
ABSTRACT

This paper articulates perceptions of farmers on Egerton University's community engagement activities as part of the results of a larger study commissioned by Transforming African Agricultural Universities to meaningfully contribute to Africa's growth and development (TAGDev). It analyses the impact of the university-community engagement activities on rural households. Community engagement provides universities with unique opportunities of experiencing community needs first-hand, contributing towards meeting them; not only during the engagement activities, but also through producing graduates with relevant knowledge, skills and attitude and through conducting relevant research. A survey conducted through researcher-administered questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews on purposively selected 84 beneficiaries of these community engagement activities revealed positive perceptions among farmers. The selected farmers practiced mixed farming with 98.8% growing maize as principal crop and 93.9% keeping cattle for milk production. On average, respondents had engaged with the university four times within the last five years. Almost all (98.8%) respondents engaged with the university to acquire new knowledge. Students facilitated most engagements (97%). Principal Component Analysis extracted five major benefits of these engagements; four of which were related to profitmaking and cost-cutting measures. Keeping farm records was the main component, explaining 55.1% of observed variance. However, follow-up was a major weakness of the university (87.6%). Designing a follow-up system embedded within the university-community engagement framework would ensure sustainability of projects and develop long term relationships characterised by continuous exchange of information between universities and communities.

Key words: Agricultural universities, community outreach, Egerton University, farmer perceptions, higher education, service learning, University-community engagement