

## **Adaptation to Rainfall Variability by Smallholder Farmers in Kwale County: A Case Study of Samburu and Tsimba Locations**

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### **Abstract**

*Rainfall received in Kwale County is highly variable negatively affecting agricultural production. Due to these variations, smallholder farmers in Kwale County have attempted to implement various adaptation mechanisms to help them cope. These include: sending children to school to enable them avail remittances when they get employed, seeking for seasonal jobs, work for food, embracing non-farm economic activities, planting of early maturing and drought tolerant crops, shifting from crop to livestock production or change in herd composition among others. These approaches have met a number of challenges such as: lack of improved seeds and information on weather incidences, inadequate capital to practice modern methods of farming, limited market to dispose of livestock during drought, frequent attack by pests and diseases. This study was conducted in Kwale County using survey research design and sought to determine effects rainfall variability and adaptation mechanisms used by the smallholder farmers in Kwale County. A sample of 272 households was picked through stratified and systematic sampling technique from Samburu and Tsimba Locations. Data was collected by use of pretested questionnaire from the sampled respondents and analyzed using Microsoft Office Excel and SPSS softwares. The study made the following recommendations to help improve the farmers' ability to adapt to rainfall variability: the number of functional meteorological stations in the County should be increased; the poor smallholder farmers should be empowered to fully implement rainwater harvesting technique, diversify and engage in both farm and non-farm economic activities that will ensure that the risks associated with rainfall variability are spread; the smallholder farmers should be supplied with adequate, high yielding and drought tolerant seed and encouraged to implement agroforestry programmes.*

**Key Words:** Seasonal Rainfall Variability, MAM Rainfall, OND Rainfall, Adaptation Mechanisms, Agro-ecological Zones.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The agricultural sector has a multiplier effect on any nation's socio-economic and industrial fabric because of the multifunctional nature of the sector (Ogen, 2007). It serves as the main source of food and employment to the rural population. Rain-fed

farming dominates agricultural production in Sub-Saharan Africa, covering around 97% of total cropland and exposes agricultural productivity to high seasonal rainfall variability (Alvaro *et al.*, 2009). This region experiences highly variable climate that manifests in climate extremes such as droughts and floods (Mwangi & Desanker 2007; IPCC 2007). According to WWF (2006), the Global circulation models predict that global warming will cause rainfall variability by up to 5-20% in Kenya by the year 2030. This prediction calls for the country to put in place the right infrastructure to save the smallholder farmers from sliding into abject poverty due to total loss of crops and livestock. Implementing the most appropriate adaptation techniques could significantly reduce the negative effects of rainfall variability (Parry *et al.*, 2009).

The extreme weather events have severe socio-economic impacts on agricultural production (Galvin *et al.*, 2004). Reduction in rainfall amount leads to reduced soil moisture, affecting pasture availability and length of growing season (Thornton *et al.*, 2002). Rainfall variability has significantly impacted on the rural smallholder farmers who rely mostly on natural rainfall for land tillage and agricultural production and according to IPCC (2007), rain fed agricultural production in Africa in general is projected to be reduced by up to 50% by 2020, resulting to serious food security challenges for the continent unless effective and appropriate adaptation mechanisms are identified and implemented.

According to Kori *et al.* (2012) and Allamano *et al.* (2010), marginal rain-fed agricultural areas with low and erratic precipitation are the most vulnerable and worst affected, depicting low and unpredictable level of crop production with the only option being development and implementation of appropriate adaptation. Admassie *et al.* (2006) and Deressa *et al.* (2008) indicate that female headed households, small-scale, rain-fed, smallholder farmers and pastoralists are the most vulnerable groups to climate change and rainfall variability. The poor smallholder farmers are more vulnerable to rainfall variability compared to the wealthy farmers who are capable of identifying and implementing the most adaptive strategies to reduce the impacts (Orindi & Eriksen, 2005; Mworio & Kinyamario, 2008). According to Field (2005), small stocks such as goats, breed rapidly and therefore able to recover quickly from impacts of rainfall variability as compared to cattle. Based on its impacts on crops and livestock production, rainfall variability has emerged as one of the major threats to livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa (Galvin *et al.*, 2004; IPCC 2007). According to Mureithi and Opiyo (2010), rainfall variability leads to decline in the number, distribution and productivity of permanent pastures and water points that livestock depends on and affects crops yields.

The magnitude of variability, frequency of event occurrence and rate of change within climate systems are examples of important attributes as they can affect farmer's ability to respond, cope and to adapt (Dessai and Hulme, 2003). Jerie and Ndabaningi (2011) found out that investing in rain-fed farming systems is of paramount importance if hunger and poverty are to be eradicated. Understanding the impacts of rainfall variability is of great importance if successful agricultural production is to be realized. The study established that farmer-training initiatives coupled with adequate and affordable inputs can reduce the problem of declining yield.

Agricultural production in Kwale County is majorly rain-fed. It is highly affected by inter-annual and seasonal rainfall variability which is attributed as a major cause of famine in the County. High variability in rainfall occurrence and amount create severe constraints for livestock and crop production because rainfall is one of the most critical factors for ecological and environmental processes. In rain-fed agriculture, the amount of water available to plants and for livestock production strongly depends on the rainy season's onset, length and cessation (Ati *et al.*, 2002; Saber, 2009).

Given that most farmers in Kwale County lead a peasantry nature of life, they are vulnerable to rainfall variability, where extreme conditions such as lack of rainfall, unpredictable pattern of rainfall, early or late onset and cessation of rains easily translates into low agricultural yields. Equipping smallholder farmers with comprehensive knowledge on rainfall variability empowers them to plant at the right time, identify the most reliable crop to plant and livestock to keep. Late onsets reduce the crop growing period and moisture availability for pasture development. Rainfall variability interferences with land preparation (clearing and ploughing), harvesting and planting time and influence the cost of farm inputs. Variation and reduction in number of rainy days results in conditions inadequate to effectively support crop and livestock production and therefore decline in livestock and crop yields. The effect of rainfall variability is spatially variable but strongly felt in arid and semi-arid areas.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Study Area**

Kwale County is in Coast Province (Figure 1). It lies within latitudes  $3^{\circ}30'S$  and  $4^{\circ}40'S$  and longitudes  $38^{\circ}27'E$  and  $39^{\circ}40'E$ . The County borders Taita Taveta County to the West, Kilifi County to the North, Mombasa County and Indian Ocean to the East and Republic of Tanzania to the South. It has a total population of 649,931 people, 122,047 households and total area coverage of 8,270.1 square kilometers (RoK, 2010a). Samburu and Tsimba Locations have a total population of 33,036 people, 5,415 households and area coverage of 445.7 square kilometers. Samburu and Tsimba Locations are mainly inhabited by the Duruma and Digo communities respectively but other communities such as Kamba, Kikuyu, Waitharaka, Luo, Duruma and even Europeans have significant presence (RoK, 2009; 2010a). Most of the farmers depend on rain-fed agriculture and therefore an accurate forecast and proper dissemination of information about rainfall pattern directly influences their vulnerability to rainfall variability.

The overall study site has monsoon type of climate; hot and dry from January to April and cool between June and August of every year. The study area experiences a bimodal rainfall pattern with the short rains occurring between October to December and the long rains occurring between March and June. The average annual rainfall ranges between 400mm and 1200mm (RoK, 2005).

The county is divided into three constituencies: Matuga, Kinango and Msambweni and 5 divisions: Kinango, Kubo, Matuga, Msambweni and Samburu. Matuga and Msambweni

divisions occupy the Coastal plains, Kinango and Samburu divisions are part of the semi-arid Nyika plateau while Kubo division covers the Coastal uplands. Samburu Location is in Samburu Division, semi-arid, L5-6 agro-ecological and livestock farming livelihood zone while Tsimba Location is in Matuga division, coastal plains, L4 agro-ecological and mixed farming livelihood zone. 32% of the population is classified as food insecure while 40% are in absolute poverty category (RoK, 2005; 2010a; 2010b).

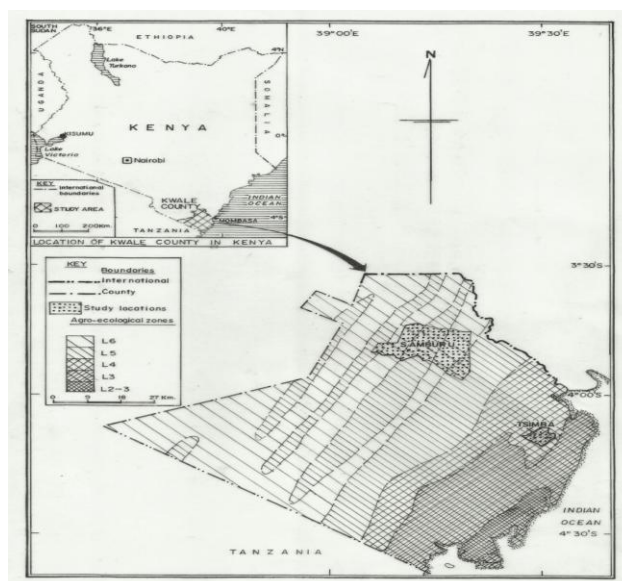


Figure 1: Study Area  
Source: Modified from Great World Atlas, 2005

This study used questionnaire and Key Informant Interview as instruments of data collection. A sample size of 272 households was picked through stratified and systematic sampling procedures to form the sample. A questionnaire that contained both closed and structured questions was used to collect data. Data collected through Key Informant Interview assisted in clarifying issues arising from the survey process. Secondary data was obtained from published books, relevant journals, theses and policy research working papers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

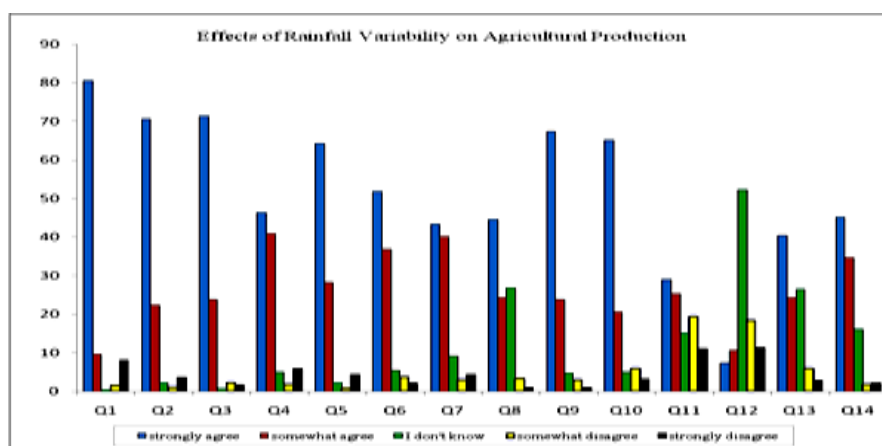
### Effects of Rainfall Variability on Crop and Livestock Production

Kwale County experiences three main types of rainfall variability: spatial variability - differences in total rainfall received across the agro-ecological zones; Inter-seasonal - deviations from long-term averages or the differences in rainfall between seasons; and Intra-seasonal - variations within the individual seasons. These variations are the causes of stress to agricultural production and yields in Kwale County. This conclusion concurs with the findings of Adejuwon (2005) who indicated that rainfall variations are the

causes of great stress to farming activities, crop production and yields in the Guinea Savanna of Nigeria. According to FAO (2001), extremes of droughts and floods and various forms of weather phenomena have wrecked havoc on the agricultural systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. Though the extreme events arising from rainfall variability are inherently abrupt, random and disastrous, the risks can be reduced through improved preparedness and planning, better information, stronger institution and new technologies.

Figure 2 shows that the sampled respondents approved various effects of rainfall variability on crop and livestock production. More than 60% of the sampled respondents strongly agreed with the following as effects of rainfall variability: interference with land preparation (clearing, ploughing), increase in the cost of farm inputs, interference with planting time, inadequacy in the amount of rainfall received in a year in supporting crop production, increment in cost of food crops and loss of livestock. 51.8% strongly agreed that crop yields have generally declined due to rainfall variability. Around 40% of respondents strongly agreed that rainfall variability results into: interference with harvesting time, decline in livestock production, emergence of crop and livestock diseases, forced smallholder farmers to change livelihood systems and that its threat is more on crops than livestock production.

The survey further revealed that only 7.4% of the respondents strongly agreed that shift or change in livestock breeds was a response to rainfall variability, 11.4% strongly disagreed with this idea while 52.2% were not aware. It was observed that the change in livestock breeds was not necessarily due to effects of rainfall variability but due to the need to acquire breeds that are high yielding or early maturing. There was a strong argument from a number of sampled respondents on whether rainfall variability had influenced rise in price of livestock products. 29% strongly agreed giving an example of milk, 25% somewhat agreed while 11% strongly disagreed, giving an example of cost of livestock that normally drops whenever droughts sets in resulting to drop in price of meat in the locality. With an exception of Q11 and Q12, on average, 57.6 of the sampled respondents strongly agreed with the above mentioned effects of rainfall variability, 3.4% strongly disagreed and only 8.7% were not aware.



| X - Axis Legend |                                                                                                |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q1              | Rainfall variability interferes with land preparation (clearing, ploughing etc)                |
| Q2              | The cost of farm inputs has increased because of rainfall variability                          |
| Q3              | Rainfall variability has interfered with planting time                                         |
| Q4              | Rainfall variability has interfered with harvesting time                                       |
| Q5              | The amount of rainfall received in a year is not adequate to support crop production as before |
| Q6              | Crop yields have generally declined due to rainfall variability                                |
| Q7              | Rainfall variability has led to decline in livestock production                                |
| Q8              | Rainfall variability has led to crop diseases                                                  |
| Q9              | The cost of food crops are increasing because of rainfall variability                          |
| Q10             | Rainfall variability has led to loss of livestock                                              |
| Q11             | The cost of livestock products have increased due to rainfall variability                      |
| Q12             | Rainfall variability has led to change in livestock breeds                                     |
| Q13             | Rainfall variability has led to the change of livelihood system                                |
| Q14             | The threat of rainfall variability is more on crop production than livestock production        |

Figure 2. Effects of rainfall variability on agricultural production  
Source: Survey Data, 2012

Table 1 shows outcomes of correlating mean rainfall received across the study period and crop and livestock production. Correlation analysis was used to establish the effects of mean rainfall received on crop yields, herd size and milk production. It was observed that all the cases display positive correlation coefficients. Herd sizes for cows, goats, sheep and number of birds (poultry) have  $r$  values of 0.531, 0.449, 0.645 and 0.1 respectively. Mean annual milk production has  $r = 0.635$ , cassava  $r = 0.619$ , coconut  $r = 0.510$ , cowpeas  $r = 0.526$ , green grams  $r = 0.529$ , groundnuts  $r = 1$ , maize  $r = 0.736$ , pigeon peas  $r = 0.113$  and sorghum  $r = 0.612$ . With  $r = 0.449$  for goats herd size,  $r = 0.1$  for number of birds and  $r = 0.113$  pigeon peas, the correlation coefficients indicates a weak influence of mean rainfall amount on goats herd size, number of birds (poultry) and pigeon peas. This implies that the proportion in yield influenced by rainfall variability in the study area is 44.9% for goats herd size, 10% for the number of birds and 11% for the pigeon peas production. The weak influence of rainfall variability on goat herd size, number of birds and pigeon peas points to the fact that goats, poultry and pigeon peas have high adaptability and tolerance to rainfall variability. This observation concurs with the findings of Mwang'ombe *et al.* (2011). The smallholder farmers in Kwale County rely more on maize and cassava production to meet household food demand.

Maize with  $r = 0.736$  indicate a strong positive correlation between maize yield and mean rainfall received. This result implies that maize is the most affected by rainfall variability in the study area. The amount of rainfall received and proper timing determines efficiency of maize crop development and yields. Maize seeds require water for germination and seedling growth. Maize is used mainly to make *ugali* and porridge and because it is used as staple food in the study area, instability in the maize yield has major consequences on population (Ayanlade *et al.*, 2009; Fakorede *et al.*, 2004; Okpara, 2003; Adejuwon, 2005). It was also observed that maize pests and diseases become dominant with rainfall variability, a finding that concurs with the observations of Ayanlade *et al.* (2009).

Cassava with  $r = 0.619$ , reflects a strong positive correlation between rainfall amount and cassava yields, indicating that the proportion of variation in cassava yield determined by rainfall variability is 61.9%. Rainfall affects crop growth, tuber development and yield (Ayanlade *et al.*, 2009). Cassava is planted throughout the rainy season, but early enough to ensure there is enough moisture for partial tuber development. Early cessation of rains during the growing period creates water stress, reducing top and root biomass, affecting the yields (Agbaje & Akinlosotu, 2004). Cassava does well if planted early to allow for water utilization during vegetative growth, root and tuber development. For short growing seasons, it is prudent to plant early maturing or drought-tolerant varieties.

Positive correlation between the livestock and crop yields and rainfall received concurs with the findings of Ayanlade *et al.* (2009) which observed that rainfall variability is the key climate element that determines the success of agricultural production, and variations in yields is strongly influenced by fluctuations in seasonal rainfall characteristics.

Table 1. Correlation analysis between rainfall amount and livestock/crop production

| Livestock and Crop Production                 | Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Herd size of cows                             | 0.531                               |
| Herd size of goats                            | 0.449                               |
| Number of birds (poultry)                     | 0.100                               |
| Herd size of sheep                            | 0.645                               |
| Mean annual milk production                   | 0.635                               |
| Cassava production (in bags per hectares)     | 0.619                               |
| Coconut production (in bags per hectares)     | 0.510                               |
| Cowpeas production (in bags per hectares)     | 0.526                               |
| Green grams production (in bags per hectares) | 0.529                               |
| Groundnuts production (in bags per hectares)  | 1.000                               |
| Maize production (in bags per hectares)       | 0.736                               |
| Pigeon peas production (in bags per hectares) | 0.113                               |
| Sorghum production (in bags per hectares)     | 0.612                               |

Correlation is significant at the 0.05level (2-tailed)

Source: Survey Data, 2012

The study findings on effects of rainfall variability indicate that agricultural production in Kwale County depends on rainfall received during the OND and MAM season and therefore crop failures, livestock loss or low yields in the County is mainly due to high rainfall variability.

### Adaptation Strategies

Table 2 displays a total of 30 strategies used by smallholder farmers in Kwale County to adapt to rainfall variability. It shows the number of respondents out of 272 sampled farmers who adopted the strategy, percentage and rank of the specific strategy. The widely used strategy despite the challenges involved was sending children to school to acquire education that would enable them secure gainful employment and support the

household through remittances to provide for household food requirements or acquire farm inputs. 55.9% of the sampled respondents have been seeking for seasonal jobs as an alternative source of livelihood whenever the rains or crops fail or as source of income to acquire farm inputs and purchase livestock. 52.9% offered labour in return for food from relatively economically stable neighbours or non-governmental organizations such as the World Vision. The work for food program was majorly supported by World Vision Organization before terminating its programmes/projects and services in the County in the year 2010 following disagreement with the community. 42.5% of the sampled farmers engaged in non-farm economic activities such as sale of charcoal, handicrafts and brooms and operating kiosks. 38.2% relied on remittances from other family members who are in formal or informal employment.

For the purpose of risk-spreading, out of the sampled respondents, 31.6% had planted short duration crop varieties, 28.7% planted different crop varieties and 11.8% planted drought tolerant crops while 10.7 practiced mixed farming. 4.4% of the farmers increased the number of browsers while 0.4% replaced the exotic breeds of livestock with indigenous breeds because they were least affected by rainfall variability. To increase productivity and withstand rainwater shortages, 5.1% engaged in rainwater harvesting and 1.5% dug boreholes and sunk wells.

Table 2. Adaptation strategies used by smallholder farmers in responding to rainfall variability

| Adaptation strategies                                                                                                                  | Frequency | %    | Rank |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------|------|
| Sending of children to school to get education to enable them secure employment and therefore avail remittances as adaptation strategy | 169       | 62.1 | 1    |
| Seeking for seasonal jobs as adaptation strategy                                                                                       | 152       | 55.9 | 2    |
| Work for food (offering labour in return of food) as adaptation strategy                                                               | 144       | 52.9 | 3    |
| Embracing non-farm economic activities as adaptation strategy                                                                          | 115       | 42.3 | 4    |
| Reliance on remittances from other family members as adaptation strategy                                                               | 104       | 38.2 | 5    |
| Planting short duration crop varieties as adaptation strategy                                                                          | 86        | 31.6 | 6    |
| Planting different varieties of crops as adaptation strategy                                                                           | 78        | 28.7 | 7    |
| Shift from crop farming to livestock farming as adaptation strategy                                                                    | 57        | 21   | 8    |
| Selling off livestock during dry seasons as adaptation strategy                                                                        | 55        | 20.2 | 9    |
| Planting drought tolerant crops as adaptation strategy                                                                                 | 32        | 11.8 | 10   |
| Practicing mixed farming                                                                                                               | 29        | 10.7 | 11   |
| Migration to other areas least affected by rainfall variability as adaptation strategy                                                 | 24        | 8.8  | 12   |
| Practicing crop rotation as adaptation strategy                                                                                        | 17        | 6.2  | 13   |
| Rain water harvesting as adaptation strategy                                                                                           | 14        | 5.1  | 14   |
| Increase in browsers (goats) as adaptation strategy                                                                                    | 12        | 4.4  | 15   |
| Transferring livestock to other areas least affected by rainfall variability as adaptation strategy                                    | 10        | 3.7  | 16   |
| Use of composite manure as adaptation strategy                                                                                         | 8         | 2.9  | 17   |
| Use of mulching as adaptation strategy                                                                                                 | 8         | 2.9  | 17   |

|                                                                                                                                                |   |      |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|------|----|
| Intercropping cereals with legumes as adaptation strategy                                                                                      | 7 | 2.6  | 19 |
| Development of water sources (e.g. Boreholes, pans, dams, wells) as adaptation strategy                                                        | 4 | 1.5  | 20 |
| Training on livestock husbandry and healthcare in response to diseases especially those related to rainfall variability as adaptation strategy | 4 | 1.5  | 20 |
| Reducing the number of livestock kept as adaptation strategy                                                                                   | 3 | 1.10 | 22 |
| Changing the extent of land under crop production as adaptation strategy                                                                       | 3 | 1.1  | 23 |
| Selling portions of land to buy food as adaptation strategy                                                                                    | 3 | 1.1  | 23 |
| Changing the extent of land put under grazing as adaptation strategy                                                                           | 2 | 0.7  | 25 |
| Practicing agroforestry as adaptation strategy                                                                                                 | 2 | 0.7  | 25 |
| Change in livestock herd compositions                                                                                                          | 2 | 0.7  | 25 |
| Zero tillage to conserve soil moisture as adaptation strategy                                                                                  | 1 | 0.4  | 28 |
| Strategic livestock feed reserves to be used during droughts as adaptation strategy                                                            | 1 | 0.4  | 28 |
| Leasing farms as adaptation strategy                                                                                                           | 1 | 0.4  | 28 |

Source: Survey Data, 2012

When the sampled respondents were asked whether the current adaptation strategies were effective and sustainable, 36% of the respondents admitted that the strategies were effective and sustainable and had helped improve yields of crops and livestock production while 64% had the opinion that the strategies were not effective and sustainable and did not have positive impact on crop and livestock production and therefore no improvement in livestock and crop production/yields. They pointed out lack of financial capital as the main obstacle towards implementation of adaptation mechanisms; a response that concurs with that of RoK (2005; 2010a; 2010c) that indicates that 32% of the population of Kwale County is classified as food insecure while 40% are in absolute poverty category.

### **Most Adaptive Strategies**

#### ***Planting high yielding, early maturing and drought, disease and pest tolerant crops.***

The sampled respondents acknowledged planting of high yielding, early maturing and drought, disease and pest tolerant crops as one of the most adaptive mechanisms that can reduce the effects of rainfall variability in Kwale County. It can enable the smallholder farmers realize high yields and reduce cost of controlling pest and diseases, but due to lack of financial resources, most of the poor smallholder farmers in the County cannot implement the strategy.

To improve crop productivity and reduce effects of rainfall variability, KARI-Mtwapa since 2007 produced certified seed of maize and clean planting materials of cassava and made them available to farmers in coastal districts in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture. The certified maize seed known as the Coast Composite can yield 37 bags per ha compared to the locally produced seeds that give 12 bags per ha. Karembo, new improved cassava variety, resistant to cassava diseases can yield up to 70 tons per ha compared to 9-12 tons per ha of Kibandameno or Kaleso, the local cultivars which are low yielding (Wekesa *et al.*, 2003).

KARI do not distribute adequate seeds but advise farmers given seeds to multiply and distribute to neighbouring farmers for subsequent seasons. This has not been successful as a number of farmers cook the certified maize seeds and fail to plant due to poverty or fail to multiply the cassava seeds and share. More so, most farmers prefer Kibandameno cassava variety because it is tastier than Karembo.

Other agencies that develop improved seeds include: The International Centre for Maize and Wheat Improvement (CIMMYT) and International Crops research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). CIMMYT develops and distribute maize varieties that are able to yield more than the locally available cultivars and can perform better in regions that experience unreliable rainfall and ICRISAT develops and distribute pigeon pea that is drought tolerant and early maturing varieties, taking three months to mature.

Due to lack of financial resources to acquire these seeds, the Government, NGOs and private sector should assist the smallholder farmers access the seeds at the right time, in adequate quantity and be used for the intended purpose. Farmers need training to make them embrace the new seeds. There is also need to establish policy framework that can easily facilitate the use of the improved seeds among the poor smallholder farmers.

**Rainwater harvesting.** Water harvesting has contributed to land rehabilitation enabling communities to adapt to drought or highly variable rainfall, with subsequent reduction of poverty (Orindi *et al.*, 2008). The harvested water can enable farmers to diversify and plant other crops such as vegetables, tomatoes, onions and fruits to meet household food requirements.

The technique used should aim at improving infiltration or storage of rainwater. The approaches include: roof catchment, deep tillage, manure application, macro-catchment techniques, stone bunds, trash lines and *Fanya Juu*.

Deep tillage, which is tilling of land at depths of more than 12 inches, ensures efficient absorption and storage of water in the soil though it requires high draft power that is expensive to access (Hatibu & Mahoo, 2000). Deep tillage can improve crop production in hardpan soils. It involves breaking of the hardpan soil, creating soil pores that influence good water infiltration and root growth. While trash lines involve laying of crop residues e.g. maize stock along contours, stone bunds involves the use of stones to trap surface runoff resulting from rainwater to increase rate of infiltration. *Fanya Juu* is a structure where a back slope trench is dug and soil from the trench is thrown up slope to form a riser bank that can trap rainwater. Application of organic manure helps improve the soil water holding capacity, making it available to crops. Macro-catchment techniques entail collection of surface runoff in dams or pans while roof catchment comprise of direct tapping of rainwater from building roofs into storage tanks. The trapped rainwater can be used during times of water stress to irrigate crops and therefore increase yields.

Water harvesting in dry lands has resulted in more vegetative cover due to increased infiltration rate resulting from slowed water movement on land (Musimba *et al.*, 2004). Lack of water storage facilities, expertise and technology poses a major barrier to rainwater harvesting in Kwale County and therefore the need for the Government,

NGO's, CBO's and private sector to empower the smallholder farmers through training and provision of the necessary technology.

***Agricultural diversification and change of herd structure.*** Agricultural diversification helps improve food security, boost household income and reduce risk of total crop failure. This adaptation mechanism is multi-facet: it entails growing of crops and keeping of livestock; diversification in crops grown; and diversification in livestock kept. It allows smallholder farmers to spread risks in such a way that if crops fail, they can still realize income from livestock or when one crop type fails, they have an alternative crop to look forth to hence a contribution towards food security (Nyariki *et al.*, 2005).

Reducing the species of livestock that are highly vulnerable to rainfall variability and increasing the herd size of those that are more resilient reduces the impact of rainfall variability on agricultural production. Due to the harsh climatic conditions especially in AEZ L5-6, farmers are supposed to engage more in goat and poultry keeping because they have high adaptability and can withstand harsh climatic conditions.

Since most of the smallholder farmers in Kwale County are poor, they encounter several barriers in their pursuit to implement adaptation mechanisms that can help reduce the effects of rainfall variability. Most of the adaptation mechanisms require financial resources to implement, prompting most farmers to implement only cheap and less effective mechanisms. This calls for the Government, NGO's and other Development Agencies to empower the farmers in terms of skills and resources that are needed in implementation of adaptation strategies.

The study findings on adaptation to rainfall variability suggests that adaptation requires farmers to understand how rainfall pattern has changed over time to enable them identify the most adaptive mechanisms. It further indicates that farmers have a wide choice of adaptation mechanisms in response to rainfall variability but implementation of the most effective adaptation mechanism is influenced mainly by availability of financial capital.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study draws the following conclusions:

1. Kwale County experiences highly variable seasonal rainfall that has negative effects on crop and livestock production. Rainfall variability interferes with land preparation (clearing and ploughing), harvesting and planting time and influenced the cost of farm inputs. On average, the amount of rainfall received in Kwale County is not adequate to effectively support crop and livestock production and has led to decline in livestock and crop yields. In particular, AEZ L5-6 can no longer support rain-fed crop farming during the MAM season, calling for appropriate adaptation strategies to reduce the effects or reverse the situation. Smallholder farmers have been subjected to frequent crop failure and loss of livestock forcing others to poverty or engage in non-farm activities.

2. Due to rainfall variability, smallholder farmers in Kwale County have designed and implemented several adaptation strategies to respond to rainfall variability. The most adaptive approaches include: planting high yielding, early maturing and drought, disease and pest tolerant crops; rainwater harvesting; and agricultural diversification and change of herd structure. The main hindrances to implementation of the adaptation mechanisms include: inadequate financial capital; lack of improved seeds, information on weather incidences and seasonal rainfall variability; and frequent attack by pests and diseases.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Rainfall received in Kwale County is highly variable and has negatively affected agricultural production. It is therefore imperative to formulate specific recommendations that can help improve the smallholder farmers' adaptability to rainfall variability. The study makes the recommendations given below:

The Ministry of Agriculture should ensure that dissemination of weather forecasts is effective and efficient and reach smallholder farmers in real-time in order to enable them make right decisions regarding agricultural activities. More so, the Government through the Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources should ensure that the number of functional meteorological stations in Kwale County is increased because the two functional stations do not fully represent the County.

The Government through the Ministries of Special Programmes, Agriculture and Livestock Development, NGOs and CBOs should organize trainings for smallholder farmers to educate them on rainfall variability, its effects and appropriate adaptation techniques. Such trainings will empower the smallholder farmers and therefore reduce their vulnerability to effects of rainfall variability.

Due to lack of financial resources to acquire improved seeds of high yielding, early maturing and drought, disease and pest tolerant crops, the Government, NGOs and private sector should assist the smallholder farmers access the seeds at the right time, in adequate quantity and be used for the intended purpose. Farmers need training to make them embrace the new seeds. There is also need to establish policy framework that can easily facilitate the use of the improved seeds among the poor smallholder farmers.

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