

Farmer Perceptions on Empowerment Programs by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Gauteng Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT The study investigated the perceptions of farmers supported by empowerment programs by the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) with a focus on their understanding of empowerment in agriculture and on selected aspects of empowerment programs. Program beneficiaries were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. Majority (59%) of farmers perceived soft (intangible) issues (consultation 29%, education and training 26%, and market access 4%) to be important determinants of empowerment. Only one in three (35%) farmers mentioned hard (tangible) issues of provision of infrastructure and equipment (14%), land reform (14%), and agricultural input supply (7%) to be important determinants of empowerment. Majority (64.3%) of farmers had negative perceptions on policy frameworks, and only one in three (35.7%) perceived the policies to be good. Support interventions of empowerment programs should prioritize soft issues such as consultation, information, counseling, advice, training, and market assessment.

INTRODUCTION

For the past 20 years, the South African public sector has undergone a series of changes in a quest of transforming institutions to reorient service delivery systems towards the majority of citizens who did not have access to such services during the past apartheid regime. Within the agricultural sector there have been changes to empower the predominantly small-scale farmers to integrate into the formal agricultural sector. Empowerment programs at a national level

include and are not limited to the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Program. Central to agricultural empowerment of farmers was the Revitalization of Smallholder Irrigation Schemes (RESIS), Veterinary Programs and the introduction of Rural Development Thrust in the 2009-2014 term of government. There has been a dearth of information to demonstrate the level of empowerment that these agricultural development programs have achieved. According to Olano (2004) and Denison et al. (2015), agrarian reform has been seen as a key state intervention that would reduce poverty by redistributing wealth and transforming rural areas into centers of equity-led economic growth. Critical support services such as production loans, agricultural extension, infrastructure and project management training were identified as being important for

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the sustainability of agrarian land reform (Department of Land Affairs 1998; Neves and Du Toit 2013). In affirmation, Jacobs (2003) and Denison et al. (2015) identified key functional areas of support for land reform beneficiaries as extension services (farming advice), skills development and capacity building, financial assistance in the form of grants and credit, infrastructure support, and access to markets, ranging from local sales that are mainly informal to marketing arrangements with commodity organizations. For government departments in charge of agriculture to ensure effectiveness of empowerment programs, they should develop appropriate indicators. Among the issues to be addressed in developing such indicators are, redefining empowerment with a focus on targeted farmers, development of empowerment framework to serve as a basis for indicator development, and subsequently, disaggregating the indicators informed by needs and aspirations of target farmers.

Depending on the extent to which empowerment programs address the needs and aspirations of target farmers, they (the farmers) develop some perceptions towards such programs, and such perceptions will be positive where empowerment programs adequately addressed the needs and aspirations of the farmers and *vice versa*. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of farmers on empowerment programs of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) in South Africa. The perceptions of the farmers will be influenced by the level of effectiveness of implemented empowerment programs.

Objective

The objective of the study was to investigate the perceptions of farmers supported by empowerment programs of Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) and focused on their understanding of empowerment in agriculture and on selected aspects of empowerment programs.

METHODOLOGY

Description of Study Area

The study was conducted in the Gauteng Province of South Africa and focused on farmers who benefitted from empowerment programs

implemented by the GDARD. The Province is almost centrally located and is the nation's economic powerhouse. Farming is practiced in all the municipalities and metropolitan areas of the Province (Fig. 1).

Research Approach

The study followed a mixed approach referred to as integrating, to mean adding together, synthesis for amalgamation, and multi-method, as it combines the quantitative and qualitative approaches in one study (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). According to Creswell (2003), and also affirmed by Leedy and Ormrod (2010), defined quantitative approach (also referred to as the traditional or positivist approach) as an enquiry into a social problem based on testing a theory made up of variables, measured with numbers and analyzed using statistical procedures in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true.

On the other hand, qualitative approach (also referred to as constructivist, naturalist and interpretative) is an enquiry process of comprehending a social or human problem or phenomenon based on building a complex holistic picture formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Creswell 2003; Smith 1983).

The mixed approach as used to collect information in this study included a review of literature that presented mainly qualitative information from scientific journals, books and reports, and interviews of farmers who benefited from empowerment programs implemented by the GDARD in South Africa. The questionnaire used for the interviews contained both closed-ended questions associated with quantitative methods and open-ended questions associated with qualitative methods (Hurmerinta-Peltomaki and Nummela 2006; Leedy and Ormrod 2010).

Research Design

According to Mounton (2001), research designs are techniques for collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting data in research investigations. As stated by Welman et al. (2005), research designs provide guidelines and instruc-

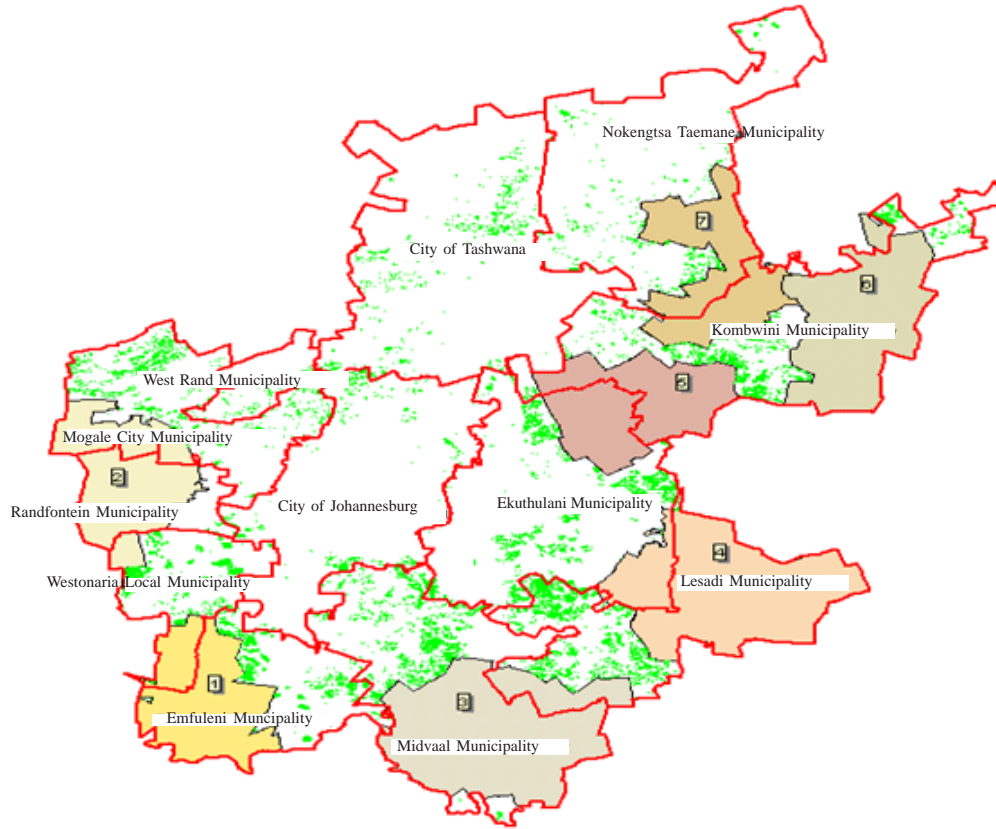


Fig. 1. Map of Gauteng Province showing the municipalities and metropolitan areas and the localities where farming is practiced

tions to be followed in addressing the research problem. Decisions on research design are informed by the fact that each study can be used to develop a general conclusion on the same challenge though in a different geographic area (Egbu 2007; Yin 1989). In accordance with the framework by Mouton (2001), the research design for this study was as presented in Table 1.

Sampling Frame and Sampling Procedure

As stated by Welman et al. (2005), it is impossible to properly judge the representativeness of a sample unless a sampling frame is borne in mind. Based on Leedy and Ormrod (2010), a representative sample is a requirement for subsequent research results to be credible and trust-

Table 1: Research design for study on empowerment programme of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Gauteng Province (South Africa) as guided by Mouton (2001)

<i>Method of data collection</i>	<i>Design classification</i>	<i>Type of sampling</i>	<i>Data analysis and interpretation</i>
Literature review	Non-empirical, secondary, textual data	Non-probability, literature selected based on theoretical considerations	Mainly qualitative analysis with subjective interpretation
Structured interviews of farmers	Empirical, primary, textual data	Non-probability, purposive sampling of farmers	Mainly quantitative analysis with objective interpretation

worthy. A sample frame was established wherein all the farmers who benefitted from the empowerment programs in the Province and in each of the municipalities and metropolitan areas were enlisted. The total size of the sampling frame for the Province was 203 farmers who benefitted from the department's empowerment programs spread across all the municipalities and metropolitan areas. Stratified random samples of the farmers were selected where the same proportion of farmers was sampled for each of the municipalities and metropolitan areas. A total of 70 farmers (34.5% of sampling frame) were sampled. The gender of the respondents was fifty-six percent males and forty-four percent females. The respondents were mostly in livestock (41%), mixed (37%), horticulture (13%) and field crops (4%) farming.

Data Collection and Analysis

For the purpose of this study, information was obtained through review of literature that presented mainly qualitative information from scientific journals, books and reports, and interviews of farmers using a questionnaire that contained both closed-ended questions associated with quantitative methods and open-ended questions associated with qualitative methods (Hurmerinta-Peltomaki and Nummela 2006; Leedy and Ormrod 2010). A questionnaire was used to obtain information on opinions, beliefs, convictions and attitudes and was therefore relevant for collecting information regarding perceptions of farmers on empowerment programs (Welman et al. 2005). The focus of the questionnaire was on farmers' understanding of empowerment in agriculture, and four thematic areas that describe the perceptions of the farmers on empowerment programs, namely, empowerment policies, strategies and processes, types and frequencies of support, benefits derived from support interventions, and effectiveness of support agents.

Quantitative data was captured and analyzed using the SAS package (SAS Institute Inc. 2009). Simple frequency tables of occurrence were generated in each class of demographic variables utilizing one-way tables. The syntax was provided to the SAS software, which automatically calculated the mean of observations falling within each category of response. The data for this study was summarized and discussed based on objective interpretations (Lee 1999; Leedy and Ormrod 2010). Qualitative data was summarized

according to its content, and main themes addressed and were discussed based on subjective interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to be able to redefine empowerment in the sector, the farmers who benefit from the empowerment programs should be at the center of the discussion. The perceptions of the farmers should inform the review of the empowerment programs. A fair assessment of the perceptions of the farmers on empowerment programs should be preceded by some determination of their (the farmers) level of understanding of 'empowerment programs' in agriculture.

Farmers Understanding of Empowerment in Agriculture

In illustrating their understanding of empowerment in agriculture, the farmers highlighted various attributes they believed were important components or determinants of the (empowerment) process (Table 2).

Table 2: Attributes perceived by respondents to be important determinants of empowerment in agriculture

<i>Components of empowerment in agriculture</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Government consultation with farmers	20	29
Agricultural education and training	18	26
Provision of infrastructure and equipment	10	14
Land Reform – expansion of land	10	14
Agricultural inputs supply	5	7
Provision of funding	4	6
Access and availability of markets	3	4
Total	70	100

The largest number of farmers (29%) considered empowerment in agriculture to be a process of government consultation with them (farmers) for support. Consultation is indeed key to effective empowerment, as it enables the government and other empowerment agents to be informed of the needs, aspirations and capacities of prospective beneficiaries of empowerment programs, and to subsequently develop appropriate empowerment plans. It is therefore sensible that consultation was included in Batho

Pele's policy for service delivery. Effective empowerment may therefore not be highly dependent on the quantities of hard (tangible) support interventions (infrastructure, machinery, production inputs) provided to beneficiaries (farmers), but may be highly influenced by the extent of soft (intangible) support such as stakeholder consultation (more so beneficiaries) and the inclusion of their views in empowerment planning.

Agricultural education and training was considered by the second largest number of farmers (26%) to be a determinant of empowerment in agriculture. This was probably a result of the fact that many of the farmers targeted by empowerment programs lacked requisite sector knowledge and skills as they (the farmers) either only operated at a small scale (often subsistence) level or were newcomers in the sector who took advantage of (empowerment) opportunities provided by the democratic government. Again the farmers regarded a soft support issue of access and availability of markets (4%) to be an important determinant of empowerment. The majority (59%) of the farmers therefore understood soft attributes of consultation, education and training, and access and availability of markets to be determinants of empowerment, suggesting that the soft attributes were more important for empowerment than their hard attributes counterparts.

As clear in the findings, attributes related to supply and delivery of hard support interventions were regarded by fewer respondents to be determinants of empowerment. Only one in seven (14%) of the farmers considered infrastructure and equipment to be determinants with the same number indicating land reform (expansion of land) to be a determinant of empowerment in agriculture. Also, fewer respondents thought supply of production inputs (7%) determined empowerment. Some six percent of farmers mentioned funding as a determinant of empowerment, and this could be used to procure both

the soft and hard support interventions on empowerment programs. The regard for the soft issue of availability and access to markets by the least number of farmers (4%) probably suggests that their production was mostly small and therefore had no challenges of lack of markets.

Farmer Perceptions on Empowerment Programs in Agriculture

A comprehensive discussion of perceptions requires in-depth understanding of key influential factors (Nesamvuni et al. 2014). The key factors influencing perceptions on empowerment programs in agriculture include, empowerment policies, strategies and policies, type of support by major stakeholders, benefits derived from support interventions, and effectiveness of the support by the stakeholders. Farmer perceptions on each of these factors would therefore influence their perceptions on empowerment programs.

Farmer Perceptions on Empowerment Policies, Strategies and Processes

The perceptions of farmers on empowerment policies, strategies and processes have a strong influence on how they (the farmers) perceive the empowerment programs. Farmers with a positive view on the policies, strategies and processes will likely have positive perceptions on the empowerment program, *and vice versa*. The farmers who benefited from the empowerment programs of the GDARD had various views on policies, strategies and processes followed in implementing the programs (Table 3).

Only about one in three (35.7%) of the farmers had a positive perception on the policies, strategies and processes involved in implementing the empowerment programs of the GDARD. The farmers described the policies, strategies and processes as 'effective, progressing and working'. The rest of the farmers (64.3%) had some negative perceptions on the policies, strat-

Table 3: Farmers views on empowerment policies, strategies and processes

<i>Farmers views</i>	<i>Ratings</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Effective, progressing, it works	Good	25	35.7
Partially adequate, slow Government, no follow ups	Fair	18	25.7
Ineffective, not working, inadequate support, lack of implementation	Poor	27	38.6
Total		70	100

egies and processes of the empowerment programs. Of the farmers with negative perceptions, one in four (25.7%) regarded the policy frameworks to be 'partially adequate with slow government and lack of follow-ups' while almost two in five (38.6%) described them as 'ineffective, not working, with inadequate support and lack of implementation.'

With the majority of farmers perceiving the policies, strategies and processes rather negatively, it may be anticipated that the policy frameworks did not sufficiently address their (the farmers') understanding of empowerment. The understanding of the majority of the farmers was for empowerment to focus on soft (intangible) issues such as government consultation (with the farmers) and farmer education and training, as opposed to hard (tangible) issues such as infrastructure and production inputs (Table 2). Considering the perceptions of the farmers on policies, strategies and processes, it would be expected for the farmers to regard the empowerment programs implemented by the GDARD rather negatively.

Farmer Perceptions on Type and Frequency of Support Provided by Various Support Agents

The perceptions of farmers on empowerment programs in agriculture are influenced by the type of support brought provided by such programs. The perceptions are likely positive when the support is relevant to the needs and aspira-

tions of the farmers. Comprehensive discussion of the relevance of the support to the needs and aspirations of farmers should consider the types and frequency of the support provided (Table 4).

The types and frequencies of support provided by major government agents included infrastructure and extension services provided daily (GDARD), training and advice provided annually (ARC), and advice and study groups also provided annually (DAFF). The types of support provided by these agents tend to focus on soft issues, namely, advisory services referred to as 'extension' (GDARD), advice (ARC and DAFF), training (ARC) and study groups (DAFF). The types of support tend to be relevant to address the soft issues of consultation and of education and training understood by majority of the farmers (59%) to be determinants of empowerment (Table 2). Although consultation was not specifically mentioned, it would likely be achieved when the support agents interact with the farmers to provide advice. The GDARD was reported to be providing support on a daily basis (frequent support), and this was because the Department has the capacity to regularly interact with farmers through its extension offices.

The types and frequencies of support provided by major farmer organizations were training and funding provided monthly (WARD) and meetings and organization also conducted monthly (AFASA). With the exception of 'funding' mentioned for WARD, the rest of the sup-

Table 4: Type of support provided by various support agents (stakeholders) to farmers in Gauteng Province of South Africa

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Type of support</i>	<i>Frequency of interaction</i>
GDARD	Infrastructure, extension	Daily
ARC	Training, advice	Annual
DAFF	Advice, study groups	Annual
WARD	Training, funding	Monthly
Afasa Others	Meetings, organisation	Monthly
Land Affairs	Land issues	Monthly
West Rand Farmers Forum	Advice, training	Bi-annual
Vet Services	Vaccination	Bi-annual
South African Poultry Association	Poultry information	Annually
Land Bank	Loan facilities	Monthly
MEC stakeholder meetings	Budget and farmer needs assessment	Bi-annual
Health Church Prayer	Counselling	Weekly
Seventh Day Adventist Church	Counselling	Weekly

Key: **GDARD** - Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, **ARC** - Agricultural Research Council, **DAFF** - Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, **WARD** - Women in Agriculture and Rural Development, **AFASA** - African Farmers Association of South Africa.

port was relevant to address the soft issues reported to be determinants of empowerment by the majority of the farmers. These support interventions would therefore complement those mentioned for government agents in achieving empowerment as understood by the majority of the farmers.

The 'other' support agents included government (Land Affairs, Veterinary Services, Land Bank, and MEC stakeholder meetings) and non-government (*farmers unions*- West Rand Farmers Forum, *commodity associations*- South African Poultry Association, and *churches*- Health Church Prayer and Seventh Day Adventist Church) institutions. The types and frequencies of support provided by these agents associated with hard issues, the assets or goods such as land (monthly) and vaccines (bi-annually), soft issues such as advice and training (bi-annually), information (monthly), and counseling (weekly), and budget (bi-annually) and loan facilities (monthly) that may be used to procure both hard and soft issues. The types of support provided by the various agents provide a focus on soft issues such as consultation, education and training, and these were understood by the majority (59%) of the farmers to be determinants of empowerment. Additional soft issues of support such as advice, information and counseling would be expected to be relevant for effectiveness of empowerment programs.

Although understood to be important by relatively smaller number of farmers, support in the form of hard issues such as assets and goods would also be necessary, more so for resource poor farmers trying to establish themselves in the agriculture sector. Inclusion of support interventions such as provision of land, machinery, equipment and production inputs was therefore necessary to address the needs of the resource poor farmers. Based on the types and frequencies of support, it would be expected for the farmers to hold positive perceptions on empowerment programs implemented by the GDARD, and this seems contrary to the findings for perceptions on policy frameworks.

Farmer Perceptions on Benefits Derived From Support Interventions

The benefits derived by farmers from support interventions have a strong influence on the perceptions they develop towards the empowerment program. Positive perceptions on the

benefits from support interventions would likely result in positive perceptions on the empowerment program. The farmer perceptions on benefits from support interventions were reflected by the number of farmers who claimed to have benefited (Table 5).

Table 5: Benefits derived by farmers from empowerment programmes implemented by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Gauteng Province, South Africa

<i>Support intervention</i>	<i>Frequ- ency</i>	<i>Perce- ntage</i>
Farm infrastructure	17	24
Supply of agricultural inputs	15	21
Agricultural education and training	9	13
Agricultural information and interaction	7	10
Provision of biological assets	6	9
Animal vaccination	6	9
Marketing	5	7
Land	5	7
Total	70	100

The largest number of farmers (24%) indicated that they benefitted through receipt of infrastructure (hard issue) from empowerment programs implemented by the GDARD. The second largest number of farmers (21%) benefitted in the form of receipt of agricultural inputs, also a hard issue. Other types of benefits received by the farmers in the form of hard issues (goods) were biological assets (9%), vaccination (also 9%) and land (7%), resulting in the majority (70%) of the farmers having received benefits in the form of hard issues.

Fewer farmers benefitted through soft support interventions such as agricultural education and training (13%), information and interaction (10%) and marketing (7%). The interaction could have included aspects of consultation regarded by the farmers as important determinants of empowerment.

The empowerment program therefore focused on the supply and delivery of hard support interventions in the form of assets or goods while the understanding of the respondents on empowerment was inclined to soft issues. There is a possibility that some of the supplied assets or goods were irrelevant to the needs of the farmers, especially as only ten percent may have been consulted. Considering the benefits derived by farmers from empowerment program implement-

ed by the GDARD, the perceptions of seven in ten of the farmers on the program were likely to be negative.

Perceptions of Farmers on Effectiveness of Support Agents

The views of farmers on effectiveness of the support agent influences their (the farmers) perceptions on empowerment programs under which the support agent is operating. Where the farmer perceptions on effectiveness of the support agents are positive, the perceptions on the empowerment program are also likely to be positive.

Agents perceived by more farmers to be effectively supporting agriculture were the GDARD (16%) and DAFF (13%) that are government departments at provincial and national levels respectively, and the ARC (19%) that is a parastatal. Farmers based organizations were perceived by fewer farmers to be effective in supporting agriculture. The farmers based organizations were WARD (6%) and AFASA (4%) and were regarded less effective in supporting farmers. The combined support of other smaller agents was enormous (43%), and those included government entities (Department of Land Affairs, Veterinary Services, MEC stakeholder meetings), non-governmental organizations (West Rand Farmers Forum, and South African Poultry Association), and faith based organizations (Health Church Prayer and Seventh Day Adventist Church) in the study area (Table 6).

The combined support by GDARD, DAFF and ARC was regarded effective by half (48%) of the farmers and would likely follow the policies, strategies and processes of implementation of empowerment programs, as the agents are themselves funded by government. Although the support of the government inclined agents was regarded effective by half of the respondents, it was probably not focused on the critical needs and aspirations of the farmers. The regard for government inclined agents to be effective providers of support by half of the farmers should however be applauded, as it suggests that farmers still have some confidence in the government (Table 6).

CONCLUSION

The majority (59%) of the farmers surveyed in Gauteng Province perceived soft (intangible)

Table 6: Perceptions of farmers on effectiveness of agents supporting farmers in the Gauteng Province

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Frequ- ency</i>	<i>Perce- ntage</i>
GDARD	11	16
ARC	13	19
DAFF	9	13
WARD	4	6
AFASA	3	4
Others	30	43
Total	70	100

Key: GDARD - Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, ARC - Agricultural Research Council, DAFF - Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, WARD - Women in Agriculture and Rural Development, AFASA - African Farmers Association of South Africa.

issues to be important determinants of empowerment in agriculture. The soft issues regarded as important determinants of empowerment were consultation (29%), agricultural education and training (26%) and market access (4%). Only one in three (35%) farmers mentioned hard (tangible) issues of provision of infrastructure and equipment (14%), land reform (14%), and agricultural input supply (7%) to be important determinants of empowerment in agriculture. At least six percent of the farmers perceived provision of funding to be an important determinant of empowerment in agriculture, where funding may be used to procure both soft and hard issues.

Only one in three (35.7%) of the farmers perceived agriculture empowerment policies, strategies and processes to be good (effective, progressive and working). The rest (64.3%) of the farmers had negative perceptions on the policies, strategies and processes, suggesting that the policy frameworks were not aligned to the farmers understanding of empowerment in agriculture that favored soft compared to hard interventions. However, perceptions on the types and frequencies of supported provided tended to contradict those mentioned for policy frameworks. Support interventions provided by major government agents were daily infrastructure and extension (GDARD), annual training and advice (ARC), and annual advice and study groups (DAFF) with infrastructure being the only hard support intervention mentioned. Support provision by farmer organizations also focused on soft issues while that provided by other support agents included both soft and hard issues.

Although support interventions were perceived to have been dominated by soft issues aligned to the farmers' perceptions of empowerment in agriculture, hard (tangible) issues were mentioned by the majority of the respondents (70%) as benefits derived from the (empowerment) programs. The benefits in the form of hard support interventions were farm infrastructure (24%), agricultural inputs (21%), biological assets (9%), animal vaccination (9%), and land (7%). Only three in ten (30%) farmers mentioned benefits in the form of soft interventions, and those were agricultural education and training (13%), information and interaction (10%), and marketing (7%).

Considering the effectiveness of the support agents, most farmers mentioned the ARC (19%), followed by GDARD (16%), DAFF (13%), WARM (6%) and least AFASA (4%) with two in three (43%) of the agents included under *others*. Except for GDARD and agents included under *others* who provided both hard and soft support interventions, the rest of the named agents provided only soft support issues. Although the soft support interventions were perceived to have benefitted only thirty percent of the farmers, they were regarded effective by majority of respondents (as reported for support agents providing those interventions). Support interventions of empowerment programs in agriculture should therefore prioritize soft issues such as consultation, information, counseling, advice, training, and market assessment that should inform decisions on hard support provision (whether to support or not, and type of support).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Empowerment programs in agriculture should prioritize soft (intangible) issues, as they are critical for the success of any empowerment initiative. Empowerment policies, strategies and processes of the GDARD should be reviewed to address the aspirations of farmers, and such reviews should be done in consultation with the farmers. Informed by the nature of the empowerment program, effective agents should be identified to participate in the empowerment initiative.

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