PROVISION OF AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION TO SMALL-SCALE TEA GROWERS IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF BURETI DISTRICT

BY

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Tea is Kenya's leading foreign exchange earner as it currently accounts for 28% of the total export earnings. In Bureti district, it is a source of livelihood to 85% of the residents. Despite the availability of agricultural information services in the country, the small-scale tea sub-sector continues to perform poorly in terms of yields per hectare in comparison with the large-scale sub-sector. This indicates that a larger proportion of small-scale tea growers lack timely and relevant information on appropriate tea farming techniques. The poor infrastructure of agricultural information systems in Kenya's rural communities worsens this situation.

This study aimed at examining the entire process of dissemination and accessibility to agricultural information by small-scale tea growers' community in Kenya and with special reference to Bureti district. The specific objectives of the study were to: identify agricultural information needs of small-scale tea growers in Bureti district; investigate their information-seeking behaviour; determine the types of agricultural information sources available for their use; find out the extent to which their information needs are met by the existing agricultural information sources; determine the types of communication channels through which they receive agricultural information; find out the factors that impede their accessibility to agricultural information and suggest how to improve communication of agricultural information to this user community.

This study reviewed relevant literature in order to shape the entire research process. A combination of multi-stage, simple random and purposive sampling techniques was used to select samples. A total of 74 respondents were interviewed on a face-to-face basis with the aid of a semi-structured schedule. This was complemented with the documentary review method. Data collected were analysed and interpreted using the content analysis method and were presented using qualitative and quantitative methods.

The findings of this study indicated that small-scale tea growers in Bureti district: have a variety of agricultural information needs; expressed a positive attitude towards information seeking; could access and use a variety of agricultural information sources and communication channels; would prefer to use informal face-to-face information sources and communication channels; had their information needs not fully satisfied by the existing information sources and communication channels and faced a number of impediments in accessing information sources and communication channels.

From these findings, the study made a number of recommendations seeking for the improvement and restructuring of the tea extension service as well as the transport and communication infrastructure. The researcher believes that, if these recommendations were accorded serious consideration, they would help to improve the agricultural information systems and services currently available for use by small-scale tea growers in Kenya.