

Small Scale Maize Farmers Attitude towards Opinion Leaders in the Western Region of Kenya in the Agricultural Reform Era



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ABSTRACT: Agricultural reforms in Kenya led to the government cutting down incentives to small scale farmers. These also coincided with reduction of agricultural extension staff hence farmers have to rely on advice from opinion leaders. The study looked at farmers' attitude towards opinion leaders on maize farming in the western region of Kenya because maize is the main staple for most of the Kenyan population and Western Region is the food basket. The study used Ex-post facto research design via cross sectional survey. The counties were purposively selected to represent the Western Region of Kenya. Two sub-counties from each of the four Counties were selected by simple random sampling. Small scale farmers were selected from focal areas through systematic random sampling. Four key informants were sampled purposefully based on their positions of authority. In addition, 52 extension staffs were sampled through systematic random sampling. The small scale farmers were interviewed with the help of interview schedule containing both open and closed ended questions. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study revealed that a high percentage of respondents from all the study Counties agreed that what other farmers said about maize production helped them to invest in the enterprise. The study concluded that small scale farmers from all the Counties, were influenced by other farmers to invest in maize production. In addition most of the respondents always followed the recommendations given by the chief and other local leaders concerning agricultural production. The study recommended that extension staff use farmer groups and local leaders to ensure that the innovations are diffused to a large number of farmers.

KEYWORDS: Small scale farmers; attitude; maize farming; agricultural reform, opinion leaders

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and trade liberalisation resulted in agricultural reforms in Kenya and other developing countries. After the introduction of Agricultural Reforms, the government of Kenya put in place crops act whose objective is to accelerate the growth and development of agriculture in general as well as enhance productivity and incomes of farmers and the rural population. The act also aims at improving investment climate and efficiency of agribusiness and develops agricultural crops as export crops that will augment the foreign exchange earnings of the country. These it is hoped will be achieved through promotion of the production, processing, marketing, and distribution of crops in suitable areas of the country (Republic of Kenya, 2013a). These reforms resulted from the introduction of SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programmes) and trade liberalisation.

Hence the Kenya government no longer gives incentives to small scale farmers. These also coincided with reduction of agricultural extension workers hence farmers had to rely on advice from opinion leaders. According to Kolaj, Zahoaliaj, Dashi and Skunked (2017), One of the responsibilities of agricultural extension agents is to empower the rural leaders and develop their leadership competencies. The study further revealed that farmers' perception of good leadership in rural community increases the possibility of involving them in collective action.

Opinion leaders are people who have established authority in a given area, market, or industry. There are many different types of opinion leaders, and they all can play a unique role in the promotion of Agriculture especially in the post structural Adjustment programme era. Opinion leaders are important because of their ability to influence the market and consumer trends. They often have the authority in the market to be the first to try a new product or service and have the influence to pass on their information and opinions, which can have an impact on the use of the product or service with their audience. They are a trusted resource to help give insight when it is needed.

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Opinion leaders tend to have access to mass media information and external contacts that provide them new ideas from outside. Additionally, the opinion leaders have greater contact with change agents, social participation, higher social status, and more innovativeness. Opinion leaders are used as role models in the adoption of innovations. This can be effective at the social and economic levels of the diffusion process (Saeed and Sawicka, 2017).

Saeed and Sawicka (2017) further observed that the effectiveness of opinion leaders in diffusing knowledge that was specifically targeted to them through intensive training was shown to depend positively on the extent of leaders' superiority compared to the socioeconomic and farming skill attributes of the would-be followers. However, the results indicate that if the selected opinion leaders are excessively superior to the others in the community, their effectiveness actually diminishes and they may become essentially irrelevant to the diffusion of knowledge beyond a small circle of those higher status individuals who are closely associated with them.

1.2 Study Objective

The study sought small scale maize farmers attitude towards opinion leaders in the western region of Kenya in the agricultural reform era. The study also sought the opinion of the agricultural extension officers to understand the responses from the farmers.

2.1 METHODOLOGY

Ex-post facto research design was used via a cross sectional survey. This was because the study used naturally occurring treatments on subjects having a self-selected level of the independent variable (Kathuri & Pals, 1993; Borg & Gall, 1993).

The study was conducted in Western Province which is administratively divided into eight Countys as shown on Fig. 1 & 2. The province is made up of Busia, Bungoma, Kakamega, Lugari: Vihiga and Mt. Elgon Countys. The Province covers an area of 8436 Km² out of this 6670 Km² has potential for agriculture of which, 3591 Km² is cultivated for various crops. Rainfall is bimodal. The long and short rains come in March-May and August-November periods, respectively. Annual rainfall ranges from 900mm in Busia to 2100mm in Bungoma (MARD, 2002).

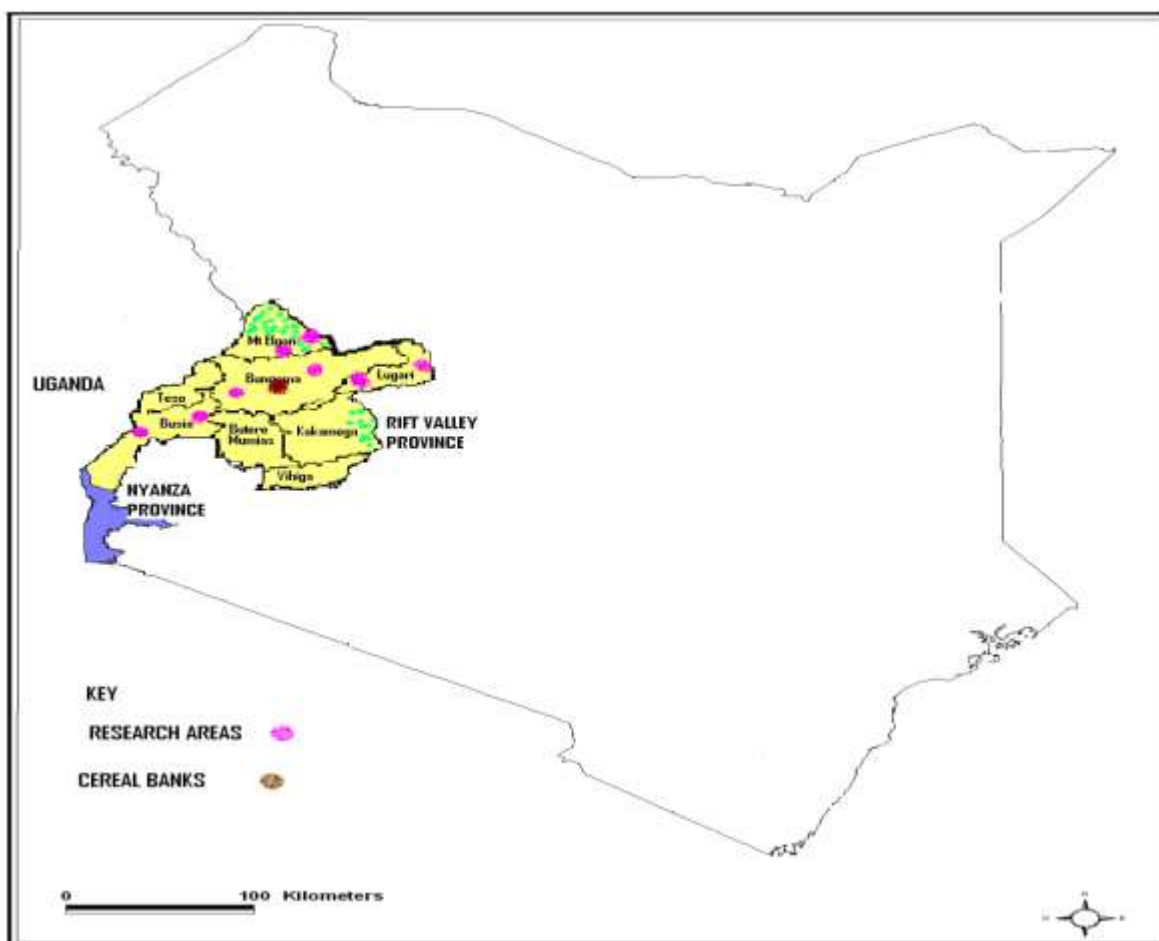


Fig. 1. Map showing the Countys in Western Province of Kenya

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The target population was made up of small scale farmers in Western Province. The accessible population was as follows: Lugari County 41,809, Bungoma County 158,370, Mt. Elgon County 19,746 and Busia County 136,736

The study Counties that is Busia, Bungoma, Mt. Elgon and Lugari were selected through purposive sampling because Busia County had the lowest average maize yields (7 bags per acre) in the province while, Lugari County experienced the highest average maize yield (18 bags per acre) in the province. Bungoma and Mt. Elgon Counties were in-between in terms of maize yield (CBS, 2001; MOA, 2006). The four Counties also represented Western Province in terms of all the Agro-ecological zones that exist in the province and therefore, results obtained could be generalized to the whole province.

Two Sub -Counties from each of the four selected Counties were selected by simple random sampling. The study Sub -Counties were Bumula and Webuye in Bungoma County; Kaptama and Kapsokwony in Mt. Elgon County; Funyula and Butula in Busia County and Lugari and Likuyani in Lugari County as shown in figure 2.



Fig. 2. Showing the two divisions selected per study County

For uniformity purposes the small holder farmers were selected from focal areas through systematic random sampling thus ensuring that they all had been exposed to extension staff. At the time of data collection, the extension staff had trained the farmers in one focal area per division and had moved to the next. The focal area approach which is under the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP) aims at improving livelihoods of the poor rural households (MOA & ML&FD, 2006). In the focal area approach the extension staffs works in one area of approximately 400 farmers per year. The focal area is taken as a demonstration site where farmers from the rest of the division can learn latest technologies (Baiya, 2003). The key informants were purposefully sampled due to their positions of authority.

The sample size was arrived at using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{NC^2}{e^2} + (N-1)e^2$$

(note: n=sample size; N=population size; C=Coefficient of variation which is 30%; e=margin of error which is fixed between 2-5%). The study sample was calculated at 25% coefficient of variation and 5% margin of error (Nassiuma, 2000).

For the purpose of generalizing the results to Western Province, twenty five percent coefficient of variation was used to ensure that the sample was wide enough. Five percent margin of error was used because the study was an ex-post facto survey. In ex-post facto survey the independent variables are not be manipulated hence necessitating relatively higher margin of error. The study sample is shown in Table 2.

The small scale farmers and extension staff were selected through systematic random sampling from sampling frames that were obtained from the extension staff offices. Four key informants were interviewed in order to generate additional information and clarify issues on the reform measures that had taken place. The key informants included the Provincial Director of Agriculture and Livestock Extension, the Provincial Crops Officer, an officer in position of authority in Agricultural Finance Corporation and an

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officer in position of authority at the National Cereals and Produce Board, Western Province. The small scale farmers were interviewed with the help of interview schedules and the extension staff were asked to fill questionnaires

Table 2. Sample Size by category

Category	Number of subjects	Sample size
Extension staff in the province	832	52
Household heads in Busia County	136,736	50
Household heads in Lugari County	41809	50
Household heads in Bungoma County	158370	50
Household heads in Mt. Elgon County	19746	50
Key Informants		4
Total	357,493	256

3.1 RESULTS

Attitude towards Opinion Leaders

Analysis on attitude towards opinion leaders revealed that a high percentage (69.7%) of respondents from all the study Counties agreed with the statements that what other farmers said about maize production helped them to invest in the enterprise. Analysis by Counties revealed that 63.2%, 83.1%, 75.4% and 56.9% of respondents from Bungoma, Lugari, Mt.Elgon and Busia Counties, respectively, agreed with the statement as shown in Table 4.19.

Table 4.19: Percentages For five Items Measuring Attitude toward Opinion Leaders per County.

ITEM	% Agree	%Disagree
BUNGOMA		
What other farmers say about maize production helps me to invest in the enterprise	63.2	29.9
I always follow the recommendations given by the chief and other local leaders concerning agricultural production	31.0	56.9
I have to see from other farmers the success of a practice before I adopt	72.4	24.2
LUGARI		
What other farmers say about maize production helps me to invest in the enterprise	83.1	10.2
I always follow the recommendations given by the chief and other local leaders concerning agricultural production	88.1	11.9
I have to see from other farmers the success of a practice before I adopt	88.3	10.0
MT. ELGON		
What other farmers say about maize production helps me to invest in the enterprise	75.4	8.8
I always follow the recommendations given by the chief and other local leaders concerning agricultural production	32.8	53.4
I have to see from other farmers the success of a practice before I adopt	51.7	32.7

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BUSIA		
What other farmers say about maize production helps me to invest in the enterprise	56.9	20.7
I always follow the recommendations given by the chief and other local leaders concerning agricultural production	70.7	29.3
I have to see from other farmers the success of a practice before I adopt	77.6	12.6

Relatively few respondents from Bungoma (29.9%), Lugari (10.2%), Mt.Elgon (8.8%) and Busia (20.7%) Counties, disagreed with the statement that what other farmers said about maize production helps them invest in the enterprise. This implies that innovations can easily diffuse from one farmer to another in the province. Hence extension staff in the province could use groups and be sure that the innovations diffused to a large number of farmers.

Generally, about half (51.3%) of the respondents in Western Province disagreed with the statement that they always followed the recommendations given by the chief and other local leaders concerning agricultural production. Analysis by Counties revealed that a high percentage of respondents from Lugari County (88.1%) and Busia County (70.7%) agreed with the statement that they always followed recommendations given by chiefs and other local leaders concerning agricultural production.

A key informant in the Ministry of Agriculture attributed the high percentage of respondents from Lugari County, who agreed with the statement, to the fact that farmers in Lugari County were enlightened; therefore, though they were from diverse ethnic groups they would listen to an opinion leader who had information that would help them improve their production. Respondents from Busia County also agreed with the statement because they belonged to the same tribe if not clan and therefore, the opinion leader could be one of their own. On the other hand, only 32.8% and 31% of the respondents from Mt. Elgon County and Bungoma County, respectively, agreed with the statement. Few respondents from the two Counties may have agreed with the statement because the Counties were made up of diverse ethnic groups who were hostile to each other. A key informant in the Ministry of Agriculture claimed that if an opinion leader was from one group, the other groups rejected him/her.

The implication of the above findings that the extension staff in Lugari and Busia Counties could minimize the problem of high farmer to extension staff ratio by passing improved agricultural practices through the provincial administration and other opinion leaders. This however, may not be the case for Bungoma and Mt.Elgon Counties, hence, calling for an alternative approach to minimize the problem of higher farmer to extension staff ratio that limits the extent to which extension staff can influence small scale farmers to improve maize production. The study further sought to find out the opinion of the extension staff on the importance of opinion leaders in influencing small scale farmers to increase maize production. The results indicated that 82.3% of the extension staff reported that prosperous farmers influenced small scale farmers by acting as their role models.

Majority of the farmers are usually follower farmers and will only adopt after they see the results of an innovation from innovative farmers. This is because farmers may not adopt innovations if a big gain is not expected (Guerin and Guerin, 1994). Chamala, (1987) further observed that farmers will tend to select technologies that are consistent with their needs, socio-economic status and attitude, hence, will want to see results from other farmers before adopting the innovations.

A high percentage (79.9%) of extension staff reported that public administrators are able to influence farmers because the small scale farmers trust them. In addition, 74.7% of the extension staff said that chair persons of groups such as farmer groups, women groups and self-help groups were able to influence community action. These results imply that extension staff have many channels for influencing small scale farmers to increase maize production.

The study sought to find out from the extension staff how the local leaders could be used to encourage small scale farmers to increase maize production. Some extension staff (57.3%) suggested that influential farmers should be asked to provide demonstration plots; others (44%) proposed that opinion leaders should be included in training through which they could be given technical messages and also trained on how to work with the small scale farmers.

3.2 CONCLUSION

Relatively few respondents from all the Counties, disagreed with the statement that what other farmers said about maize production helps them invest in the enterprise, implying that most of the respondents agreed with the statement. In addition the

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study revealed that most of the respondents in Western Province always followed the recommendations given by the chief and other local leaders concerning agricultural production.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Extension staff in the western region of Kenya could use groups and be sure that the innovations diffused to a large number of farmers. The extension staff should also utilize local leaders to ensure faster uptake of innovations

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