

ABSTRACT

Agriculture is the backbone of Kenya's economy, and hence its importance in enhancing foreign trade, food security, poverty alleviation, national development and revitalizing human welfare. Despite the importance of the sector, more than three-quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) of the country's area is dryland in the form of Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs), in which rain-fed agriculture is largely unviable livelihood option. In the drylands of Kenya therefore, livestock rearing and dryland farming are the most important livelihood options for resident communities given the climatic conditions. The adverse natural weather conditions are compounded by anthropogenic activities that degrade the environment, making local residents high disadvantaged in matters livelihood. As a result, food insecurity remains the greatest challenge in the ASALs of Kenya. While weather patterns are responsible for food insecurity, other factors come in to escalate want in these areas such as gender-based division of labor and cultural dictates that limit food production. This study investigated the gender dimension of dryland farming practices in the drylands of Embu County and the attendant implications on food production and security at the household level. It used both qualitative and quantitative methods of social investigation, while giving more emphasis on the former as data collection procedures. In addition, the study utilized both qualitative and quantitative data analysis procedures, while putting more emphasis on the former. It henceforth pointed at implications of gender-based division of labor in dryland farming on food production and security at the household level. Such findings have been generalized not only for the dryland areas exhibiting similar socio-economic and climatic conditions, but also on a national scale. From this study, it was determined that women faced several challenges in their food production efforts and these had more to do with culture than natural weather and structural problems. In the same vein, they were arguably the hands-on food producers although returns to them were not in line with their efforts. On their part, men had several opportunities in food production, although they were not fully utilized. This has implications for below potential food production and possibility of household food insecurity. As a result, a gender inclined framework of the best practices was the outcome, which is expected to bring a positive difference in food production to assuage household food security. From the findings, policy recommendations were made regarding dryland farming to enhance household food security in semi-arid areas of Embu County and other areas with similar climatic, socio-cultural and economic conditions. It is the implementation of the recommendations which is expected to enhance dryland farming and agricultural productivity in order to alleviate food insecurity and stimulate community welfare as well as national development