targeted the entire rural population in Kenya, engaged in agriculture, livestock and fisheries production. NALEP delivered advisory services with an aim of achieving increased production, food security, higher incomes and improved environment. It had a short term objective of bridging the gap between the resource-poor and the wealthy to narrow the disparity in the level of receptiveness to extension knowledge. It aimed at ensuring that the people are adequately empowered to demand extension services. The demand-driven approach refers to a development strategy where the people themselves are expected to take the initiative (Nambiro *et al.*, 2005) and the responsibility for improving their situation rather than being passive recipients of Government services.

A demand-led approach seeks to put farmers in a position to influence the research agenda and enable the research process to generate relevant outputs (Kibwika *et al.*, 2009). Demand-driven systems are formed around users, where service providers are accountable to the users. 'Demand' is what people ask for, need and value so much that they are willing to invest their own resources, such as time, produce and/or money to receive the services (Chipeta, 2006 as cited in Rivera, 2008).

NALEP also encouraged promotion of collective rural innovations which could have significant impacts on rural livelihoods that lie untapped in spite of their potential to transform lives. The programme also advocated, facilitated, and promoted establishment of grassroot institutions that take control of development initiatives in their areas. Some institutions established included Stakeholder Forums (SHFs), Focal Area Development Committees (FADCs), Common Interest Groups (CIGs) and marketing federations (coalescing of CIGs into sizeable entities to take advantage of the

economies of scale in both procurement of inputs and sale of produce/products). This made community engagement very important in achievement of results.

Fawcett *et al.*, (1995) defines community engagement as the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting their well-being. It enhances ownership and setting up of common goals, objectives and achieving economies of scale. It also enables social actors to capitalize on the comparative advantage of each other and thereby increase efficiency of their roles (Zeigler & Hossain, 1995 as cited in Amudavi, 2003). Effective community engagement is a process and often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programmes and practices (Fawcett *et al.*, 1995).

The present study assessed the level of community engagement in NALEP implementation in two locations in Meru South Sub-County in Eastern Kenya. It gathered information on awareness, participation and evaluation in the programme by the community through a series of interviews and focus groups discussions conducted in February, 2009. The study also assessed the communities' capacity to identify their problems.

## METHODOLOGY

The study population lived in a focal area which is an equivalent of an administrative Location. The target population was farmers who did or did not participate in the NALEP from Mugwe and Gitareni Locations of Chuka Division. The main criterion for their inclusion into the study was that they were residents of the area during the implementation period (July 2006 to June 2008). The total population for the study was 3840 farm families broken down into 2040 in Mugwe and 1800 in Gitareni.

During the implementation of NALEP, each focal area (Location) was divided into 4 blocks (of about 500 farm households) for the purpose of implementing NALEP activities, resulting in 8 blocks for the two Locations. The study adopted this set up and employed simple random sampling method to obtain one block in each of the two Locations. The questionnaires were then administered systematically at every 25<sup>th</sup> home in a block. This resulted in 20 questionnaires in each of the two Locations and a total of 40 for the entire study. Three focus group interviews were conducted in the Locations; two in

Gitareni and one in Mugwe. The participants of focus group discussions were carefully selected such that a common denominator among them was the fact they were all members of the committees for the implementation of NALEP activities in their respective Locations and were, therefore, expected to be more knowledgeable about NALEP and other development programmes in the area. Information gathered was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively with emphasis on descriptive analysis. A thematic approach was used to analyze the data from the focus groups.

## RESULTS

In Mugwe, the community had a greater knowledge of the NALEP (50% respondents knew about it) than

in Gitareni (35%). In Mugwe, the respondents were more involved in the programme's activities and 40% said their engagement in the programme was 'very high', compared to only 15% in Gitareni (Table 1).

Comparatively, the Mugwe Focal Area Development Committee (FADC) was very conversant with the programme's operations and was articulate about the outcomes, while there was a lot of debate within the Gitareni FADC before members agreed on any outcome. It is noteworthy that participants aged between 21 and 30 years had no idea about the programme. Despite this, there was no clear evidence of level of knowledge of the programme being influenced by age, sex or occupation.

**Table 1: Community knowledge of NALEP**

Level of Knowledge	Mugwe		Gitareni	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	2	10	3	15
High	8	40	4	20
Fair	5	25	6	30
Limited	4	20	1	5
Very limited/No idea	1	5	5	25

In Gitareni, 25% respondents had very limited or no idea about the programme, compared to 5% in Mugwe. This was supported by the Gitareni FADC that felt that people are somewhat engaged in the programme. Mugwe FADC felt that the programme had engaged the people and were very articulate in detailing benefits of the programme. This difference can be attributed to the fact that Mugwe is close to the urban centre from which the programme implementers operate.

A higher percentage of respondents participated in NALEP activities in Gitareni (65%) than in Mugwe (50%). In Mugwe 80% of those participating in NALEP activities contributed money or materials towards the programme's activities, while only 31% did so in Gitareni. This can be interpreted to indicate a higher level of engagement. Of all the NALEP activities, CIG training was rated to be the most useful to the respondents followed by the field days (Table 2).

A high percentage of respondents from the farming and business category participated in NALEP activities and this was attributed to the focus of NALEP on 'farming as a business' (65% in Mugwe and 45% Gitareni). Such an interpretation is confirmed by the focus group quote that 'the word

business influenced many people; the idea that local crops like bananas can be business was thrilling. Women had a higher level of participation. However, the sample of women was small to enable conclusive findings to be made (30% of the sample).

Respondents in both areas participated in the programme so as to improve their farms. It is evident, therefore, that participation is influenced by perceived benefits. This interpretation is confirmed by Wandersman *et al.*, (1987) who argue that participation is caused by goals or motivations. It is also apparent that, from the farmers' point of view, extension still plays an important role in the introduction of new farming technologies. From one of the focus groups (Amani and Gatugi Women Group) it was clear that the women gained social benefits such as higher status in the society, recognition, self-confidence and public image. This is in line with what Butterfoss (2006) outlined as the potential benefits for participants.

Findings revealed that the level of community engagement in both areas was between 'fair' to 'very high' (over 80% in both areas). However, there was no clear distinction between the two areas (Table 3).

**Table 2: Participation**

Activities attended	Mugwe		Gitareni	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
PAPOLD	4	20	0	0
Public meeting	3	15	6	30
CAP meeting	3	15	7	35
CIG training	9	45	8	40
Field days	7	35	7	35
<b>Number of meetings attended</b>				
Very many >10	2	10	2	10
Many (5-10)	6	30	5	25
A few (1-5)	2	20	6	30
None	10	50	7	35
<b>Contribution</b>				
Money	8	80	4	31
Materials	8	80	2	15

This is because from the questionnaires, Mugwe community was more engaged than Gitareni, the Mugwe FADC was more articulate than the Gitareni FADC, and had a merry-go-round activity to enhance cohesion. However, the Gitareni Common Interest Group (CIG) was also very articulate on issues

concerning the programme implementation and how they had participated and benefited. No CIG group was interviewed in Mugwe to provide a comparative basis. Age and occupation did not seem to influence the level of engagement. However, women were found to be more engaged as compared to men.

**Table 3: Level of engagement**

Level of engagement	Mugwe		Gitareni	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	4	40	2	15
High	2	20	4	30
Fair	4	40	5	40
Low	0	0	2	15
Very low	0	0	0	0

In Mugwe, 40% of the respondents gauged themselves as having a very high level of engagement in the programme while only 15% in Gitareni did the same. In Gitareni, the highest percentage of respondents felt that they were only fairly engaged in the programme (Table 3).

From the secondary data, it is not obvious that either of communities had a higher level of participation in terms of people attending various NALEP activities than the other. From the analysis of the results, there were more people attending the sensitization *baraza*, CAP *baraza* and field days in Mugwe, while there were more who attended CIG trainings in Gitareni in addition to there being more CIGs in Gitareni Location than in Mugwe Location.

## CONCLUSION

Mugwe community has greater knowledge of the programme and is more involved and engaged in the programme's activities. It also contributes money and

other materials for various programme activities. The Focal Area Development Committee is more conversant with the programme operations due to close proximity to the major Chuka Town.

Most people participate in the programme to improve their farms and turn them into businesses. Other benefits from participating in the programme include higher status in the society, recognition, self-confidence and improved public image.

To realize the full benefits of the programme, community engagement and other factors such as political environment, programme aspects, governance structures, globalization, climate change, and liberalization are crucial. The interplay between the communities, private sector, the government and other development partners is crucial for sustainable development, not only in the agricultural sector, but in all livelihood sectors.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Improved Decentralized Training Programme

Increasing decentralization is correlated with increasing knowledge of potential sources of information, as well as higher rates of participation in various community organizations and knowledge of various available channels of extension service delivery. Therefore, it is necessary for the programme to sustain training at a local level to ensure that the people receive knowledge and skills to better implement development in their areas. The training programme should be tailored to suit the needs of each specific community.

### Flexible Modes of Engagement

A mode of engagement that might work in one area may not necessarily work in another area and it is important to adopt flexible modes of engagement rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. The facilitators need to have good understanding of the dynamics of the community and engage with them rather than impose externally designed solutions.

### Coordination between Stakeholders

Collaborative engagement between all stakeholders is an excellent opportunity for delivering networking opportunities and providing access to information and resources. It is also excellent in ensuring personal recognition, contributing towards skills enhancement, and providing a sense of contributing to the community. The stakeholders need to treat the community residents as peers and not as 'customers, clients, objects of concern, sources of data, or targets of problem-solving effort'. All stakeholders should listen to and make an effort to understand the needs of the community.

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