POLICY BRIEF

PB03/2023

STRENGTHENING AGRICULTURE EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICES AT COUNTY LEVEL.

TITLE: ***Strengthening Agriculture Extension and Advisory Service Delivery in Murang'a County***

Key Highlights.

This Policy Brief highlights the following:

i) Agriculture extension at county level.
ii) Staffing strength of extension service providers at the county level.
iii) Policy environment for extension, services provision at the county.
iv) Youth and women in agriculture extension service delivery
v) Addressing challenges facing women and youth in agriculture extension.
vi) Challenges in agricultural technology adoption.
vii) Empowering rural communities.



Participants at the County Level Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services Policy Dialogue in Murang'a County

Executive Summary.

Kenya's agricultural sector contributes 25% of the GDP directly and a further 27% through market linkages and agro industry. The government therefore emphasizes on stimulating growth and transformation in the sector.

In Murang'a County agriculture activities are estimated to be 60% of the county's economic income and 70% of local employment. However, Extension service provision has continued to dwindle, to the extent that the current extension to farmers' ratio is, at 1:7950, despite the county having high numbers of qualified professional youths who remain unemployed.

This policy brief is developed through collating of secondary data documents, literature reviews mapping of relevant stakeholders and a stakeholder consultative meeting through policy dialogue at Murang'a County.

This policy dialogue aimed at addressing the challenges facing agriculture extension and advisory service delivery while providing policy recommendations on how to improve service delivery at the county level.

The stakeholders pinpointed out the following as recommendations;

- Digitalization policy that outlines digital connectors' roles,
- formulation of a County data management policy,
- One ward one cooperative society policy that defines what and how agriprenuers fit into the county extension systems,
- Engaging the public in formulating a digitalization policy,
- creation of credit access scheme for the farming community through unique digital banking for the central region,
- Developing appropriate partnerships.

Introduction.

Agriculture sector contributes significantly to Murang'a County and Kenyan economy at large. In Murang'a County, agricultural activities are estimated to account for 60% of the county's economic activities and 70% resident's employment. Despite the importance of the agricultural sector in the county, extension and advisory service delivery has been on the dwindling side due to the staffing strength at Murang'a County- Agriculture, livestock and cooperatives department which is currently at 1: 7950 while the staff household ratio is at 1: 2333. This is projected to double up in the next coming five years as current staffs are near their retirement age. A well-functioning agriculture extension service operated by the public and private sector is one of the critical inputs required for increased agricultural productivity to transform subsistence farming into a vibrant, commercial and modern farming, attain food security, improve incomes, and create wealth and employment opportunities. Historically, the country/county used various extension management systems with varying degree of success. These included Training and Visit (TnV), NALEP, CIGs (group approach, demand driven model, focal area) After devolution Murang'a county adopted other extension approaches which includes; PPP, Cooperative extension model, value chain extension model (NARIGP), ASDP, Youth led extension, internship model, Beta approach, one ward one cooperative model. The National Agriculture Sector Extension Policy (NASEP) 2012 (Revised in 2023 and renamed KASEP), adopted a sector-wide approach to providing extension services. E-extension approach has been identified as an important approach to ensure accessibility of information by farmers, exploit the potential of high numbers of professional skilled youth, technology adoption, and digitalization of AEAS. This is evident in the piloting of the use of Digital Connectors (define them) to bridge the gaps in agricultural extension and advisory service delivery. These DCs underwent numerous trainings and mentorship under the Digital Connectors for Farming communities (DC4FC) project.

Background.

This policy brief intends to address agriculture extension and advisory services challenges at county level and ensure effectiveness and enhanced efficiency in delivery through measures that includes; enhancing extension capacity, creating a conducive policy environment, wealth and employment creation, poverty reduction strategy, inclusion of youths in extension, digitalization of extension services and agriculture at large, coaching and mentoring of youths in agribusiness.

Approach.

The approach used included identifying secondary data sources, collating of secondary data documents, literature review to gather secondary data, mapping of relevant stakeholders and a stakeholder consultation meeting through policy dialogue at Murang'a County.

Findings.

- **Overview of Agricultural extension at county level.**

The county government agricultural extension policy has shifted from supply driven to demand.
. driven extension

From the dialogue its evident that the number of extension service providers is low hence farmers have inadequate access to advisory services, information and knowledge sharing.

Farmers need to articulate their demand for extension.

- **Challenges facing women and youth in agriculture at the county level.**

Majority of women and youth in agriculture faces challenges of accessing financing, access to information and knowledge sharing, mobilization of resources, land ownership.

The county government needs to provide incentives to ensure land ownership/access by youths in agriculture, making agricultural information easily accessible to the public and collaborating with financing institutions to offer the farming community with zero or low interest loans/credits for agribusiness.

- **Youth unemployment.**

50% of Murang'a population is majorly youths. The unemployment rate among this youths stands at 37%. This has resulted into high numbers of skilled/professional youths to engage in drug and alcohol abuse, thus the need to come up with opportunities to engage youth in meaningful opportunities. The county is now running a programme that absorbs youths as interns. This programme contributes to equipping the youth with skills through the provision of skills through the provision of various short-term opportunities.



Figure Showcasing youth extensionist offering agronomy advisory to avocado farmers.

Policy Recommendations.

- ✓ The County Government should in a participatory approach develop a digitalization policy that outlines digital connectors' roles in the Mainstream extension provision.
- ✓ The county should come up with a County data management policy in agriculture
- ✓ The county should clearly elaborate the One ward, one cooperative society policy that defines the role of agriprenuers into the public extension system.
- ✓ The County government and Financial institutions should formulate financial schemes to ensure availability of credit to the farming community through unique digital banking for the [1]central region.
- ✓ The Digital connectors should forge partnerships with private sector to leverage on their resource.

Conclusions.

Digitalization and one ward one cooperative union policy approach will help bridge the gap evident in low extension and advisory service delivery, ensure direct funding from donors and have all the crops under one umbrella union hence ease of export market penetration.

Inclusion of youth in extension service delivery through enticing and engaging in agricultural activities, involvement in innovation platforms and absorption under the county internship programme is the best way to curb unemployment among skilled youths.

References.

1. **Murang'a County fiscal policy strategy paper 2022 pdf.**
2. **National Agriculture Sector Extension Policy (NASEP).**
3. **Kenya Youth Agribusiness Strategy 2018-2022 (https://kilimo.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Kenya-Youth-in-Agribusiness-Strategy_signed-Copy.pdf.**

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