
Enhancing Access, Accountability and Empowerment for the Poor Through Decentralization and Participation: A Case for Agricultural Extension Service in Eastern Kenya

By Godiah L. Mugunieri and John M. Omiti

The Evolution of Extension Provision

The importance of agricultural extension in rural development is widely acknowledged, particularly in developing countries where the majority of the population lives in rural areas, agriculture is the main source of livelihood, and access to information is costly. Since Kenya's independence in 1963 until the late eighties, the provision of extension services was largely the preserve of the central government. However, the movement toward liberalization in the nineties, as well as rising concerns of the efficacy of government-led extension, resulted in the increasing decentralization of extension provision. This trend is generally attributed to three key factors: the inability of the central government to handle the complexity of context-specificity required by extension services, the inability of the government to finance the requisite range of services, and the idea that democracy is best served through devolved functions with enhanced participation at the local level.

Decentralization in Kenya has come in two key forms. First, there has been the decentralization of government responsibility for extension through structural reform with the objective of shifting extension to other institutions and improving both accountability and responsiveness. Second, there is the decentralization of management programs

through farmer participatory programs in which the end-user (the farmer) shoulders some responsibility for designing appropriate curricula, and disseminating the information.

This re-organization of the extension system has evolved to include four broad forms of delivery systems: *Public delivery and public finance* which essentially comprises the traditional government agricultural extension that continues to persist albeit with greatly diminished outreach and constrained by a lack of sufficient funding. *Public delivery and private finance* whereby government staff is contracted by private agencies to deliver extension services. *Private delivery and private finance* whereby commercial entities provide their suppliers with the extension services required to improve their technical efficiency. This mode of delivery is prevalent in commodity out-grower schemes and highly commercialized high-value agriculture. *Private delivery and public finance* which entails the outsourcing of responsibility for extension delivery to private sector providers such as NGOs and CBOs. This mode of extension provision is emerging as an important pathway, with several comparative advantages over the other channels, including grassroots contacts and use of participatory methods.

The Effect of Decentralization on Extension Efficacy

With the increase in delivery methods brought about by decentralization, one major challenge facing extension in Kenya is how to re-orient the extension system to improve its efficiency, to enhance the access that those requiring such services have to the various sources available, to hold providers accountable to their customers, and to assure the relevancy of the services provided by eliciting the participation of the end-user. To determine the best way to design the appropriate institutional structure to meet these objectives, several questions must first be answered. Does decentralization improve or diminish access to extension services? Has decentralization resulted in effective local participation? Does this depend on the extent that extension provision has been decentralized, or on the sources of extension services? This study seeks to answer these questions with the aim of establishing whether and to what extent the decentralization of agricultural extension has enhanced access, local accountability and empowerment of farmers.

The study analyzes the relationship between decentralization and extension efficacy by highlighting the experiences of the Kibwezi and Makindu divisions of Makueni district in Kenya's Eastern province. The two divisions differ in the number of agricultural-based active civil institutions that operate in the division with Kibwezi playing host many more such institutions than Makindu. As the study uses the total number of active agricultural-based civil society institutions as a proxy for the degree of extension decentralization, Kibwezi can be characterized as having a relatively high level of decentralization, with Makindu defined as having a low level of decentralization.

A comparison of sampled households across the two divisions presents a general picture of the relationship between the degree of decentralization and several indicators of extension efficacy. In Kibwezi, where decentralization is high, membership to community based organizations and knowledge of various available channels of extension service delivery were also higher. While causality cannot be claimed, it is clear

in this case that increasing decentralization is correlated with increased knowledge of potential sources of information, as well as higher rates of participation in various community organizations.

Another indication that decentralization results in the improved dissemination of information lies in the differences between total cropped area across the two divisions. While average land holdings in Makindu are significantly larger, total cropped area is larger in Kibwezi. This greater land resource utilization in Kibwezi could result from the concerted effort of extension service providers to educate farmers to make the most of their land. On the other hand, it could imply that the intensification of agriculture results in a greater demand for extension services.

Factors Influencing Access to Extension

For a more rigorous investigation of the determinants of access to extension, three different measures of access were regressed on several variables such as the sex, age, and educational attainment of the household head, as well as household income, livestock holdings, and distance to divisional headquarters. Of the three measures, two stand out as particularly salient: The first measure aims to focus on the determinants to accessing demand-induced extension and is captured in a dichotomous variable equal to one if the particular household received extension advice in the past year as a direct result of proactively seeking out the service. The second measure focuses on the factors influencing the receipt of supply-led extension and is captured in a dichotomous variable equal to one if the sample household received unsolicited extension advice in the past year. Logistic regressions thus tested the degree and significance that the covariates had on the probability that a household accessed demand-induced or supply-led extension. A household's division of residence was introduced as a dummy and acted as a proxy for the degree of decentralization.

The results show that farmers living in an area of higher decentralization (Kibwezi) were significantly more likely to have accessed demand-induced extension in the previous

year. This result coincides with the greater knowledge residents of Kibwezi had of the extension opportunities open to them and were therefore better placed to actively seek those resources. Membership in Community Based Organizations also was associated with a positive and significant effect on household's access to demand-induced extension.

Other factors that have a significant impact on the likelihood of receiving demand-induced extension include income which, as expected, increases the probability of accessing extension. Illiteracy of the household head is associated with a diminished likelihood of seeking (and receiving) extension advice. Given the large and ongoing debate on the benefits of a demand-driven extension system, these results are salient and caution that relying too much on such a method of delivery would marginalize the poor and ill-informed: a subset of the population that is likely to benefit disproportionately from such advice.

The results from the logistic regression focusing on supply-led extension indicate that visits from extension agents were significantly influenced by the wealth status of the farmer, and his/her educational level. As a large majority of these visits (17 out of 22) were from government agents, the results indicate that their choice of household to visit is not entirely random and, for whatever reason, they are more likely to patronize more well to do farmers. Households that are further from the town center and require extension agents to spend more time and fuel resources to access are also significantly less likely to be visited.

The effect of decentralization and participation in CBOs on receiving an extension visit, while positive, was not significant. This could be because NGOs/CBOs favor seminars, collective field visits, and tours to demonstration sites than home visits.

Summary and Policy Implications

This paper seeks to investigate the consequences that the decentralizing of agricultural extension services has had on farmers' access to these services and on farmers' involvement in setting the extension agenda. Evidence from Makueni District in Eastern

Kenya points to a positive relationship between decentralization and extension provision. More specifically, in areas of greater decentralization, farmers were more likely to proactively seek extension advice. This result suggests that with decentralization comes greater awareness of the availability of such services which in turn may empower farmers to actively seek out extension advice.

The policy implication of these findings suggest a restructuring of the extension system in favor of NGOs and CBOs with an extension mandate as they appear to have the comparative advantage in providing farmers with pertinent technical advice. Continued investments in forming and supporting farmers groups, is also likely to yield high returns as farmers increasingly build their capacity and ability to demand services that are compatible with their needs. However, as the extension efforts of NGOs and CBOs are largely demand-driven, the government also has a crucial role to play in guaranteeing that certain populations are not cut off from such services. An important step in ensuring that extension resources are efficiently utilized is to create a mechanism for coordinating the extension activities of both the government and private agencies to make certain that each player works to their strengths and efforts are not duplicated.

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Further Readings

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