HARNESSING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR INFORMATION ACCESS AND USE AMONGST FARMERS IN LOWER YATTA DISTRICT, KENYA

BY

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ABSTRACT

Kenya relies heavily on agriculture for economic growth, and for this to be realized, information is one of the key ingredients for improved agricultural production. Farming is mainly practiced in the rural areas. Information requirements of rural farmers are varied, and complex. The information delivery mechanisms in place do not take into account the characteristics of the rural farmer. Lack of proper information infrastructure also affects information delivery. The aim of this study was therefore to investigate the use of ICTs in the access and use of information by rural farmers in Lower Yatta District of Kitui, Kenya and recommend a suitable model for optimizing ICT use in information provision. The objectives of the study were to identify the information needs of the farmers, examining channels of communication and sources of information, map and audit types of ICTs available, identify the legal frameworks in place in support of information access and determine the challenges faced by farmers when accessing and using ICTs. The study was informed by Info-mobilization theory with regard to information systems and their application in communities, Wilson’s general model of information behaviour as it relates to information use and users and Information innovation adoption model with regard to ICT adoption by farmers. Cluster sampling was used to divide the district into locations, and then purposive sampling was used to get respondents from each location. The field study was conducted among 51 rural farmers and 9 key informants in the district. The study employed a qualitative research method using survey research paradigm, which focused on understanding and interpreting the utilization of ICTs in accessing information by rural farmers in Lower Yatta District. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview schedules supplemented by observation and document review methods. The data collected were analyzed through content analysis and interpretation techniques after the initial editing; coding, classification and tabulation. Amongst other findings, the results indicate firstly, that there is information provision through ICTs on agricultural activities, but farmers rarely access and use the information. Secondly, the information provided is not localized to the meet the community’s needs. Thirdly, that most farmers mostly used the conventional ICTs compared to the emerging ICTs. The study recommends that farmers to be advised on how to access agricultural information and shown the importance of applying the information in the agricultural practice, and policy makers should put in place policies and develop information systems which will ensure that information provided is relevant to the community. The government should intervene and facilitate the improvement of ICT infrastructure in the District through low-cost and high quality connections. The study also proposed a model for optimizing information access and use through ICTs.