Enhancing the Farm Input Support Program and Food Security: Challenges and Possibilities in the Case of Bungoma County, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

The focus on smallholder farmers as a drive to fighting hunger in the Sub-Saharan Africa is certainly becoming the focus of agricultural investments as governments race to meet the second sustainable development goal of eradicating hunger. The Farm Input Support Programs (FISPs) are emerging as the sure approach in doing this. This paper has emerged from a wider study that sought to examine challenges experienced in the Bungoma County FISP. This program is pro-poor and targets vulnerable households by supporting them with free fertilizers and certified maize seed for one season. The study adopted an ex-poste study design where qualitative and quantitative data were obtained from 450 beneficiaries, 8 key informant and six focus group members arranged in two groups. Purposive sampling, systematic random sampling and simple random sampling methods were employed in identifying study participants, hence both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were preferred. Beneficiaries were assisted to fill questionnaires in obtaining quantitative data, while interview schedules was preferred for Key Informants and Focus Group Discussions. Quantitative data was analyzed using a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and presented as both descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data by content analysis and presented as narratives. The findings indicate that major challenges experienced in the program include political interference, governance challenges and poor attitude by stakeholders and beneficiaries. It is also observed that the program can leverage on the goodwill it enjoys among the farmers and policy makers. The study recommends for a more elaborate legal and policy framework, and also a beneficiary assessment tool that will stipulate the process and therefore guide the implementation of the program with an aim of streamlining the process.

Keywords: Challenges, Household food security, Opportunities, Smallholder farmers

INTRODUCTION

A good number of studies (World Bank, 2020: Christiaensen and Brooks, 2018: Ricciard et al, 2018:) have revealed that three out of four poor people in the developing world live in rural areas and their livelihoods are dependent on agriculture directly or indirectly. It has also been observed that in the twenty first century,

smallholder agriculture has remained the most fundamental method of fighting poverty in rural populations. Further to the above, smallholder farm activities has remained the main approach to food security and social interactions in many households in Sub-Saharan Africa (Van Dijk, 2020). Many government funded agriculture programs are grounded with the aim of increasing food production and hence attaining food security at household levels. In most cases the approaches have been investing in smallholder peasant farmers since they are these kind of households that feel the brunt of hunger.

In Kenya the target by government has been to empower lower income households through a philosophy referred to as "Bottom Up" which targets among other things to ensure sufficient food production and supply to households through involvement of smallholder farmers. However, although smallholder farmers are actively involved in food production process, they face a myriad of social, political, economic and natural constrains that put barriers to their access to credit and material farm inputs. Hence the smallholder farmers' involved in food production are not efficiently equipped with materials, technical knowledge and credit to enable them use their small farms appropriately to produce enough food for their households (FAO, 2020: Ricciard, 2018). As observed by Makombe, (2023), many smallholder farmers fail to participate fully in funded agriculture programs because of ignorance, fear, lack of information about the facility and poor communication.

The Bungoma County Agriculture Farm Input Support Programme (FISP) for the Resource Poor and Vulnerable Smallholder Farmers is a pro-poor hunger safety net program through which resource poor farmers are provided with fertilizers and certified seed for free. It seeks to address the challenge of food security and poverty by improving access to affordable key productive inputs for holders with small parcels of land, particularly the resource poor. The policy framework for this program is in tandem with article 43. (c). of the Kenyan constitution (2010) which states that every person has the right to be free from hunger and to have food of acceptable quality which is also captured within the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP, 2018) of Bungoma County. It is a one off support as it envisions the benefitting farmers accessing their own inputs after the crop cycle is completed. After one season these farmers are expected to graduate to the next category and participate in commercial agriculture production and hence fighting poverty. The program is supported and funded as per the fourth schedule of county government implementation framework (GOK, 2010) and the Finance Act (2012). Under this frameworks beneficiaries are entitled to participate in all development initiatives that are meant to benefit them through a democratic decision making process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges to farmers' participation in agricultural programs are many, however, Paloma, Riesgo and Louhichi (2020) & Best and Johnson (2016) have grouped them as social-cultural, institutional and structural in nature. Culture to a greater extent influences people to participate in food production and distribution. Different tribes have preferences to some foods for children, women and men. Social cultural variables that contribute to food selection and eating practices affects their food production behaviors and it include ethnicity, religion, social class and reference groups (Makombe, 2023 & Paloma et al, 2020).

Institutional challenges are procedures and practices that exclude or discourage farmers to be involved in the agricultural program. World Bank (2020) & Jayne et al (2018) identify institutional challenges as; negative attitudes of program staff towards farmers; poor support services when farmers need it; lack of resources during program implementation and ignoring previous knowledge and experiences. Institutional challenges are inherent in the institutional methods used in the design of the program and can be biased against the farmers' needs. According to Omotayo et al (2019) & Omolo (2012), very few organizations are committed to effective local involvement in planning of programs that benefit the locals. This lack of interest can lead to many other inherent challenges which include; failure to address beneficiaries needs, inflexible provisions

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and unnecessary durations, poor management of the available resources and non-adherence to stipulated timelines which affects the overall outcomes in an agricultural program and can be very discouraging. Also, many farmers wouldn't want to be part of a program that is headed by unmotivated and incompetent personnel.

In regard to change of abrupt of policy that demanded farmers to switch to organic farming in Sri Lanka, Janocha (2022) posits that the agricultural activities kept dropping yet it was the main economic engagement for rural populations which in turn resulted into more rural-urban migration. Farm production costs were not affordable because the poor soils had gotten used to inorganic fertilizers and sources of the recommended organic manures were scarce, hence increased the misery of household to meeting food security through their farm work. This discussion shows that government policies and natural calamities also can contribute to poor food production. Prolonged droughts have proved to be an impediment to food production in many parts of world and more in SSA, while unfavorable policies that demand use of organic fertilizers in regions that have used inorganic ones also haven't profited intervention programs aimed at community food security.

Statement of the Problem

Kenya's economy is founded on agriculture with food security as a basis for its economic emancipation. In Bungoma County, the farming activity is fancied and therefore looked forward to, due to its social engagements and assurance of food security to households. Without enough food, the citizens do not have strength to work and produce in any economic agenda. Since 2014 the county government of Bungoma has supported several agriculture programs. The main drive in supporting through FISP has been to enable smallholder farmers improve their food production. Since food is a basic human need as per Maslow hierarchy of needs, its insufficiency can be a challenge to governments in planning and the interaction of households. Households that experience poor food security tend to have nutritional and socialization challenges which is a danger to their health and a gap in a country's governance. Similarly, inefficient provision of the farm input to the beneficiaries and poor implementation of program activities can lead to less output. Laxity of program officials, political interference and system bureaucracy are also known to hurt the food production process.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Bungoma County in the western part of the republic of Kenya. The county has nine sub-counties and Bungoma Central Sub-county was purposively sampled. The sub-county has four administrative units called Wards (basic units of administration) and through random sampling two of them were selected for the study. Lists of beneficiaries of the program for the last four years were obtained from the sub-county agricultural office (administrators of the program) and systematic random sampling was used to select study participants. In total, 450 beneficiaries farmers participated in the study who represented 30% ($2n = Z^2pq/d^2$ where n is the sample size, z is standard confidence level, p is the population size, q=1-p and d is level of statistical significance) of the farmers enrolled in the program within the period of study from the selected administrative research units. Eight key informants were purposively selected, where the Ward Administrator (WA) and the Ward Agriculture Officer (WAO) were targeted since they are the main administrators of the program at the grassroots and are also presumed to be knowledgeable about the food systems in their respective administrative units. Along with them as key informants were Ward program committee members who included representatives of farmers, civil society organization and special groups. Similarly, a senior ministry officials was part of key informants based on their valuable insights about program policy.

In each sampled administrative unit, a focus group discussion was formed consisting of a two farmers (one successful and one challenged, based on food production and security indicators, who are beneficiaries and

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were not selected among the initial 450 beneficiaries) who were purposively selected and a member of management committee (must not have participated as Key Informant) who was randomly sampled.

The study adopted an ex-poste group design that allows a researcher to focus his efforts on a group that has experienced a stimulus. In this case the study focused on farmers that had been involved in the program. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used to collect primary data from the beneficiaries, key informants and focus group discussion. Quantitative data was organized into themes and analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer package and presented in both descriptive and inferential statistics. While qualitative data was analyzed by content analysis and presented in narrative form.

RESULTS

The analysis encompassed beneficiaries' opinions, key informant insights and focus group discussion observations and suggestions for program improvement. The challenges and opportunities are thematically discussed.

Political and Administrative Interference

Table 1: Involvement of Stakeholders in the Program

Statement	Involved	Partially involved	I don't know	Not involved	Total
Views on the involvement of politicians in the program	59(13.1%)	46 (10.2%)	164(36.4%)	181(40.2)	450(100.0%)
Involvement of agricultural office in the program	333(74.0%)	0(0.0%)	46(10.3%)	71(15.7%)	450(100.0%)
Involvement of provincial administration in the program	404(89.8%)	0(0.0%)	46(10.2%)	0(0.0%)	450(100.0%)
Involvement of County staff in the program	**437(97.49%)**	**0(0.0%)**	**0(0.0%)**	**13(2.51%)**	**450(100.0%)**

From Table 1, it can be observed that on the involvement of politicians, (13.1%) of respondents acknowledged their involvement and (10.2%) noted that they are partially involved. However, a significant portion (36.4%) expressed uncertainty ("I don't know") about their involvement, while 40.2% claimed that they are not involved in the program. This indicates that the involvement of politicians is not felt as much as other stakeholders.

In terms of the involvement of the agricultural office, a substantial majority (74.0%) acknowledged their involvement indicating a high level of engagement with the program and a small portion (10.3%) were uncertain about their involvement. Interestingly, the "Not involved" category garnered only (15.7%), indicating a positive perception of the agricultural office's active role in the program. The Ward Agriculture Officer (WAO) is the custodian of all documentations of the program and in essence the administrator of the program. Since the program is housed in the department of agriculture and livestock development, much is expected and therefore its' staff involvement should much higher than observed in the findings.

Similarly, the provincial administration was viewed as significantly involved by (89.8%) of respondents, with the remaining (10.2%) unsure about their involvement. This high perceived involvement of the

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provincial administration suggests their effective engagement in the program's implementation. The provincial administration was established as the section that played a key role in the recruitment of beneficiaries since they use their established mechanism of administration. Being an old government department, they have the records, networks and means of establishing vulnerable households with easy.

Regarding the involvement of County staff, a substantial majority (97.49%) perceived them as "Involved," while 2.51% saw them as "Not involved." The lack of any responses in the "Partially involved" or "I don't know" categories suggests an influential role of county staff's role in the program. This program is a county government initiative where the county staff have the power of ownership. The ward administrator is an ex-official on the grass root committee that is charged with the program implementation.

Whereas the political interference within the program did not emerge as a significant concern among the beneficiaries, according to the interviewees (Key informants) it emerged as a threat to the implementation, Ward Agriculture Officer one (WAO1) highlighted the intrusion of politicians ie Member of County Assemblies (MCAs) and the provincial administration ie chiefs, into the beneficiary selection process. This interference resulted in the exclusion of genuinely vulnerable individuals in favor of political associates.

A ward committee member (WC1) representing special interest in the committee had this to say about political involvement:

There is a lot of political interference, especially from the MCA who normally disrupts the work of the committee and causes differences between beneficiaries and the committee members. Some people get included on the list because they are politically right even when they do not deserve. Some have had to benefit more than once yet others have never.

WAO1 had this to say about interference by politicians:

The lists of beneficiaries gets occasionally interfered with by the MCAs and chiefs because they would wish to reward their cronies yet the genuine identified vulnerable individuals are left out. ...some committee members and beneficiaries come to the program with a formed mind that whatever the program was giving out is the governor paying back for the votes he received.

Role of Provincial Administration

The role of the chief is critical in the identification, selection and mobilization of beneficiaries. In the process of discharging this tasks, they are seen as practicing favoritism and nepotism as observed by a Ward Administrator two (WA2):

The role of the chief is to help in the identification of vulnerable people in their areas of service. This happens much during "barazas" after his team of village elders arrive with lists. The chief also provides security since he always comes with policemen. However, I don't trust him because he also comes with hidden names of his cronies to include on the list. There was a year when he brought on the list members of his family that don't deserve. The public rejected the lists.

Procurement and Distribution

Key informants respondents highlighted challenges related to procurement and distribution of inputs. Inadequate supply and poor distribution led to dissatisfaction among beneficiaries. Beneficiaries reported cases where the procured supplier did not meet their preferences, affecting their ability to effectively utilize the inputs.

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One of the key informants WAO1 had this to say about one of the inputs

The preferred fertilizers for our region are phosphates for planting and nitrates for top dressing. They have proved to be game changers in the overall output from the program. However sometimes the procured supplier does not heed to our requests on the types we want and for such we do not have control.

A beneficiary farmer F1 had this to say about her satisfaction with the procurement and supply of the inputs.

They brought the input much later after the rains had started. I couldn't wait that long so I planted without and just applied much later…. Sometimes they bring seeds alone and bring fertilizers later and it was really inconveniencing.

Trainings and Capacity Building

The interviewees stressed the importance of training and capacity building for beneficiaries. WAO1 emphasized that basic training on the program was primarily provided during chief's barazas and committee meetings, limiting comprehensive education. WA2 suggested regular capacity-building sessions for committee members to disseminate knowledge to beneficiary groups. However, the availability of extension officers was seen as limited, impacting the dissemination of farming techniques to beneficiaries.

Farm Practices, Climate, and Pest Management

Observations regarding farm practices, climate, and pest control issues were also notable during the interviews with key informant and focus groups. An interview with one beneficiary who was a key informant (F2) revealed that some beneficiaries did not optimally apply program supplies as advised by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), leading to suboptimal fertilizer application and reduced yields. The interview further revealed that the absence of provisions for pest control in the program's budget left farmers vulnerable to pest attacks and unpredictable climatic conditions.

In relation to pests attack and climate issues the WAO1 observed that:

Food production has been smooth over the years, except when farms are affected by other factors like poor rainfall or attack by pests. Of recent pest attack has been a menace and its control is not budgeted for in the program.

Attitude of Beneficiaries

The perception and attitude of beneficiaries towards the program were significant challenges. Beneficiaries were requested to indicate what they disliked most about the program and the responses were as indicated in table 2 below.

Table 2: Not Liked about the Program

	Frequency	**Percent**	**Percent**
Favoritism and corruption in distribution	149	33.1	33.1
Annual distribution	23	5.1	5.1
lack of continuity	9	2.0	2.0
N/A	51	11.3	11.3
Next Consideration is minimal	22	8.0	8.0
Small Quantity	205	45.6	45.6

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Total	**450**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Field Data (2023)

The findings from Table 3 highlight key factors contributing to beneficiaries' dissatisfaction with the program initiatives where (33.1%) raised concerns about favoritism and corruption in the distribution process pointing to a need for transparent and equitable resource allocation. (5.1%, 2.0%) registered dissatisfaction with annual distribution and lack of program continuity which suggests the importance of aligning support with beneficiaries' seasonal needs and maintaining consistent assistance. (8.0%) revealed that the perception that beneficiaries' opinions are inadequately considered emphasizes the value of involving beneficiaries in decision-making and feedback mechanisms and (45.6%) being a significant proportion expressed dissatisfaction with the quantity of provided inputs which shows a gap in the procurement.

This also coupled up with the interview responses where farmer (F3) perspective was:

Sometimes we are asked to prepare one acre of land and then we are given what can plant only half of it. So we try to use what we have been given to plant the one acre. I request that we get enough for one acre as we are normally promised during vetting.

An interviewed F2 farmer observed:

Sometimes you find a person staying on a rental building demanding to be given and you ask where surely such a person will apply the input. They do so because it is free and have a notion that it is a reward from their political friends.

A Civil Society Organization leader in one of the FGD who was also a committee member had this to say about the committee members:

Sometimes committee members have hidden interests in the program, they come for vetting and when you are done with identification, later you get different people on the lists as beneficiaries. If you raise it as an issue in the next meeting, then they disrupt to cause confusion which means you have to begin a fresh. Some farmers travel from far to attend this meetings and so we feel wasted.

Management Challenges

The program encountered several management challenges, including procurement planning, input storage, and administrative budget constraints. A Ward Agriculture Officer (WAO1) who was the main custodian of the documentation at the implementation unit, identified shortcomings in procurement planning, leading to delayed supplies to beneficiaries. Storage of supplies posed a challenge due to inadequate infrastructure, forcing reliance on external institutions like schools and churches. During distribution, a shortage of personnel and lack of administrative funds further complicated the process. The WAO1 had this to say

County teams in-charge of procurement should be planning and executing their plans in such way to enable beneficiaries receive their supplies early enough as they prepare for the season. …there is a challenge of storage for the supplies when they are being delivered to the ward by the supplier before distribution to farmers. As you are aware MOA at the ward levels do not have warehouses to safely store this volumes of supply. So we have been working with other public institutions like schools and churches. The challenge is they provide rooms for storage but not security. We have had thieves breaking in such places and carrying away the supply. Imagine they have been breaking even in churches .During distribution the work is so much but we are very few, we need to get more personnel to assist. During distribution, we always work to

odd hours. We don't have a single cent allocated for administration. Sometimes I am forced to get my own money to ensure this exercise goes on. It is very frustrating.

Correlations

The correlation Table 3, presents the relationships between various factors and perceptions within the FISP, with implications for program challenges and opportunities. These correlations offer valuable insights into how different aspects of the program may influence farmer perceptions and overall program performance.

Table 3: Correlations

Control	A	Correlation			1.000	.155	-.050	.018	.	.002	.104	-.064
		Significance (2-tailed)			.	.001	.291	.711	.	.972	.028	.177
		Df			0	446	446	446	446	446	446	446
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias		.000	-.003	.001	.000	.[b]	-.001	-.001	.001
			Std. Error		.000	.022	.010	.004	.[b]	.037	.047	.010
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	1.000	.110	-.070	.010	.[b,c]	-.070	.005	-.083
				Upper	1.000	.192	-.031	.025	.[b,c]	.075	.192	-.043
	B	Correlation			.155	1.000	-.014	.057	.	.055	-.093	-.155
		Significance (2-tailed)			.001	.	.771	.226	.	.244	.049	.001
		Df			446	0	446	446	446	446	446	446
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias		-.003	.000	.001	-.001	.[b]	-.003	.001	-.001
			Std. Error		.022	.000	.048	.050	.[b]	.049	.048	.047
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	.110	1.000	-.110	-.042	.[b,c]	-.045	-.187	-.249
				Upper	.192	1.000	.080	.155	.[b,c]	.150	.004	-.063
	C	Correlation			-.050	-.014	1.000	.017	.	.158	.240	-.061
		Significance (2-tailed)			.291	.771	.	.722	.	.001	.000	.194
		Df			446	446	0	446	446	446	446	446
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias		.001	.001	.000	.000	.[b]	-.001	.000	.001
			Std. Error		.010	.048	.000	.004	.[b]	.023	.036	.010
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	-.070	-.110	1.000	.010	.[b,c]	.111	.169	-.082
				Upper	-.031	.080	1.000	.024	.[b,c]	.201	.310	-.040
	D	Correlation			.018	.057	.017	1.000	.	-.098	-.327	-.071
		Significance (2-tailed)			.711	.226	.722	.	.	.038	.000	.134
		Df			446	446	446	0	446	446	446	446
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias		.000	-.001	.000	.000	.[b]	.001	.003	.000
			Std. Error		.004	.050	.004	.000	.[b]	.015	.045	.014
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	.010	-.042	.010	1.000	.[b,c]	-.126	-.414	-.101
				Upper	.025	.155	.024	1.000	.[b,c]	-.069	-.235	-.045

	E	Correlation			.	.	.	.	1.000	.	.	.
		Significance (2-tailed)			.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
		Df			446	446	446	446	0	446	446	446
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias		.[b]	.[b]	.[b]	.[b]	.000	.[b]	.[b]	.[b]
			Std. Error		.[b]	.[b]	.[b]	.[b]	.000	.[b]	.[b]	.[b]
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	.[b,c]	.[b,c]	.[b,c]	.[b,c]	1.000	.[b,c]	.[b,c]	.[b,c]
				Upper	.[b,c]	.[b,c]	.[b,c]	.[b,c]	1.000	.[b,c]	.[b,c]	.[b,c]
	F	Correlation			.002	.055	.158	-.098	.	1.000	-.263	-.319
		Significance (2-tailed)			.972	.244	.001	.038	.	.	.000	.000
		Df			446	446	446	446	446	0	446	446
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias		-.001	-.003	-.001	.001	.[b]	.000	.006	.003
			Std. Error		.037	.049	.023	.015	.[b]	.000	.076	.068
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	-.070	-.045	.111	-.126	.[b,c]	1.000	-.398	-.450
				Upper	.075	.150	.201	-.069	.[b,c]	1.000	-.099	-.175
	G	Correlation			.104	-.093	.240	-.327	.	-.263	1.000	.308
		Significance (2-tailed)			.028	.049	.000	.000	.	.000	.	.000
		Df			446	446	446	446	446	446	0	446
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias		-.001	.001	.000	.003	.[b]	.006	.000	-.001
			Std. Error		.047	.048	.036	.045	.[b]	.076	.000	.088
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	.005	-.187	.169	-.414	.[b,c]	-.398	1.000	.125
				Upper	.192	.004	.310	-.235	.[b,c]	-.099	1.000	.470
	H	Correlation			-.064	-.155	-.061	-.071	.	-.319	.308	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)			.177	.001	.194	.134	.	.000	.000	.
		Df			446	446	446	446	446	446	446	0
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias		.001	-.001	.001	.000	.[b]	.003	-.001	.000
			Std. Error		.010	.047	.010	.014	.[b]	.068	.088	.000
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	-.083	-.249	-.082	-.101	.[b,c]	-.450	.125	1.000
				Upper	-.043	-.063	-.040	-.045	.[b,c]	-.175	.470	1.000
	a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples											
	b. Based on 0 samples											
	c. A 95% confidence interval requires at least 39 bootstrap samples.											

KEY

1. How you were selected to be beneficiary of the Program
2. Do you think the selection method is open and transparent?
3. Was the community allowed to choose between maize and fertilizer in any of the season
4. Choice of seeds and fertilizer was appropriate
5. Is a monitoring system among each other?
6. How will rate the perception of fellow farmers concerning timings under which the program is implemented
7. How will rate the perception of fellow farmers concerning the involvement of politicians in the program
8. How will rate the perception of fellow farmers concerning the legal framework of program operation

Control: How will rate the perception of fellow farmers concerning how farmers are treated with the county

staff & How will rate the perception of fellow farmers concerning how the program resonates with community ceremonies

Table 3 reveals various opportunities and challenges in the program. The selection method (Factor A) and transparency (Factor B) have moderate positive correlation of 0.155 indicating that farmers' perceptions of the selection method's openness and transparency are positively associated with their overall satisfaction with the program. This suggests that when farmers perceive the selection process to be fair and transparent, they are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the program which is good for the program as designed.

Community choice (Factor C) and appropriateness of inputs (Factor D) have notable positive correlation of 0.240 suggests that involving the community in the choice of inputs is associated with perceptions of input suitability. This implies that when farmers have the opportunity to choose between different input options, they are more likely to perceive the inputs they receive as appropriate for their farming needs. It is a strength in the program, which when strengthened can lead to higher program acceptability.

Perception of timing (Factor F) and involvement of politicians (Factor G) recorded negative correlation of -0.319 between perception of timing and involvement of politicians revealing that perceptions of the program's timing are negatively associated with the involvement of politicians.

This suggests that when farmers perceive the program's timing to be inappropriate, they are less likely to view political involvement positively. These correlations highlight the complex interplay between various factors within this FISP. This indicates that both timing of the program as per seasons and community ceremonies is a challenge alongside the involvement of politicians. Therefore, addressing concerns related to timing and political involvement are likely to improve farmer satisfaction and program outcomes.

The correlation also assessed the relationship between two crucial control variables within the Program: farmers' perceptions of how they are treated by county staff and the resonance of the program with community ceremonies. The study examined the correlation coefficient between these variables in order to quantify the strength and direction of the relationship. In this case, the study reveals a positive correlation coefficient of 0.104. This indicates a moderate positive relationship between farmers' perceptions of treatment by county staff and the resonance of the program with community ceremonies. To put this into perspective into a scenario where farmers perceive county staff as respectful, helpful, and responsive to their needs. In such cases, they are more likely to view the program positively and feel that it aligns well with their community's traditions and events. This positive perception is likely to increased trust in the program and greater willingness to participate in its activities, ultimately enhancing program effectiveness and farmer satisfaction. Conversely, if farmers feel mistreated or neglected by county staff, they may develop negative attitudes towards the program. This negativity is likely to extend to their perception of the program's alignment with community ceremonies. Farmers may feel that the program is out of touch with their cultural practices or fails to respect their traditions, leading to disengagement and reduced program impact. Therefore, the positive correlation observed in the correlation table suggests that efforts to improve farmers' experiences with county staff can have broader implications for community engagement and program success.

DISCUSSION

From the results presented above food security programs in a devolved system can pose some interesting challenges. In the Kenyan system, administrative and governance functions are decentralized to regional governments and further to smaller units referred to as wards, the findings of the study observed political, management, perception and administrative challenges which included coordination and collaborations, resource allocation, policy harmonization, accountability and monitoring, and public participation and

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engagement. As observed in the study, there is a gap between the recruitment team and beneficiaries, ward committee and political processes, and planning teams and suppliers. The conflicts observed in the program can be associated with the challenges the two levels of governance structure being implemented in Kenya. Omotayo et al (2019) also, observed similar challenges in coordination in a study carried out in a rice production program in Nigeria. For effective coordination and collaboration between different levels of government, Jakku et al (2019) posts that it requires a clear communication channels and mechanisms for sharing information, resources, and best practices among various stakeholders that are involved. They assert that devolution also means that different regions have varying levels of resources and capacities. Therefore, allocating resources fairly and efficiently to address food security challenges across different regions is a complex task, requiring careful planning and decision-making.

When it comes to procurement and distribution the study established it as an administrative challenge. Though the inputs are procured externally at the departmental headquarter, it's acquiring and distribution has proved a challenge to the implementers and thus derailing the efficiency of the program. In a survey done across Sub-Saharan African where FISP programs are being implemented, Shively & Ricker-Gilbert (2013) observed various constrains that can eminent from the procurement and distribution sections, they observed that in many regions of Africa, inadequate transportation and storage infrastructure can hinder the efficient procurement and distribution of farm inputs. Poor road networks, lack of proper storage facilities, and unreliable transportation systems have led to delays and inefficiencies in getting inputs to the intended beneficiaries. Secondly, corruption and mismanagement are significant challenges in the procurement and distribution process. It included issues such as diversion of inputs for personal gain, favoritism in the selection of suppliers and lack of transparency in the procurement process. These issues undermine the effectiveness and impact of the FISP. Thirdly, inaccurate targeting by the program also was a issue. Ensuring that the support inputs reach the intended beneficiaries was a complex task. Inaccurate targeting results in inputs being distributed to individuals or groups who do not actually need them, while those who genuinely require assistance being left out. This program is pro-poor and its implementation is focused on helping vulnerable households to produce their own stable food and in so doing overcome a form of poverty. Hence targeting has to be effective in locating the intended population.

A challenge of beneficiaries' attitude towards the program as it being purely a reward for voting in the incumbent political leaders is seen to be hurting the program objectives. Aggarwal et al (2023) also observed poor attitude among beneficiaries in a Malawian FISP. In suggesting for a paradigm shift, Flor a et al (2018) & Best and Johnson (2016) advocate for planners to help build correct attitude since it is more advantageous in any program. Bagheramiri and Shaal (2020) & Flora et al (2018) argue that when beneficiaries have a positive attitude towards the FISP and are motivated to participate actively, it leads to increased engagement in program activities. They are more likely to invest time, effort, and additional resources into program implementation, resulting in higher productivity and satisfaction. While studying global food security situation, Fuglie (2018) argues that beneficiaries' attitude towards learning and adopting best practices in agriculture plays a crucial role. If they have a receptive mindset and are willing to embrace new techniques, technologies, and sustainable farming methods promoted through the FISP, it enhances their productivity and overall food production. As presented by Best and Johnson (2016), when beneficiaries feel a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their agricultural activities, they tend to be more diligent and committed. This leads to better management of resources, such as land and inputs.

From the correlation tests, it is observed that there is satisfaction by beneficiaries in the selection method used in identifying beneficiaries and also the group has a positive attitude about the choice of inputs and their appropriateness. A positive attitude towards collaboration and knowledge sharing among beneficiaries which is lacking in this program design can foster a supportive and learning environment. When farmers exchange ideas, experiences, and expertise, through an organized forum, it leads to the adoption of innovative practices, problem-solving techniques, and ultimately, increase in food production. Such

exchanges are better methods of capacity building for adults (Tora T. T, 2024 & Woodhale et al, 2022). As observed by Giller et al (2021) & Van Dijk (2020), agriculture is often subject to various challenges, such as climate change, pests, and market fluctuations and with poor attitude among beneficiaries, farm work may not yield much at the end. However, beneficiaries with a positive attitude tend to be more resilient and adaptable in the face of these challenges. They are more likely to seek solutions, explore alternative approaches, and bounce back from setbacks, which contributes to sustained production. According to Aggarwal et al (2023), beneficiaries' attitudes is influenced by various factors, including their socio-economic conditions, access to resources, and the support provided through a program. Creating awareness, providing training, and fostering a positive mindset through effective communication and engagement strategies can help shape beneficiaries' attitudes towards the initiative and maximize the impact of the program.

As observed from the FGD and Key Informant interviews, most farmers recruited on the program lack knowledge on good farm practices and yet the program does not provide for specialized training. The study therefore established that poor farm practices contribute to low yields and therefore impacts negatively on food production. On examining the devolution aspect in Kenya Muathe et al (2017) examines the devolved function of agriculture and recommends investment of county government in training centers to sharpen beneficiaries' skills in good practices. Agreeing, Torre et al (2023), Aggarwal et al (2023) & Leddy (2020), argue for and express that farm practices play a crucial role in determining food production outcomes within the context of a FISP.

CONCLUSION

This section of the study focused on examining the challenges and opportunities in the farm input support for the resource poor and vulnerable smallholder farmers program in Bungoma County, which is a pro-poor hunger safety net program that assists communities to have sufficient food. This paper has assessed the challenges experienced by beneficiaries and program officials as they implement the program. The findings indicate that the challenges experienced are embedded in the perception and attitude of beneficiaries and stakeholders, governance and administrative in nature. Beneficiaries perceive the support being given as a reward by victors in the past election cycle while politicians see it as an opportunity to assert self as hard working leaders who deserve support in the next election. The provincial administration team that is led by local administrators as Chiefs are identified as practicing nepotism and favoritism so as to have their relatives and friends benefit even when they do not deserve because of their ability. Similarly, budget allocations are lacking fundamental aspects like training and administrative costs for storage and security.

There is poor knowledge of the program by the committee members while lack of awareness of the legal framework of the program by the beneficiaries and program leadership. This contributes to a haphazard way in which beneficiaries are selected and the pattern used to distribute the farm input. Similarly, the procurement and distribution of the program items is centralized at the department headquarters which poses a challenge to the implementing committee. The committees are in-charge of acquiring appropriate fertilizers and seed for their regions, but they are not represented on the procurement committee in the county. Secondly, the pre-qualified suppliers take long before they deliver the supply, sometimes way past the first planting rains, as such lowering the produce.

Whereas the program ward committee is responsible for program implementation at the ward level which is the most basic unit of administration in the devolved system of governance, it is not supported nor facilitated to discharge this mandate by the program executives. There is no provision on the program budget for administrative costs nor non material support in the program. Ward program implementation committee activities are therefore not well coordinated. The program does not have warehouses to store the bulky supplies before distributing to beneficiaries. Similarly, the committee is not reinforced with security

personals and thus leaving the coveted items exposed leading to them being stolen from the warehouses through organized gangs. The politicians also have used this weakness to ensure that their political cronies who may not have been identified as beneficiaries benefit even if they don't deserve.

Besides the challenges experienced, the Bungoma County FISP has opportunities that lie within the satisfaction of beneficiaries in a number of program structure, design and implementation. On the overall this program leverages on the positive attitude it enjoys among beneficiaries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that a more elaborate program implementation framework be put in place with clear guidelines on duties and functions of each stakeholders so as to have less conflict in the program. This action will facilitate accountability and transparency among players involved. Secondly, there is need to correct the political prejudices observed in the program structure so that genuine and deserving households benefit, that will enable efficiency and effectiveness in the program. Thirdly, the study recommend that the procurement be decentralized so that each ward committee can be able to acquire its own certified seed and fertilizers that are customized and also allocate funds for administration and facilitation. The departmental headquarters who fund the program can then offer technical and oversight services. This approach will empower community members and give beneficiaries an attitude of program ownership. Lastly, there is need for the program to develop a social inquiry tool that is tailored towards measuring the vulnerability of households in relation to household food security. With scoring points indicated clearly on the tool, means testing will single out true vulnerable households to benefit. This will then draw the program away from serving the masses as numbers on the program to serving the pro-poor, thus moving from quantity to quality. The social inquiry tool will guide the recruitment teams in identifying households that are vulnerable to hunger based on household food security indicators, at the same time have other pre-requisites like an acre of land set aside by the same household for farming.

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