

GOVERNMENT STRATEGIC RESPONSES ON MANAGEMENT OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY SMALL-SCALE FRESH TOMATO FARMERS IN MBEERE-SOUTH DISTRICT, KENYA

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Abstract

Small- scale fresh tomato farming in Mbeere- South District, Kenya is hampered by inadequate technical expertise among farmers, unavailability of farm inputs, limited access to credit and inaccessibility of business information services. The study targeted approximately 200 tomato farmers along Masinga dam in the District. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the strategic responses by government on the management of these challenges. It was important to evaluate government's performance on these strategic areas at a time when it is working on the achievement of Vision 2030. Descriptive research was used. Questionnaires and face-to-face interview was used to collect data. Statistical Package for Social Sciences software was used to analyse data. Frequencies, means, and percentages were used and results presented in tables and charts. The study established that the government had done very little on the strategic areas looked at. The recommendations would make tomato farming a profitable venture.

Key words:

Strategic responses, Management of challenges

1.0 Introduction

Mbeere-South District hosts the famous seven folks dams which include Kindaruma, Kiambere, Kamburu, Masinga, Grand falls, Mutonga and Gitaru. Mostly the small scale fresh tomato production is carried out by farmers along Masinga dam. Small scale fresh tomato farming is a form of Small and Micro Enterprise (SME) which plays a significant role in the Kenyan economy.

Most of these Small and Micro enterprises (SMEs) operate within the informal economy, a sector commonly referred to as informal sector, or in the Kenya context, *Jua Kali* (Mitullah, 2003). The Kenya Labour Force Survey Report of 1998/99 indicates that the sector covers all semi-organized

and unregulated activities that are small scale in terms of employment. The report notes that the activities are largely undertaken by self-employed persons or employees with few workers in the open markets, in market stalls, in both developed and undeveloped premises, (Republic of Kenya, Labour Force Survey, 2003).

Farming play a crucial role in the social and economic development of a country. The Kenyan Government in its vision 2030 is pursuing a National Development Strategy that seeks to instill rapid and sustained economic growth and reduce the high incidence of poverty. Poverty in Kenya is one among many problems, which include insecurity, a high mortality rate, lack of ready market, poor infrastructure, and lack of business information support for SMEs.

The study focused Mbeere-South District in Kenya. Various crops are planted in this region. They include maize, peas, beans, green grams and millet which are seasonal. Tomato farming is done by irrigation in this region. The farmers face various challenges in the farming activities which include inadequate technical expertise, unavailability of farm inputs, limited access to credit and inaccessibility of business information services. By evaluating and understanding the strategic responses by the government on the management of the challenges faced by small scale fresh tomato farmers, it is possible to make recommendations which would help these farmers improve this important sector in Mbeere-South District.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Small scale fresh tomato farming as an upcoming business in Mbeere-South District is bound to face various problems such as inadequate technical expertise among farmers, unavailability of farm inputs, limited access to credit, and inaccessibility of business information services. From the quarterly reports of April to June, July to September and October to December 2011 (Republic of Kenya, 2011) which were obtained from Mwea Divisional Agriculture office, several constraints which the farmers face in this sector were highlighted. They included inadequate greenhouse technology, unpredictable flooding of Masinga dam, non-availability of Government subsidised fertilizer, high cost of fuel, expensive chemicals, unstable market prices, unreliable water for irrigation and poor road network.

Many researches have been done on the implication of technical expertise, access to farm inputs, access to credit facilities, and business information services. Sapienza and Grimm, (1997) argues that high education level has a positive impact on firm performance. Kolvereid (1992) shows that entrepreneurs with high education are more likely to have their business grow. At another level, Meja, (2003) argues that without technical expertise small scale farmers may not be able to control pests and diseases attacking their produce.

Quality farm inputs are a requirement for higher yields by the farmers and with the liberalisation of the production and importation of agricultural inputs, the number of competitors increase, quality is diversified and prices are open to the law of demand and supply hence the sale of fake inputs by unscrupulous agencies (Chianu, 2008).

Mead and Musinga, (1995) argues that lack of credit and finance whether for working capital or other type is a major constraint to the SMES. Most SMEs rely mostly on their own savings and reinvest profits for their business which is not sufficient. Business growth is determined by how successfully one sells products and services.

Hult *et al.*, (2003) argues that market orientation and superior products and services enables better satisfaction of customers and stakeholders which in turn result in a firm's growth. Business

information, according to (Thomas and Ballard, 1995) is raw data converted into a form to enable the user to make a decision in responses to a business need. Information and business information services are of strategic importance to business as the success of any firm depends on its ability to acquire the right information at the right time and cost.

These researches clearly show that availability of technical expertise, credit facilities, business information services, farm inputs and market has a positive impact on the growth of a firm. Non-availability of the same poses challenges to the firm and contributes to stagnation. These challenges include inadequate technology, non-availability of subsidized fertilizer, expensive chemicals, insufficient business information services, unstable market prices and poor road network. Small scale fresh tomato farmers in Mbeere South District are among those affected by these challenges. The researcher intends to evaluate the government on the management of these challenges through technical expertise, credit facilities, business information services and farm inputs.

1.3 Objectives

The overall objective was to evaluate the strategic responses by the government on the management of the challenges faced by small scale fresh tomato farmers in Mbeere-South District.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

1. To establish the extent to which the government has provided technical expertise in the management of the challenges faced by the small-scale fresh tomato farmers.
2. To establish the extent to which the government has been able to provide affordable farm inputs to the farmers.
3. To determine the extent to which the government has helped manage the challenges faced by the farmers through access to credit.
4. To establish the extent to which the government has been able to provide business information services to the farmers.

1.4 Research Questions

1. To what extent has the government provided technical expertise in the management of the challenges faced by the small-scale fresh tomato farmers?
2. To what extent has the government been able to provide affordable farm inputs to the farmers?
3. To what extent has the government helped manage the challenges faced by the farmers through access to credit?
4. To what extent has the government been able to provide business information services to the farmers?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study sought to evaluate the strategic responses by the government on the management of the challenges faced by small-scale fresh tomato farmers in Mbeere-South District. The study was important for the following reasons. First, by establishing the extent to which the government had managed the various challenges faced by small-scale fresh tomato farmers, it would help make

recommendations that would be an eye opener to majority of the farmers and policy makers who would be able to make informed decisions. Secondly, as the government seeks to create jobs, eradicate poverty and achieve Vision 2030, it is important for small-scale farmers to be supported in terms of the skills and knowledge in order to achieve more growth and profitability. By evaluating the strategic responses by the government on the management of the challenges faced by small-scale fresh tomato farmers, it would help the policy makers make informed decisions which would be a milestone towards uplifting the living standards of these tomato farmers who have the potential of even exporting their product and earn foreign exchange, hence the achievement of Vision 2030 goal of creating a globally competitive and prosperous country with a high quality of life by 2030” by transforming Kenya into a newly industrializing middle – income country (NIC) and providing a high quality life for all its citizens in a clean and secure environment(Vision 2030) . Lastly, it is also important to know that the revealing of the findings of the study would add a body of knowledge on small-scale farming and this would help those in the farming business, the potential farmers and also the policy makers in the region.

2.0 Literature Review

This chapter contains literature on the many researches that have been done on the implication of technical expertise, access to farm inputs, access to credit facilities and business information services. These researches clearly show that availability of technical expertise, credit facilities, business information services and farm inputs have a positive impact on the growth of a firm. Non-availability of the same poses challenges to the firm and contributes to stagnation. The researcher intended to evaluate the government on the management of these challenges through technical expertise, credit facilities, business information services and farm inputs. The literature also looked at the various theories of strategic responses which also provided background information required for the study.

2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual

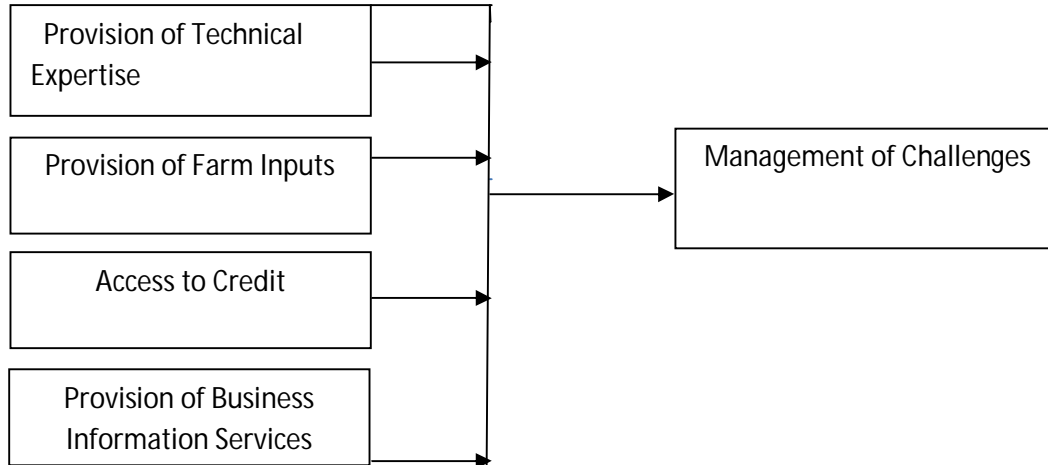
The importance of technical expertise, access to farm inputs, access to credit facilities and business information services has been recognized by many researchers. Kolvereid (1992) shows that entrepreneurs with high education are more likely to have their business grow. Quality farm inputs are a requirement for higher yields by the farmers and with the liberalisation of the production and importation of agricultural inputs, the number of competitors increase, quality is diversified and prices are open to the law of demand and supply hence the sale of fake inputs by unscrupulous agencies (Chianu, 2008). Mead and Musinga, (1995) argues that lack of credit and finance whether for working capital or other type is a major constraint to the SMES. Most SMEs rely mostly on their own savings and reinvest profits for their business which is not sufficient. Business growth is determined by how successfully one sells products and services. Hult *et al.*, (2003) argues that market orientation and superior products and services enables better satisfaction of customers and stakeholders which in turn result in a firm’s growth. Business information, according to (Thomas and Ballard, 1995) is raw data converted into a form to enable the user to make a decision in responses to a business need. Information and business information services are of strategic importance to business as the success of any firm depends on its ability to acquire the right information at the right time and cost. It is evident that availability of technical expertise, access to

farm inputs, access to credit facilities and business information services makes a business to grow. Thus good management of the same is very important for the prosperity of a business entity.

Conceptual Framework

Independent variables

Dependent variables



3.0 Research Methodology

The study employed the survey research design, which is used to enable researchers to gather information, summarize, present and interpret for the purpose of clarification (Orodho, 2002). Descriptive research was used based on the fact that in this study the researcher was interested on describing the state of affairs as they existed at that time, (Kothari, 2004). There are approximately 200 farmers in Mbeere South District who produce tomatoes along Masinga dam, using water from River Tana to irrigate the crop and they were all targeted. Simple random sampling was used by the researcher to select a sample of forty small scale fresh tomato farmers from the target population. A list of the farmers from the divisions was obtained by the researcher and they were allocated numbers which were picked randomly until the required sample was realised. The researcher used both the interview and the structured questionnaire to collect data. Questionnaires were administrated to the literate farmers and then the researcher had face-to-face interviews with the illiterate farmers. Frequencies, means, and percentages were used to analyse the data. Statistical Package of Social Sciences Software (SPSS) was used. The results were presented inform of tables and charts.

4.0 Results and Discussions

Figure 4.1 indicate that out of the 40 respondents, 30 had technical training in tomato farming who represented 75 % while 10 respondents had no technical training and they represented 25%. Technical expertise is very crucial for the success of any business. The fact that the majority of the respondents are trained on tomato farming, this implies that they should be able to utilize these skills to maximize on tomato productivity hence making good profit on tomato farming. Table 4.2 shows the source of the training for those farmers who had training. Out of the 30 trained farmers 20 had sponsored themselves in various institutions to get skills while 10 of them used the skills given to them by the extension workers. This analysis implies that although majority of the tomato farmers were trained on tomato farming, the extent to which the government assisted on the training was very minimal. This explains clearly that the government had not to a large extent been

able to provide the crucial extension services in the area which aims at improving productivity through training of the farmers. Failure of the government not to empower the farmers with the farming skills would have led to low production of the tomatoes especially by those respondents not trained. Thus training of these farmers by the government is very important in order for them to be able to acquire the necessary skills thus improving on their productivity and living standards.

The figure 4.2 shows the impact of training on productivity of the tomatoes on respondents who had training. The figure shows that 73% of respondents were impacted positively. Only 17% were affected negatively and 10% of the respondents felt no effect.

Considering that 75% Of the respondents had training and 73% were impacted positively, this explains that those whose impact on production was negative were those who had not been trained and an insignificant number of those trained. This implies that training has a very positive effect on production of tomatoes. According to Kolvereid (1992) entrepreneurs with high education are more likely to have their business grow. Therefore training on tomato farming make the farmers improve on tomato productivity hence growth of the business.

The study sought responses on whether the respondents had regular training offered by the government. Figure 4.3 shows that out of 40 respondents interviewed, only 2 % had regular training by the government. The 2% who had government training said that the training had a positive impact on their tomato farming. Majority, of the respondents, 98 % did not have the regular training. This analysis signifies that to a large extent the government has not been able to put up strategies on the training of the farmers in this area thus training is still a challenge to them. The percentage trained by the government is too small that there is need for the government to come up with measures on training in order to equip the farmers with the necessary skills to improve on productivity. Lack of the necessary skills on tomato farming may therefore lead to the farmers using their own knowledge hence low productivity.

The research sought responses on the accessibility of farm inputs. Table 4.3 indicates that 8% of the respondents agreed that the farm inputs are very accessible while 72 % reported they were accessible. Only 12 % of respondent said the farm inputs were inaccessible and 8% supported that the inputs were very inaccessible. Greater percentage of the respondents agreed that the farm inputs were available. This implies that availability of the farm inputs was not a major challenge to the farmers but other factors would have made the farmers not access the farm inputs.

Table 4.4 indicated that majority of respondents 87% acquired farm inputs from authorized dealers, while 13 % obtained from private traders. Considering that farm inputs were available and most farmers got them from dealers authorized by the government, it was evident that the government had performed well in the provision of farm inputs to the farmers by making them available through the authorized dealers.

The research wanted to establish the rate the government had subsidized farm inputs. The responses were represented in figure 4.4. The number of respondents interviewed was 40 but only 39 responded to this particular question. Therefore the response rate was 99%. Out of the 39 respondents 3% believed that the government subsidized sometimes, another 3% felt the farm inputs were subsidized always. Majority of respondents 95% said that the government has never subsidized farm inputs. Therefore although the farm inputs were available through the authorized dealers, the price was the major reason which made the farmers not to access them. This implies that the extent to which the government provided farm inputs is minimal since there is need to subsidize them and make them affordable to all farmers.

The frequency table 4.5 indicates that 23 of the respondents representing 57% did not have access to credit facilities from banks and cooperative societies. Only 17 respondents who were represented by 43% had access to credit facilities. This shows that more than half of the respondents did not access

credit facilities from banks and cooperative societies. The study therefore established that accessibility to credit by the farmers is a big challenge in the area. This implies that the non-accessibility of the credit to many of the farmers may be as a result of some factors which need to be established by the government so that strategies can be laid down to help the farmers access the credit.

Table 4.6 shows that out of 17 respondents who had access to credit facilities, 13 borrowed from cooperative societies and only 4 borrowed from banks. Out of the 23 respondents who did not borrow from banks and cooperative societies, 2 borrowed from groups, 5 borrowed from friends and family members and 16 did not borrow from anywhere. The analysis implies that majority of the respondents had no formal way of accessing credit from financial institutions to boost their production. A very small percentage borrowed from cooperative societies and banks and others did not borrow at all. This shows that the farmers may have lacked information which could have guided them on the borrowing hence accessibility to credit was not possible.

Figure 4.5 shows that 54% of respondents believed that the rates of terms of credit offered by financial institution were favourable compared to 46% who felt that the rates were unfavourable. Looking at the previous analysis, the number which accessed credit from both bank and cooperative societies was smaller than those who did not access from them although the terms were favourable. This implies that other reasons may have contributed to the farmers not accessing credit from these facilities.

Figure 4.6 indicates that 54% of the respondent believed that the government assisted tomato farmers in accessing credit facilities through education by the extension workers on the institutions which over credit and 41% believed that there was no assistance by the government while 5% were not aware of any assistance by the government to access credit. This implies that though slightly half of the respondents got information on access to credit, a lot needs to be done by the government to make sure that many of the farmers access the necessary information on credit which would help them improve on their productivity.

Table 4.7 displays the results of the frequency at which respondent received information from extension workers on how to manage tomato farms. Out of the 40 respondents, 70% said that they are educated on sometimes basis while 30% never received any information. None of the respondents always got the information. This implies that provision of business information by extension workers was not consistent and this made the farmers even lack the necessary information such as credit accessibility which would help them maximize on their productivity.

Figure 4.7 indicates the results of the forums used by the government to pass information to tomato farmers. Out of the 40 respondents, 20% believed that the government used farmers' groups and 55% was through media which means that many forums were through media. Only 25 % of respondents said no forums were used by government. Information is very important for any business to grow. Therefore this analysis shows that it is important for the government to provide information by both the media and also the farmers' groups in order to equip the farmers with crucial information necessary in their tomato production.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study several things emerged in relation to the management of the challenges faced by the small-scale tomato farmers in Mbeere-South district by the government. On the provision of technical skills, affordable farm inputs, business information services and accessibility to credit, the government had done very little about them. In some cases the farmers were even not aware of what the government would offer to them. Involving and sensitizing the

farmers in different dimensions and approaches would help them get informed hence improve on production. Doing training and providing accessible credit facilities will yield satisfaction to the farmers and community at large, improve their well being and above all achieve high success rate.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that farmers whether trained or not should be involved in generating strategies and airing their opinions. Therefore the government should organize forums, seminars and agricultural trainings to ensure that the farmers are equipped with information and knowledge relevant in their farming activities. A system to distribute resources to the farmers and reliable means of transport of the produce to the market should be a key factor considering that tomatoes are very perishable. Therefore the government should embark on upgrading the various feeder roads leading to the farms to ease the transport problems. The government should also create forums to educate the farmers on how to access credit from the lenders since the low number registered in borrowing from the financial institutions could have been as a result of lack of the information on how to access the credit. Formation of cooperative societies would help the farmers access credit and farm inputs to help improve on their productivity and selling the produce locally on behalf of the farmers. The cooperative societies can also export the produce on behalf of the farmers. The government should also put up an information centre where ordinary farmers can go to raise their issues and also get informed on matters related to their area of production. More so extension workers should regularly be organizing education forums for the farmers in the region. Lack of involvement and commitment by farmers in generating strategies and new approaches towards farming would kill the farmers trust to the government and this often may result to failure. Therefore the researcher recommends that the farmers always be involved by the agriculture officers when making decisions which directly affect their area of production. Since most farmers get farming information through the media especially radios, most of the communications should be availed regularly through the local dialect which farmers listen to most and several farming programmes should be aired for the benefit of the farmers. Water is a key component in the production of tomatoes in Mbeere-South district. The focus was only on the farmers who irrigate their produce using water from Masinga dam. The government should also focus on other farmers who are far from the dam. Therefore strategies should be laid down on how to provide water even to these farmers either through the construction of dams to collect rain water and also through the provision of piped water which for many years has not been available in the region. Technology is a key factor in the Kenyan economy thus the farmers in this region should be trained on how to use greenhouse technology for higher productivity.

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APPENDIX A: Tables**Table 4.2 Source of training**

| Source | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Self-sponsorship | 20 | 50 |
| Extension workers | 10 | 25 |
| Total | 30 | 75 |

Table 4.3 Accessibility of farm inputs

| Accessibility | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very accessible | 3 | 8 |
| Accessible | 29 | 72 |
| Inaccessible | 5 | 12 |
| Very inaccessible | 3 | 8 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |

Table 4.4 Source of farm inputs

| Source | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Private traders | 5 | 13 |
| Authorized dealers | 35 | 87 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |

Table 4.5 Access to credit facilities from banks and cooperative societies

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 17 | 43 |
| No | 23 | 57 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |

Table 4.6 Cross tabulation of access and source of credit

| | | credit source | | | | | Total |
|-----------------------------|-----|---------------|-----------------------|--------|----------------------------|----------------|-------|
| | | Banks | Cooperative societies | Groups | Friends and family members | Not applicable | |
| Access to credit facilities | Yes | 4 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17 |
| | No | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 16 | 23 |
| Total | | 4 | 13 | 2 | 5 | 16 | 40 |

Table 4.7 Rate of how extension workers give information on farm management

| Rate | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Sometimes | 28 | 70 |
| Always | 0 | 0 |
| Never | 12 | 30 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |

APPENDIX B: Figures

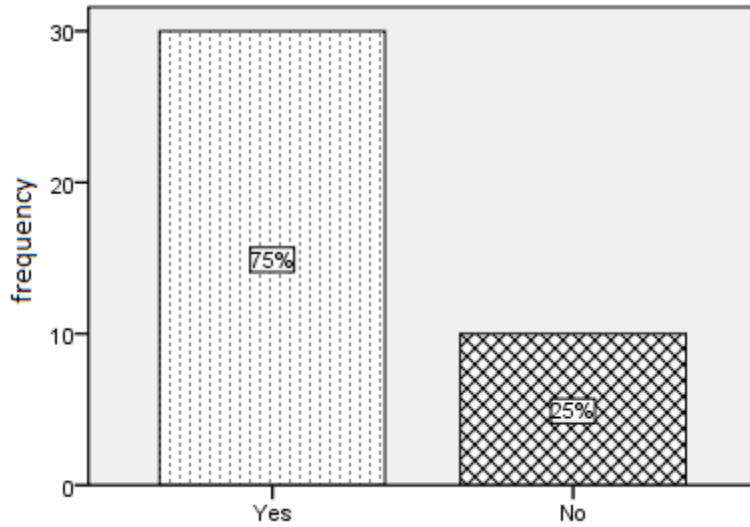


Figure 4.1 Technical training

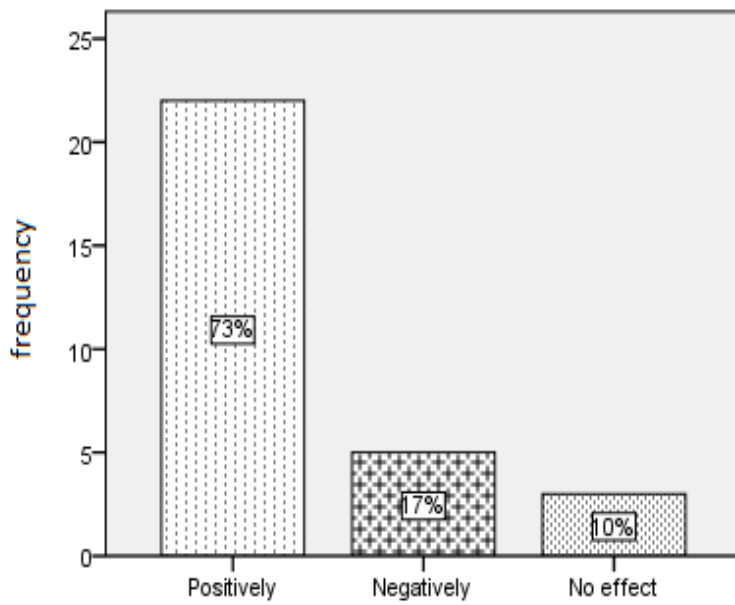


Figure 4.2 Impact of training

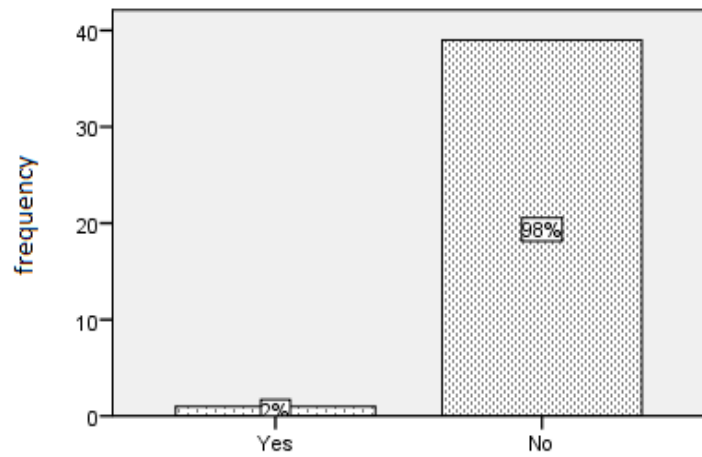


Figure 4.3 Regular training by the Government

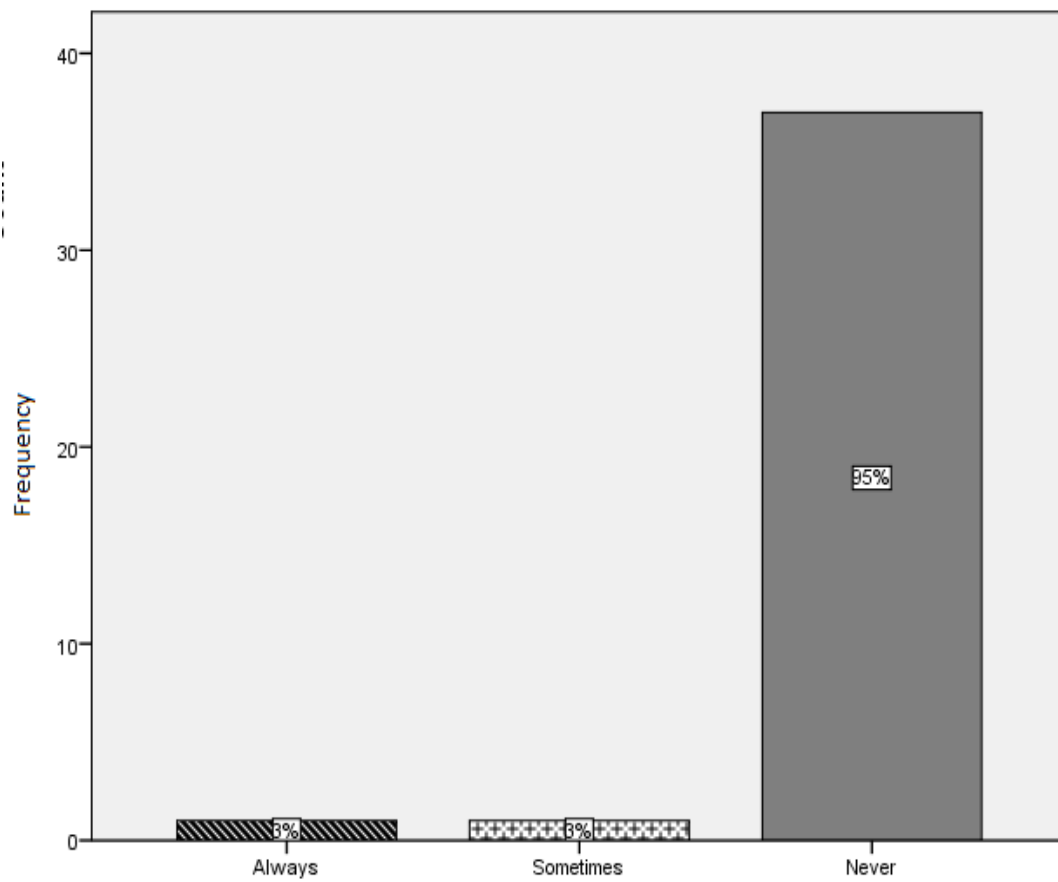


Figure 4.4 Farm Inputs subsidy by the Government

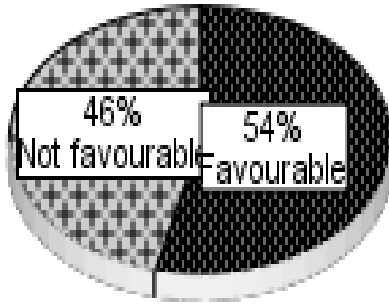


Figure 4.5 Terms of Credit

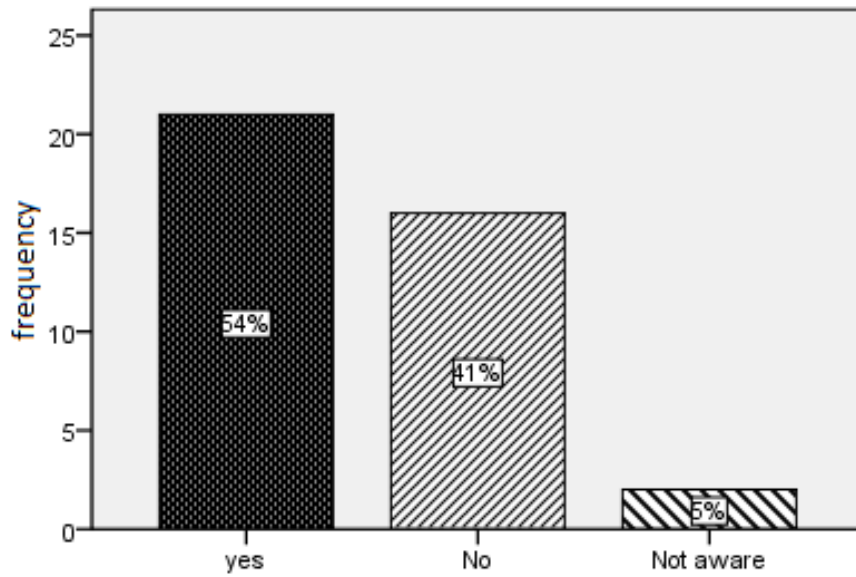


Figure 4.6 Government Assistance

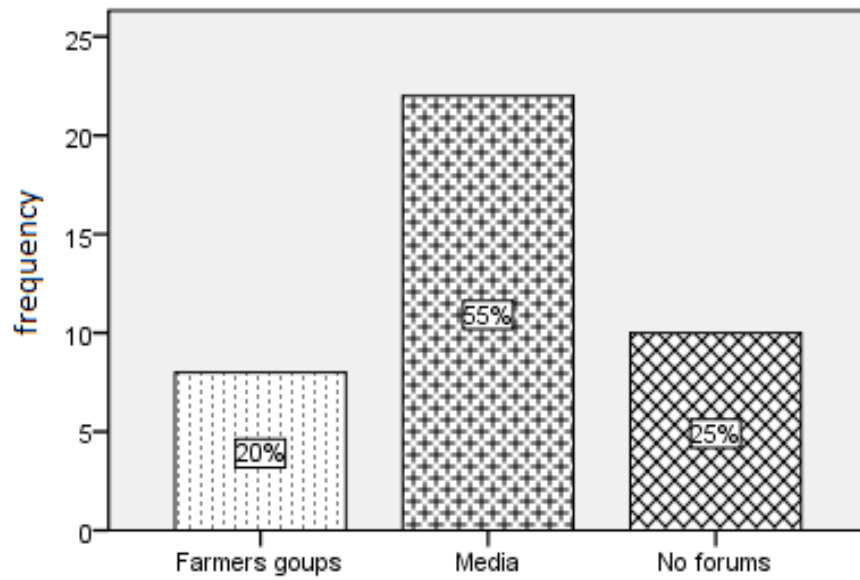


Figure 4.7 Forums used by the Government to avail information to farmers