

Challenges Faced by Small Scale Farmers in Hhohho Region in Swaziland

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Abstract

This paper present challenges exacerbated by finance, nature and history faced by smallholder farmers in the Hhohho region of Swaziland impacting on sustainable agriculture. One of the outcomes of development projects is to bring relieve to the targeted people in specific communities. However, with an increase in population creating demand for food but poor production is experienced due to a number of reasons among others include climate changes and other challenges that make the achievement of development objectives not to be realized. The study was conducted in three areas of Hhohho region. The study was designed in quantitative paradigm in which a population of 150 farmers was identified for the study. A questionnaire was designed to collect data from a sample of 45 small holder farmers which was randomly chosen out of 150 (or 30%) and 20 extension officials. The study found that some of the challenges that frustrate the achievement of the expected objectives included personal, financial, access to information, natural, and limited agricultural knowledge. The paper concludes with a recommendation such as developing a solution to the challenges.

Keywords: *Small Scale Farmers; Extension Officers; Challenges; Strategies; Mitigating; Market; Swaziland*

Introduction

Farmers and Extension Officers (EOs) strive towards achieving self-sufficiency in food supply and food security. In some cases, development projects are used as instruments to bring relief to the targeted people in specific communities to address food security needs. However, with an increase in population creating demand for food but poor production due to climate changes and other challenges make the achievement of development objectives not to be easily realized. This paper presents the findings of a study on the challenges faced by small-scale farmers in the Hhohho region namely: Ntfontjeni, Mvembili and KaLomshiyo observed over the period of 5 years.

The Swaziland Government has put institutions in place to enable farmers whether small or large scale to be acquainted with relevant agricultural innovations. These amongst others include the Ministry of Agriculture's Extension Services, the National Maize Corporation (NMC), the National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBoard), Rural Development Areas (RDAS) [1]. Despite all these efforts, small scale farmers continue to experience challenges which hinder the realisation of good yields in the country. The increasing demand for food security seems to be at a centre stage in the challenges faced by small-scale farmers in Swaziland.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of this paper is twofold namely to explore the challenges faced by smallholder farmers in Hhohho region, and to suggest ways of resolving the challenges.

Theoretical Background

Numerous challenges faced by small-scale producers have been emphasised by various authors including Dlamini and Dube [2], African Risk Capacity [3]. Amongst these challenges are; access to information, land ownership, access to finance, market access as well as transport costs. Conversely, it is worth noting that these challenges impact on agriculture development in the Hhohho region, the country and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region as a whole [4]. Food security has been the buzz word for too long with the Ministry of Agriculture, wherein many households have been found to be susceptible to food insecurity comprising those in the marked areas in the Hhohho region [5].

Farming is regarded as a means of generating more income, and it is for this reason that most of the farmers are women, because men are working on salaried jobs as ascertained [6]. Developmentally, farming has to be transformed from subsistence to commercial, which the Swaziland Government is also working hard towards achieving. This is done in household level through the utilisation of Extension Officers (EOs), wherefrom income is generated and at the same time it promotes rural employment [7].

Like most Southern African countries, Swaziland has been highly affected by more severe and more recurrent weather hazards including low rainfall, lengthened dry spells and sporadic intense rainfall events. These hazards have often led to severe droughts and isolated flooding disasters. Small scale farmers, therefore, face a dire need of producing more in a small hectorage as they have to produce for home consumption and for the market. Benefits of small scale farming are vast. Principally, providing for their families and promote rural employment as postulated [8]. Additionally, several studies have shown that agriculture plays an important role in encouraging rural development and alleviating poverty Jitsanguan [9], Zwane [10] and Bembridge [11].

Other important consideration for understanding small holders is the insight brought [12] who observed that poor performance in smallholder irrigation scheme operated by small holder was attributed to a number of factors which included poor infrastructure and equipment maintenance; high costs of energy where pumping was involved; lack of institutional support in terms of credit; marketing and draught power; lack of extension and farmer training; conflict; as well as weak local organisation.

According to Kangolo and Dlamini [8] concurs that small scale farmers comprise of women, the poor and marginalised, those who farm less than two hectares of land, earn less than 25 dollars per day and do not realise good yields hence, bringing about food insecurity.

Given the situation analysis above, the challenges faced by small scale farmers in food production had to be assessed and to recommend mitigation strategies that could be adopted to combat these challenges towards the attainment of food security. The Hhohho region has been regarded the food basket of Swaziland throughout history in terms of food production, but lately it has been affected by a number of trials resulting to low production. Some of the factors ascertained exacerbating low food production from this region are climate change, credit facilities, land ownership, information access and training and development.

Methodology

The study area is located in the northern part of Swaziland as indicated in figure 1.

The study area has a total human population of 282,735 settled in a land of 35,104 hectares of arable land [1]. Temperature for the area averages between 10 degrees centigrade in winter and 42 degrees centigrade in summer. The rainfall pattern differs as December rains usually records the highest as seen in table 1 below.

Data was collected from farmers and extension officers individually from Hhohho region in order to assess the challenges faced by small scale farmers in Swaziland. The data was collected through in-depth interviews completed using an interview guide that allowed probing for more information and that kept respondents on course.



Figure 1: Map of Swaziland showing the study area.

Stations	Months and rainfall in millimetres (ml)				
	August	September	October	November	December
Motshane RDA	3.5	17.2	13.8	14.1	140
Northern RDA	26.0	22.0	32.2	27.0	87.9
Mayiwane RDA	30.0	50.0	20.3	31.2	58.8
Madlangempisi RDA	10.5	35.5	6.5	29.0	47.5
LFTC	58.0	21.0	27.0	36.0	126
Average Rainfall	25.60	29.14	19.96	27.46	119.50

Table 1: Rainfall trend (ml) at Hhohho region on the cropping season 2015/2016.

Findings and Discussion

The challenges found during face-to-face interviews in the Ntfontjeni, Emvembili and KaLomshiyi areas were interconnected to personal, information access, natural, marketing and agriculture and these are presented and discussed.

Man-made and natural caused challenges

Man has ability to influence either positive or negative environmental challenges that directly affect farmers. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they view man's role in causing the challenges by using a scale of "high or very high". The situation is reflected in figure 2.

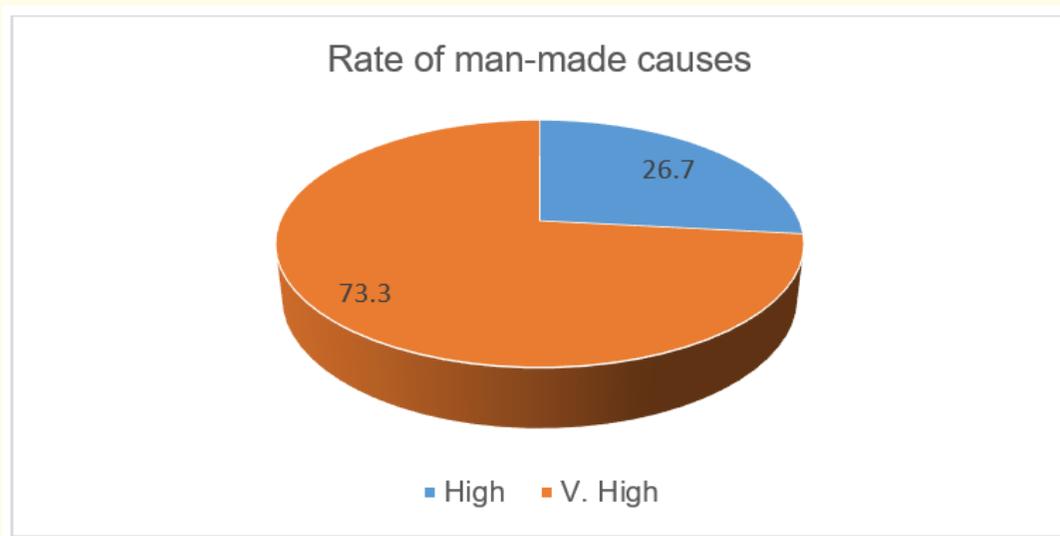


Figure 2: Man-made causes of challenges for farming.

The findings revealed that the majority of the respondents 73% agreed that man-made causes are the main reason of the poor performance of agricultural projects in the area. This situation is a cause of concern for development in the region of Hhohho. An example of man-made causes-includes: credit facilities, land ownership, cost of transport, information access, training and development. When respondents were asked about the possible solution to this man made challenges, they suggested that man should adopt good farming habits, for instance, planning for growth, attending agricultural workshops and conferences, adhering to the standards required by the market for their produce.

Respondents were further asked to rate the challenges caused by nature by using a scale of "very high and high "The situation is indicated in figure 3.

The findings in figure 3 reveal that nature contribute a huge percentage of 88.9%. Although this is a cause of concern, there is very little that farmers could do towards challenges caused by nature. Examples of nature causes challenges include climate change, momentarily weather pattern and pests. It was confirmed that such challenges are not easily avoided [13]. It can be concluded that the challenges hinder agriculture development in the Hhohho region.

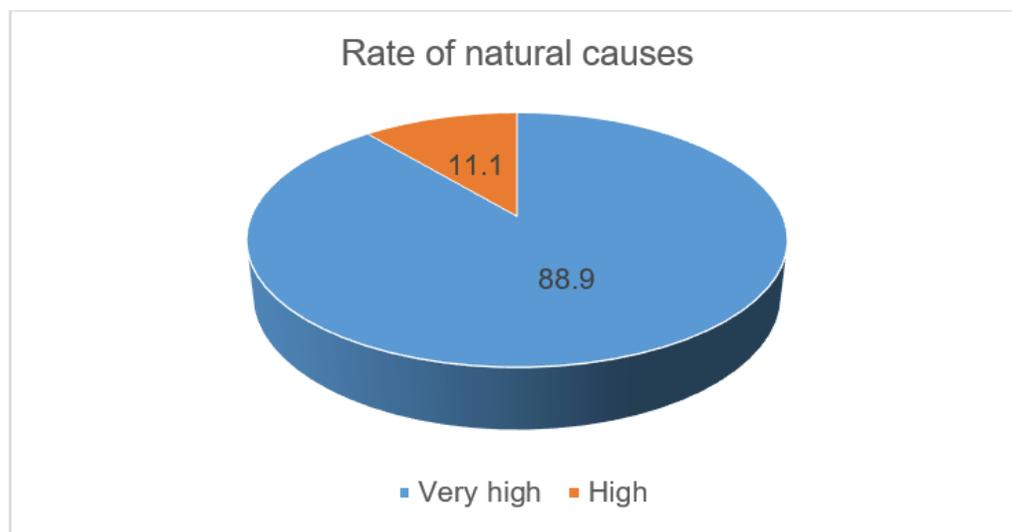


Figure 3: Rate of natural causes of challenges of farming.

Role of extension officer in increasing production

The role played by extension in disseminating advisory services has been noted by a number of authors such as Oakly and Garfoth [14]. They advise farmers in ways that can ultimately improve their livelihoods [9,15]. Respondents were asked to indicate whether extension officers were having a role to play in terms of improving production in Hhohho region. The response is reflected in figure 4.

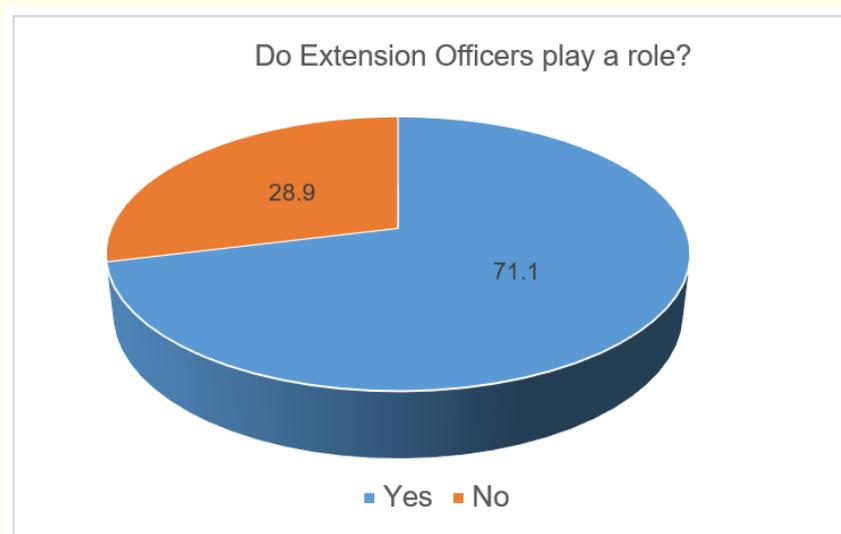


Figure 4: Role played by extension officers.

According to figure 4, the overwhelming response is that extension officers have a role to play in the process of developing Hhohho. However, the extension officers further identified some challenges that confront development such as having access to credit facilities. While on the other hand farmers have indicated that if they could have access to information and water they can produce to maximum level. In this case both extension officers and farmers have agreed that it is possible to reach high levels of production provided these challenges are attended.

Land and irrigation challenges in farming

Land is one of the resources needed to produce food. However, in most cases this has been found inadequate and best with a lot of challenges. Poor performance in irrigation schemes was attributed to a number of factors which included poor infrastructure and equipment maintenance; high costs of energy where pumping was involved; lack of institutional support in terms of credit; marketing and draught power; lack of extension and farmer training; conflict; as well as weak local organisation [12]. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed that small holder farmers were faced with challenges.

Results from the in-depth interview indicated that 100% of the respondents were aware that small scale farming is faced by challenges in its daily farming work. 100% of the farmers pointed out to land and irrigation challenges as a contributing factor towards small scale farming and food insecurity. The need for support was emphasized that land disputes significantly decrease agricultural productivity [16]. A general observation from aggrieved farmers revealed that a drop in production can be attributed to the fact that smallholders farming in disputed land have a tendency to plant fewer crops, lessen the amount of inputs they use and reduce the amount of agrochemicals they apply.

Financial challenges

Financial challenges were the second most important as viewed by the respondents. It is asserted that small-scale farmers do not have credit facilities in place due to the fact that they do not generate enough income [16]. The economic situation in Swaziland has adversely affected farmers and generated a lot of hardships. This falls in line with the idea of Mensah [17], that small entities are likely to experience more difficulties than medium sized ones, which too experience more difficulties than large entities. The expense of labour has escalated and it has become difficult to find farm labourers because most of them immigrate to cities and/or want to be paid exorbitant wages.

Many respondents discussed financial challenges as having enough cash to keep their small holdings running and having access to loans and securing sufficient farm land. Farmers also put forth their concerns on the recurrent economic situation which has created hardships. Farmers highlighted on the state's regulations pertaining permits, licences which cost too high, just for the paperwork and this causes farmers to flout these regulations instead of complying due to costs.

Natural causes in farming

More than 88% of the respondents viewed natural causes as another major challenge over the past five years. This was categorised in the form of threats of weather, pests and disease, which exhibited difficulty in overcoming. According to the farmers, weather threatens the crops, whilst in the interim it digs deep into their budgets as they may have to do replanting [16]. It looks like the situation is not getting any better since natural resources like fertile soil and water appears to dwindle yet the population is increasing. On the contrary, the land is getting smaller too. Most farmers indicated that they cannot obtain water according to their needs due to the dependency on rain water which comes at its own time. Boreholes have dried up, especially in the dry season of the year, those drawing water from the Lomati River were sceptical as they were to be granted permits by the state to do so. This turned to be cumbersome to the farmers due to paperwork, travelling and the tariffs involved.

Lack of extension officers

According to Bembridge [11], lack of extension and farmer training contribute to poor performance of small holder farming. Poor management is one of the causes of the below expected smallholder irrigated agriculture in Swaziland [17].

Respondents were asked to indicate whether extension is causing a challenge or not. The finding is an overwhelming support in which 71.1% of the respondents viewed lack of extension officer (EOs) as the fourth major challenge. The situation of extension officers in the region has changed, previously, these farmers used to have EOs in the region who acted as a vehicle of conveying new farming technologies but not anymore. Currently, the majority of farmers are having difficulty in accessing information even though a minimal number of EOs is available either from government or local NGOs. From the study 60% of the respondents indicated that they have at least once met with an EO but not working with them closely as it is supposed to be.

It is supported that land disputes significantly decrease agricultural products and land productivity by about 20% whilst anxieties about the future lessens land output by 15% [16,18].

Access to markets

One of the challenges experienced by smallholder farmers is the fact that they do not have information about available markets [18,19]. Respondents indicated that 60% of produce is sold to informal markets. There are various reasons towards this for example farmers have to look into price as the yardstick and non-availability of transport because formal markets are located far from the farms. Another conclusion is that EOs could be good tools in reducing the challenges that small scale producers encounter. Government was also seen to play a role in subsidising farm inputs and avail transport for farmers' produce to the formal markets. As a way of solving the problem it is suggested that Smallholder farmers need to be exposed and build relationships with existing and new markets if they are to penetrate them.

Land challenges in farming

Fertiliser usage and household income are other factors influencing agriculture production however where there is land conflict productivity can be seriously affected. For example, land conflicts can keep a piece of land either unused or under used for several years. The other factor could be the distance between the market and where the plot is situated, this too can also affect productivity. The study revealed that plots with title deeds are more likely to be extra productive and this was confirmed [19,20]. The majority of the farmers facing such disputes were unenthusiastic to apply long-term development measures, and they are reluctant towards the usage of profitable and persistent-crops [21].-

Conclusion

The study investigated the challenges faced by small scale farmers in Hhohho region of Swaziland, different challenges were identified. The study revealed that there is a relationship between small-scale farmers and extension officers because both need each other for example the farmer need the extension officer to be capacitated with technical know-how, while the extension officer need the farmer who should implement agricultural policy inputs. There is a need to strengthen this relationship by means of having more interactions; adding more EOs so that every farmer has information accessibility; and education on farming to curtail challenges that may arise whilst in the farming business.

Respondents indicated that the state was the sole controller of policies and the only body to assist implement such policies that will relieve the load on producers in as far as sustainability is concerned [20]. The Ministry of Agriculture, therefore, can play a pivotal role in implementing the policies. It is the only ministry that can effectively and efficiently empower farmers and EOs utilising the power vested on it as a ministry, in the interim making sustainability the core of every small holding in the country.

Recommendations

Based on the challenges discussed, it is recommended that mitigation strategies should be identified and be adopted by small scale farmers for sustainable productivity. Several strategies were identified from the study which all centres on good governance, economic development, social wellbeing, including women and youth in rural development, reducing man interference to the environment, implementing government policies that will support farmers in various areas such as markets, increasing more extension officers, and working

with NGOs to encourage participation. This harmonises with Jitsanguan [9] that if the Government's Department of Agriculture could work with NGO's the extension service will be more efficient because NGO's encourage participation; they strive to reach the poor and they look into outcome rather than the process whilst promoting people-centred development.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

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