

The Future and Options Available for Privatizing Extension in Kenya:-The Case of Uasin Gishu District.

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Abstracts

The Kenyan economy is agriculturally driven and when the sector grows the economy is expected to grow. The sector contributes slightly over 26 percent of Kenya's Gross Domestic Product. Although the share contribution of agriculture to overall GDP has declined from 37 percent at independence to 26 percent in the 1990s, its influence on overall Kenyan economic performance remains substantial. This is attributed to poor infrastructure, inadequate research and extension, poor prices, poor legal framework and inaccessibility to credit. Over 70 percent of raw materials emerge from agriculture which accounts for 45 percent of government revenue in taxes. The sector employs more than 70 percent of the population. Over the last few years the sector has continued to experience recurring food deficits in the main food commodities:-maize, wheat, and beans. While the sector realized 16 million bags of maize last year (1999) only 11 million bags are expected this year (2000). Importation of foodstuffs has become order of the day exhausting scarce foreign currencies thus destabilizing the Kenyan shilling.

Any policies aimed at reviving the Kenyan economy must address pertinent issues in agricultural sector. The first necessary step is the reorganization of extension system to equip it with necessary tools for efficient delivery of services and also make it relevant to the changing times. The objectives of this paper are three-fold. The paper examines the performance of agricultural extension system in Kenya, delineates possible options available for privatizing extension and attempts to identify which areas in extension to target for privatization.

In an effort to address the above mentioned issues 120 randomly selected farmers from six divisions of Uasin Gishu district, Kenya were interviewed. Front-line, location, divisional and district extension staff were interviewed and formed key informants. The interviews were complemented by secondary data derived from the division, district and ministry of Agriculture headquarters.

It was established that extension performance falls below farmers expectations thus resulting in most farmers developing apathy towards traditional mode of extension. Inability of extension to deliver is attributed to lack of resources, disorganized work structures, lack of training and re-training, lack of integrated approach to extension, sustainability of the project ignored, delay in release of authority to incur expenditure (AIEAs). Some farmers are ready to pay for extension emanating from non-traditional sources as long as they come attach some value to the enterprise in question.

The possible areas for privatization are:- (i) horticultural production (ii) production and marketing information (iii) irrigation (iv) livestock production. Overall, various options exist for privatizing Kenyan agricultural extension. However, the process has to be done, gradually and cautiously.

Keywords: performance, options, privatization, extension, kenya, busia district