Poster Abstracts

Voices of Small-Scale Farmers in Kenya:
An Examination of Extension Roles and Coverage

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Extension has come through many evolutions as a result of the changing social, economic and natural environment in which it operates. Small-scale farmers living in marginal areas have typically been ignored by extension. Extension today must not only work under the constraints of today’s decentralized, pluralistic and low-budgeted services, but also listen to and meet the needs of these billion or so farmers.

Purpose
This poster describes a study conducted in May-August 2002 to examine the current extension approaches in Kenya. Because of the desire to obtain information from all levels, focus group interviews of farmers were conducted. Two farmer groups were interviewed, one from a medium potential and one from a low potential agricultural area in order to collect data from more marginal areas. To triangulate the data, information was also collected from local NGOs, government personnel and secondary data.

During the focus groups, issues discussed included topics such as how the farmers learned to farm, where they obtained seed and information, whether any organization is providing them with extension and why they had taken up cropping. Participatory mapping and an analysis of their knowledge system were included in the study.

Conclusions
The data revealed that although there are many groups providing extension services in Kenya, their coverage is sporadic for a myriad of reasons. Although non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are known to cover the more marginal areas, they still are not able to reach every community. Farmers living closer to towns have an easier time obtaining information, agricultural inputs and extension services. Non-governmental organizations and other development partners play an important role in agricultural development, at least in semi-arid or remote areas. Finally, community mobilization through the forming of groups enables a community to express their wants and needs, to feel empowered and to demand services from extension providers.

Educational Importance
With the evolving framework for extension today, it is important that extensionists listen to their clients in order to stay relevant. This will help to ensure that extension provides education focused on issues and problems that small-scale farmers wrestle with. Gathering needs-based information is critical for effective extension outcomes.