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Sources of Agricultural Information for Women Farmers in Hai and Kilosa Districts, Tanzania

Abstract

This study investigated sources of agricultural information used by women farmers in Tanzania. Women farmers constitute the majority of farmers in Tanzania. Enabling them to increase food production will help achieve the government's goals of achieving food security and agro-based industrialization. However, it is not clear where women farmers obtain information on modern farming methods. Knowing these sources will enable the Tanzanian government and international aid organizations channel information directed toward women farmers through those sources.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify women farmer's sources of information in agriculture. Due to limited funding and time constraints, the study involved a survey of 300 women farmers in Hai and Kilosa districts of Kilimanjaro and Morogoro Regions, respectively. The survey was completed using an interview schedule. Of the 300 respondents sampled, 288 provided usable data for the study yielding a response rate of 96%. Six research objectives guided this study, namely: (a) examine the demographic characteristics of women farmers in Tanzania; (b) describe sources of information on modern farming methods for women farmers; (c) assess innovative farming methods adopted by women farmers; (d) examine women farmers' access to and use of ICTs; (e) examine women farmers' access to and use of agricultural extension agents; and (f) examine other challenges facing women farmers in Tanzania.

Key findings from this study were as follows: First, the demographic characteristics showed that the vast majority of women farmers in Tanzania aged 23 – 53 years, placing them in an age category whereby they are capable of making strong contributions to agricultural growth. Most women farmers had completed their primary education, which suggests that they can benefit from vocational education opportunities. The second finding was that radio and agricultural extension workers constituted the primary sources of agricultural information for women farmers in Tanzania. Swahili is the national language of Tanzania; therefore, broadcasting agricultural information in the national language will enhance the likelihood of reaching almost of the women farmers in the country. Radio also overcomes barriers of distance and poor road infrastructure. Therefore, providing radio sets at a subsidized cost, especially solar-powered radios, may be an effective strategy for disseminating information to women farmers. Also, contrary to conventional cultural wisdom, women farmers in Tanzania can interact with male extension workers and do not need to get permission from their husbands. However, the number of female extension workers in Tanzania is small, relative to male extension workers and there may be a need to recruit more females into the service. Another finding from this study is that virtually all women farmers in the study had access to a cell phone. However, they used them primarily for personal purposes, not for accessing agricultural information. This is probably because the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives have not yet set up a system whereby farmers can use the telephone to obtain agricultural information. A number of non-profit organizations are beginning to provide this service and, therefore, cell phones may become a very convenient tool for accessing farming information by farmers.

Overall, the study revealed that women farmers are capable of making significant contributions to agricultural growth in Tanzania. However, they face major challenges, such as limited access to land and credit to purchase modern farming inputs. It is important for the government to address these concerns.