

**GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGIC RESPONSES AND MANAGEMENT OF
CHALLENGES FACING SMALL SCALE FARMERS IN KENYA.
A SURVEY OF POTATO FARMERS IN NYERI COUNTY**

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of the study was to evaluate the strategic responses by the government on the management of challenges facing small-scale farmers in Nyeri County in Kenya. The study employed survey research design. Descriptive research was used. All the farmers in this area were targeted. The researcher used questionnaires and face-to-face interview to collect data. Data was analysed using SPSS. The researchers found out that the Government had done little on the following issues; provision of technical skills, affordable farm inputs, business information services, accessibility to credit and the management of the marketing challenges.*

KEYWORDS: Technical Expertise, Farm Inputs, Challenges, Business Information, Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Mostly the small scale fresh potato production is carried out by farmers along Masinga dam. Small scale potato farming is a form of Small and Micro Enterprise (SME) which plays a significant role in the Kenyan economy. Most of these Small and Micro enterprises (SMEs) operate within the informal economy, a sector commonly referred to as informal sector, or in the Kenya context, *Jua Kali* (Mitullah, 2003). The Kenya Labour Force Survey Report of 1998/99 indicates that the sector covers all semi-organized and unregulated activities that are small scale in terms of employment. The report notes that the activities are largely undertaken by self-employed persons or employees with few workers in the open markets, in market stalls, in both developed and undeveloped premises, (Republic of Kenya, 2003). Farming play a crucial role in the social and economic development of a country. The Kenyan Government in its vision 2030 is pursuing a National Development Strategy that seeks to instill rapid and sustained economic growth and reduce the high incidence of poverty, (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Poverty in Kenya is one among many problems, which include insecurity, a high mortality rate, lack of ready market, poor infrastructure, and lack of business information support for SMEs. The study focused Nyeri County in Kenya. Like any other sector of production, small scale potato farming as an ongoing business in Nyeri County is bound to face various problems such as inadequate technical expertise among farmers, unavailability of farm inputs, limited access to credit, inaccessibility of business information services and marketing challenges. From the quarterly

reports of April to June, July to September and October to December 2011 (Republic of Kenya, 2011) which were obtained from Mwea Divisional Agriculture office, several constraints which the farmers faced in this sector were highlighted. They included inadequate greenhouse technology, unpredictable flooding of Masinga dam, non-availability of Government subsidised fertilizer, high cost of fuel, expensive chemicals, unstable market prices, unreliable water for irrigation and poor road network. The study sought to evaluate the strategic responses by the government on the management of the challenges faced by small-scale potato farmers. The performance of the government on the management of the challenges would be an eye opener to the farmers and the policy makers hence informed decisions would be made which will be a milestone towards the achievement of the country's vision 2030.

The objectives of the study included

1. To establish the level of government's involvement in the provision of technical expertise to the potato farmers in Nyeri County.
2. To establish the level of government's involvement in the provision of affordable farm inputs to potato farmers in Nyeri County.
3. To establish the level of government's involvement to help manage the challenges faced by the potato farmers in Nyeri County.
4. To establish the level of government's involvement in provision of business information to the potato farmers in Nyeri County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have been done on the implication of technical expertise, access to farm inputs, access to credit facilities, marketing and business information services. Sapienza and Grimm, (1997) argues that high education level has a positive impact on firm performance. Kolvereid (1992) shows that entrepreneurs with high education are more likely to have their business grow. At another level, Meja, (2003) argues that without technical expertise small scale farmers may not be able to control pests and diseases attacking their produce. Quality farm inputs are a requirement for higher yields by the farmers and with the liberalisation of the production and importation of agricultural inputs, the number of competitors increase, quality is diversified and prices are open to the law of demand and supply hence the sale of fake inputs by unscrupulous agencies (Chianu, 2008). Mead and Musinga (1995) argues that lack of credit and finance whether for working capital or other type is a major constraint to the SMES. Most SMEs rely mostly on their own savings and reinvest profits for their business which is not sufficient. Business growth is determined by how successfully one sells products and services. Hult, *et al.* (2003) argues that market orientation and superior products and services enables better satisfaction of customers and stakeholders which in turn result in a firm's growth. Business information, according to Thomas and Ballard (1995) is raw data converted into a form to enable the user to make a decision in responses to a business need. Information and business information services are of strategic importance to business as the success of any firm depends on its ability to acquire the right information at the right time and cost. These researches clearly show that availability of technical expertise, credit facilities, business information services, farm inputs and market has a positive impact on the growth of a firm. Non-availability of the same poses challenges to the firm and contributes to stagnation. These challenges include inadequate

technology, non-availability of subsidized fertilizer, expensive chemicals, insufficient business information services, unstable market prices and poor road network. Small scale fresh potato farmers in Nyeri County are among those affected by these challenges. The researcher therefore intends to establish whether the government has been able to manage these challenges through assistance in technical expertise, credit facilities, business information services, farm inputs and marketing.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the survey research design, which is used to enable researchers to gather information, summarize, present and interpret for the purpose of clarification (Orodho, 2002). Descriptive research was used based on the fact that in this study the researcher was interested on describing the state of affairs as they existed at that time, (Kothari, 2004). There are approximately 200 farmers in Nyeri County who produce tomatoes along Masinga dam, using water from River Tana to irrigate the crop and they were all targeted. Simple random sampling was used by the researcher to select a sample of forty small scale fresh potato farmers from the target population. A list of the farmers from the divisions was obtained by the researcher and they were allocated numbers which were picked randomly until the required sample was realised. The researcher used both the interview and the structured questionnaire to collect data. Questionnaires were administered to the literate farmers and then the researcher had face-to-face interviews with the illiterate farmers. Frequencies, means, and percentages were used to analyse the data. Statistical Package of Social Sciences Software (SPSS) was used. The results were presented in form of tables and charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research established that 75% had potato training and 25% never had the training. On productivity 73% of respondents were impacted positively; this shows that training has a very positive effect on production of potato. Only 17% were affected negatively, 10% of the respondents felt no effect. On the training of the farmers by the government, only 2 % had regular training by the government. This is a very small proportion as compared to 98 % of the respondents who did not have the regular training by the government. The results implies that the government did not play a big role in imparting farming skills to the farmers. On farm inputs, 8% of the respondents agreed that the farm inputs were very accessible while 72 % reported they were accessible. Only 12 % of respondents said the inputs are inaccessible, 8% supported that the inputs were very inaccessible. The research wanted to establish the rates government had subsidized farm inputs. The response as per the number of respondents interviewed was 40 but only 39 responded to this particular question. Therefore the response rate was 99%. Out of the 39 respondents 3% believed that the government subsidized sometimes, another 3% felt the farm inputs were subsidized always. Majority of respondents 95% said that the government had never subsidized farm inputs. When comparing the rate of accessibility of the farm inputs in which majority (80% said they are accessible) and the rate at which the government subsidized them (95% said that the prices were not subsidized), it is evident that though farm inputs were available most farmers felt that the government had not played a part in offering the farm inputs at subsidized prices which would make them affordable hence improve on their productivity. In

regard to access to credit from recognized lending institutions (banks and cooperative societies), 23 who represented 57% did not have access to credit facilities. Only 17 respondents who represented by 43% had access to credit facilities. Out of the 17 respondents, 13 got credit facilities from cooperatives societies. This is a very small proportion of the respondents. More than half of the respondents did not access credit facilities from banks and cooperative societies. The 23 of the respondents who did not access credit from the banks and cooperative societies, 2 borrowed from groups, 5 from friends and family members and 16 had no source of credit. The study therefore established that accessibility to credit by the farmers is a big challenge in the area though 54% of respondents indicated that the terms of credit were favourable. This implies that the non-accessibility of the credit to many of the farmers may be as a result of other factors which need to be established by the government. The research also sought to establish the rate of transport problems experienced by the farmers. 18% of the respondents interviewed felt that the transport problems happened always, 37% said they encountered the problem often, 40% of respondent indicated that they experienced the problems sometimes and 5% of the respondents never had transport problems. In addition to the transport problem, marketing of the potato was also focused. The study sought to establish the rate of the marketing challenges the farmers faced. Out of the 40 respondents, 5% believed that the rate of challenges faced in marketing was very high, 60% said that the rate was high. Only 35% felt the rate was moderate. Marketing challenges according to the findings are experienced by the farmers. The study also sought to establish whether the government had done something to alleviate the marketing challenges. Majority of the respondents 85% reported that the government had done nothing to address the marketing challenges. Only 10% said that the government had done something and 5% of the respondents were not aware of what the government had done to address the marketing challenges. The study also sought to establish the forums through which the farmers got information about farming from. From the results, 20% of the respondents got information through farmers' groups organized by the extension workers, 55% through the media and 25% said that no forums were organized by the government. In this respect whatever the government had done for the farmers in Nyeri to gain information was very minimal.

KNOWLEDGE GAP AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE EXISTING STUDY

Meja, (2003) argues that without technical expertise small scale farmers may not be able to control pests and diseases attacking their produce. Quality farm inputs are a requirement for higher yields by the farmers and with the liberalisation of the production and importation of agricultural inputs, the number of competitors increase, quality is diversified and prices are open to the law of demand and supply hence the sale of fake inputs by unscrupulous agencies (Chianu, 2008). Mead and Musinga (1995) argues that lack of credit and finance whether for working capital or other type is a major constraint to the SMES. Most SMEs rely mostly on their own savings and reinvest profits for their business which is not sufficient. Business growth is determined by how successfully one sells products and services. Hult, *et al.* (2003) argues that market orientation and superior products and services enables better satisfaction of customers and stakeholders which in turn result in a firm's growth. Business information, according to Thomas and Ballard (1995) is raw data converted into a form to enable the user to make a decision in responses to a business need. Information and business information services are of strategic importance to business as the success of any firm depends on its ability to acquire the

right information at the right time and cost. These researches clearly show that availability of technical expertise, credit facilities, business information services, farm inputs and market has a positive impact on the growth of a firm. Non-availability of the same poses challenges to the firm and contributes to stagnation. Looking at these studies critically, most of them have been wholly over relying on the impact of the either availability and unavailability of the stated facilities on the production. Pegging the argument on this, the researchers sought to explore more avenue on this for example, the University up bottom to specific aspects that would enable farmers not only to understand the whole scenario but also to make them succeed in terms of production inform of profit making – at the same time, the researchers would wish to explore on the alternative strategies to bring this whole process to the community based organizations for example bring the market closer to the farmers, this is strategic positioning to which can help the Government to reach majority of the farmers at the same time. Apart from creating the market in the region, the researchers would also generate strategic ideas to know why? How? this can be of more help to the upcoming strategists in the public sector

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study several things emerged in relation to the management of the challenges faced by the small-scale potato farmers in Nyeri by the government. On the provision of technical skills, affordable farm inputs, business information services, accessibility to credit and the management of the marketing challenges, the government had done very little about. In some cases the farmers were even not aware of what the government would offer to them. Involving and sensitizing the farmers in different dimensions and approaches would help them get informed hence improve on production. Doing training and providing accessible credit facilities and information about them will yield satisfaction to the farmers and community at large, improve their wellbeing and above all achieve high success rate. The data analysis for this study showed that though the purpose of the study was to highlight the government strategic responses to benefit the farmers, the farmers' participation would also help the government to identify the most urgent and important areas to look at. The government would also be able to establish the challenges faced in solving the problems faced by the farmers and also come up with favorable solutions to the problems using the information given by the farmers in generating the best strategies. It was also evident a number of the farmers were ignorant of the issues surrounding them and this could be the reason why they did not have any information and trained skills on potato growing thus use their own knowledge hence low production rate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, some recommendations were made in order to make small-scale potato farming a profitable venture in Nyeri county. Considering that small-scale potato farming is carried out by both trained and untrained farmers, one of the recommendations is that farmers whether trained or not should be involved in generating strategies and airing their opinions. Therefore the government should organize forums, seminars and agricultural trainings to ensure that they are equipped with information and knowledge relevant in their farming activities. At another level, a system to distribute resources to the farmers and reliable means of transport of the produce to the market should be a key factor. Therefore the government should

embark on upgrading the feeder roads leading to the farms to ease the transport problems. The government should also create forums to educate the farmers on how to access credit from the lenders since the low number registered in borrowing from the financial institutions could have been as a result of lack of the information on how to access the credit. Marketing challenges can be addressed by connecting the farmers with ready markets. This can be through the formation of cooperative societies which can be selling the produce locally on behalf of the farmers. The cooperative societies can also export the produce on behalf of the farmers. The government should also put an information centre where ordinary farmers can go to raise their issues and also get informed on matters related to their area of production. Lack of involvement and commitment by farmers in generating strategies and new approaches towards farming would kill the farmers trust to the government and this often may result to failure. Therefore the researcher recommends that the farmers always be involved by the agriculture officers when making decisions which directly affect their area of production. Since most farmers get farming information through the media especially radios, most of the communications should be availed regularly through the local dialect which farmers listen to most. Water is a key component in the production of potato in Nyeri county. The focus was only to the farmers who irrigate their produce using water from Masinga dam. The government should also focus on other farmers who are far from the dam. Therefore strategies should be laid down on how to provide water even to these farmers either through the construction of dams to collect rain water and also through the provision of piped water which for many years has not been available in the region. Technology is a key factor in the Kenyan economy thus the farmers in this region should be trained on how to use greenhouse technology for higher productivity. Further research should be conducted to establish other areas of strategic importance in the production of potato in Nyeri County. Furthermore the study was only carried out in one district and therefore further studies should be carried out in other districts where potatoes are grown to evaluate how the government has responded to the challenges faced by the farmers in this county and Kenya as a whole and also to establish the farmers' involvement in generating the strategies to improve on the production.

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