The Contribution of Individual and Group Social Networks to Knowledge Diffusion among Farmers in Semi-Arid Kenya

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Abstract

Following the radical change of the extension sector in eastern Africa that was triggered by the disproving of the traditional 'Transfer of Technology' paradigm in the 1990s, a number of competing and largely decentralised extension approaches have been developed. Basing upon the hypothesis that innovative arrangements and practices emerge from social interaction rather than from the traditional technology development chain, most of those new approaches aim to facilitate exchange and networking among farmers, research and extension organisations. From the coexistence of traditional and alternative approaches arise the need for, and the opportunity of comparative evaluation and impact assessments.

The paper investigates the diffusion of innovative farm management technologies in two rural development projects that follow dissimilar extension approaches. Household and community-level social networks, as well as the regional Tree Knowledge and Information System (TKIS) represent the analytical levels of analysis.

A full sample of 432 households has been interviewed in West Pokot and Makueni Districts of Kenya. Primary data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires, expert interviews, group discussions and rankings, as well as observation. Data was analysed employing sociometric and statistical software packages.

Farm household innovativeness is related to the household information and exchange networks, as well as the activities and maturity of development-oriented village organisations and farmers groups. Institutional interlinkage and collaboration between administration, research and extension organisations are presented. Research findings are captured in a statistical model. Recommendations refer to the intensification of farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange, in order to further improve efficiency and efficacy of the technology extension efforts.

Keywords: Agroforestry, diffusion of innovations, forestry extension, social connectedness

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