**Original Research Article**

**Economic Barriers to the adoption of sustainable Agriculture in Tharaka –Nithi County of Kenya**

**Abstract**

With the ballooning world population and the challenges posed by climate change, the world food security has been extensively compromised. In an effort to meet this growing demand for food, there has been intensification of agriculture. This has in turn resulted to the degradation of natural ecosystems and social economic challenges such as unemployment and a rise in the poverty levels. The adoption of sustainable agriculture however has the potential to mitigate this situation. However its adoption is curtailed by numerous handles among them some economic factors facing the farmers. This study aimed at studying the economic factors that affect the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices by the small scale farmers in Tharaka - Nithi county of Kenya. It was a descriptive survey where data was collected from the residents using semi structured questionnaires and interview schedules. Secondary data was collected from journal articles, dissertations, thesis, books and conference papers. It was organized and analysed using SPSS version 24.The study revealed that economic factors such as lack of access to credit, high cost of farm inputs, low returns on the farm produce, poor markets for the produce and land issues affected the adoption of sustainable agriculture by the farmers in this area.

Key words: Sustainable agriculture, Adoption, Economic, income, Market

**1.0: Introduction**

The global human population has been increasing steadily over time from about 1.5 billion in 1900, to 6.1billion in 2000 and is estimated that it will be between 9.4 and 10 billion people by 2050 (Carvalho 2017). This increase has brought about a proportional rise in the demand for food and fiber. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) (2010) estimates that, by 2050 the demand for food will have increased by 70%. In the area of study, the number of people who need food aid is also increasing. For example, according to Gioto (2018), 16,300 people required food aid in Tharaka-Nithi County in 2014. This rising demand for food has led to the intensification and modernization of agriculture resulting to outcomes such as; change in the land use patterns, loss of biodiversity, water and soil pollution, change in the eating habits of communities and increased levels of poverty. This threatens the capacity of the agricultural systems to sustain the required food production in the long run.

**1.1: Sustainable agriculture**

The negative trends in agriculture can be mitigated by making the farming systems of the rural poor less vulnerable through the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. As the National Research Council (2010) notes, to meet the rising global need for food without negatively impacting the environmental resources or ignoring broad economic and social concerns, there is need to accelerate efforts towards agricultural sustainability.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2014), sums up the elements of sustainability as; good governance, environmental accountability, economic soundness and social wellbeing.

The adoption of sustainable agriculture does not however imply scaling down of agricultural activities but rather as Etingoff (2016) notes, it is an approach that embraces the optimization of expertise and technology for the longstanding strength of the agricultural enterprise by building on the existing agricultural practices so as to sustain high farm returns without compromising the fundamentals of the enterprise. Mensah et al (2019) view sustainability as a balance between the population and the ability of its environment to support it whereby the population attains development without producing irreversible adverse effects on the environment. It is an idea of societal and economic association that is grounded on just and shared idea of development (Etingoff 2016).

**1.2: Why adopt sustainable agriculture**

Ochieng et-al (2021) observe that, adoption of sustainable agriculture is critical since in the current global trend farmers are required to increase their agricultural output on reduced land and at the same time optimize on the utilization of pesticides, fertilizers and limited resources such as water. It supports the intensified agriculture in the view of the scarcity of natural resources on which agriculture is dependent (Ogemah 2017). Sustainability could enrich long term crop productivity, environmental protection and the adaptive capacity of agriculture (Khamung 2015).

As Ogemah (2017) observes, embracing of sustainable agriculture ensures the security of the rural livelihoods and hence decent incomes and quality life. Ochieng et-al (2021) further note that, sustainable agriculture can contribute to reduction of poverty by raising the incomes of the poor households and by providing employment to the landless laborers. It also strengthens the food systems and helps in the attainment of food security since it makes them more resilient and productive (Pineiro, 2020).

**1.3: Economic barriers to the adoption of sustainable agriculture**

Although the adoption of sustainable agriculture is crucial in ensuring food security for the growing population, it is hampered by various economic factors. The agricultural markets especially in sub-Saharan Africa are usually not well structured and managed. They are outdated, poorly kept and are not adequate in addressing the needs of the rising population (Adenle et-al 2018). Farmers also face difficulties in finding markets for products such as organic food as they transition from conventional agricultural practices to some of the sustainable agricultural practices such as organic farming (Han et-al 2022). As such the farmers are not able to benefit economically from their farm produce.

The farmers in the less developed countries are not able to meet the required quality standards for the international markets for their produce where they fetch better prices. This is due to lack of the requisite skills and finances to acquire the processing infrastructure and marketing of their produce (Adenle 2018).

Agriculture especially in the less developed countries is labour intensive. As such as Yigezu 2021 notes, Population dynamics such as the aging of the rural farmers affects the productivity of the agricultural labour and related aspects such as land tenure and the community’s social organizations. Older farmers will also be more affected by advancement in agricultural technology and may be discriminated against in the access to credit and other income generating resources. Consequently, they are not able to invest adequately in agricultural innovation for higher productivity. As Adenle et-al (2018) observe, the supply of the agricultural labour is also affected by the rural urban migration were the young people move to the town centers in pursuit of better careers leaving behind the aged farmers.

The subdivision of agricultural land into small pieces also makes the adoption of sustainable agriculture difficult. According to Yigezu (2021) these pieces of land end up being degraded, fragmented and infertile. It also becomes difficult to practice mechanized farming on these small pieces of land. Consequently, the rate of unemployment increases since the land is not adequate to engage the farmers on full time bases.

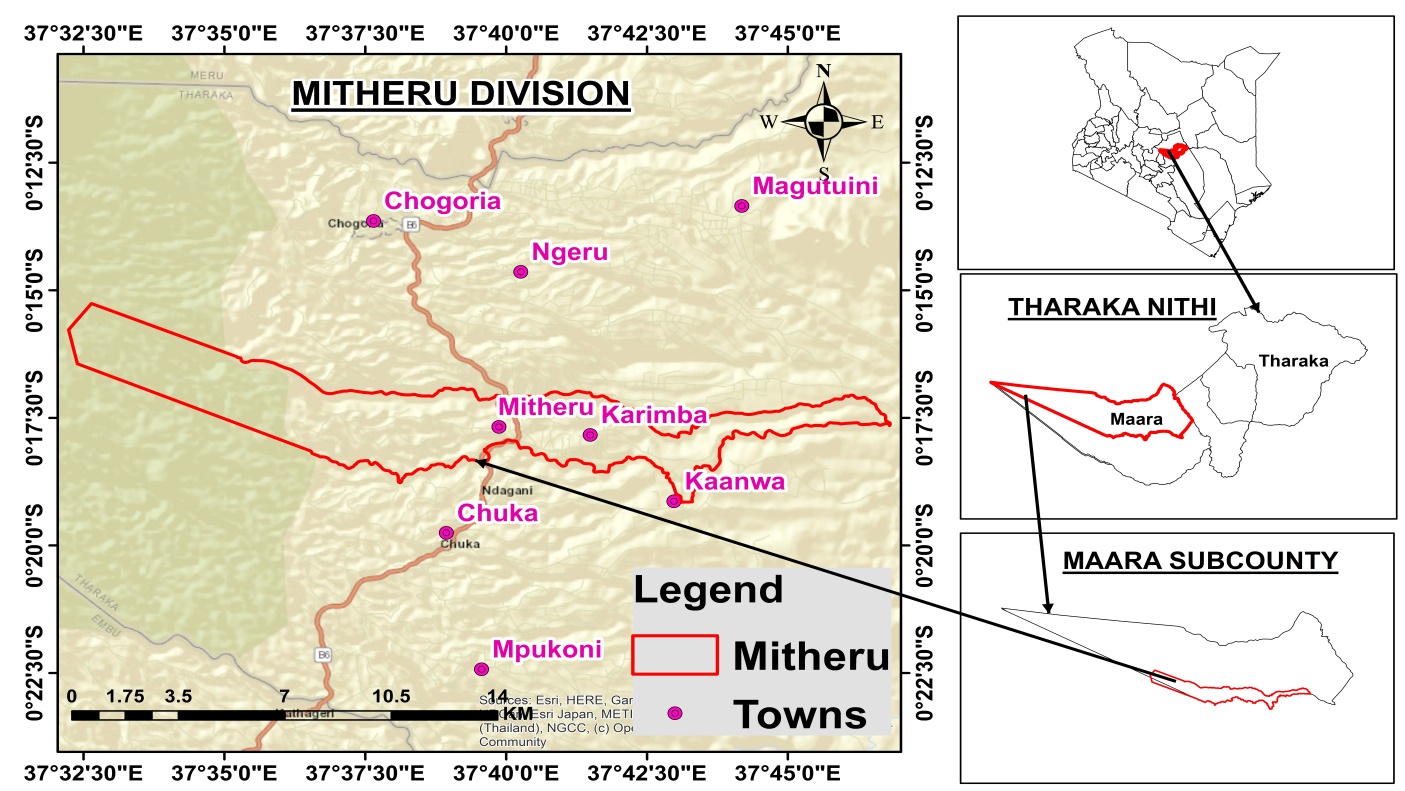
Good market practices that ensure fairness in agriculture trade is of great importance in ensuring sustainability. As Ochieng et-al (2021) note, farmer characteristics, and market limitations like lack of affordable credit, expensive inputs and threats to production affect the willingness of a farmer to adopt sustainable agricultural practices. Wilkinson (2015), recognizes the need to have a level playing ground for farmers around the world by removing the subsidies that favor the farmers in the rich countries at the behest of the ones in the developing world.

Wide spread poverty in the bigger part of the rural sub-Saharan Africa also curtails the embracing of sustainable agricultural practices. As Adenle (2018) observes, the high poverty levels make it difficult for the farmers to be able to adapt to climate variation as well as employ mechanisms of increasing labour productivity such as use of light farm machinery.

**3.0: Methodology**

**3.1: Study Area**

The study was conducted in Mitheru division of Tharaka-Nithi County of Kenya as illustrated in figure 1 below. The population of the study area is 17,421 (KNBS 2019). The area of study is 33Km2 with a population density of 527.9 people per Km2. The residents are mainly smallholder farmers who practice mixed farming. The area is composed of four sub-locations namely; Gatua and Ruguta on the upper region, and Karimba and Ndumbini on the lower semi- arid region. The average annual rainfall in the upper zone is 2200mm and 500mm in the lower zone while the average temperature is between 140C to 300C in the upper region and 220C to 360C in the lower region. The area experiences bimodal rainfall pattern with the long rains coming from the month of April to June and the short rains from the month of October to December (Tharaka-Nithi County, 2018).



**Figure 1: Map of Mitheru Division Tharaka-Nithi County (source: Field Data 2024)**

**3.2: Study Design**

The study was a descriptive survey where qualitative and quantitative data was collected from the respondents using semi-structured questionnaires and interview schedules. Stratified, purposive and simple random sampling methods were used in identifying the respondents. Simple random sampling was used in identifying the residents for the study to increase accuracy since the population was not uniform. Stratified sampling was used in identifying the government and nongovernmental organisations officers for the study since they belonged to different cadres. Key informants were identified using purposive sampling where two model farmers from each sub location were picked since the information that was to be collected from them was very specific.

**3.3: Sampling, Data Collection and Data Analysis**

A sample of 96 residents was used. Primary and secondary data was collected. The primary data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires and interview schedules from the residents of the study area, government and non-governmental organisations officials. Secondary data was collected from journals, books, dissertations and conference papers. The data collection instruments were pretested for reliability and the anomalies noted were corrected before the actual study. Before analysis, the data was sorted, cleaned, and tested for the response rate, reliability, and validity of the tools. It was then organized using SPSS version 24. It was presented in tables, charts, and histograms and analysed using the chi-square, Pearson’s correlation coefficient, mean, standard deviation, the Anova test, frequencies, and percentages.

**4.0: Results and discussion**

**4.1: Farmers Characteristics and Their Influence on Sustainable agriculture.**

From the study, 55 % of the respondents were female and 45% were male. The number of female respondents was slightly higher than that of the male respondents. Given the culture of the community, women are given the full unpaid responsibility of household chores such as child care, cooking and cleaning leaving them with little time to invest in agriculture (Rodgers et al. 2019). On the other end the men in the area go out more often to the work in other people’s farms for extra income. It was thus more likely to find more women at home than the men. Chi-square statistics were used to examine the association between gender and the adoption of sustainable agriculture. There was no significant relationship at a 5 % confidence level between the two variables (*x*² = 2.230, df = 3, p= .118) indicating that gender did not significantly influence the adoption of sustainable agriculture.

From the study, 29% of the respondents were above 60 years of age while 21% were aged between 50 to 59 years, 24% between 40 to 49 years, 16% between 30 to 39 years and 10 % were below 30 years of age. This indicated low participation of the youth in agriculture. Chi-square statistics were used to examine the association between age and adoption of sustainable agriculture where there was a significant relationship at a 5 % confidence level between the two variables (*x*² = 10.470, df = 4, p= .008) indicating that age influenced the adoption of sustainable agriculture with more older farmers practicing sustainable agriculture as compared to the young farmers.

**Table 1: A cross tabulation of gender and age of the farmers**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | What is your age (Years) | | | | | Total |
| Below 30 | 30 - 39 | 40 - 49 | 50 - 59 | Above 60 |
| What is your gender  (%) | Male | 0 | 5.6 | 19.7 | 8.4 | 11.3 | 45 |
| Female | 6.6 | 10.9 | 15.4 | 6.6 | 15.4 | 55 |
| Total | | 6.6 | 16.5 | 35.1 | 15.0 | 26.7 | 100 |

A Cross tabulation of the age of the farmers and their gender as shown in table 1 established that, women formed the highest percentage of the youthful farmers below the age of fourty years (17.5%) and the older farmers above sixty years (15.4%). On the other hand the proportion of the men farmers was higher in the middle aged farmers’ category (40 to 59 years) at 28.1%. This was an indication that much of the agricultural work was left to the women and children while men engaged in non-agricultural activities.

On the level of education of the respondents, it was established that only 6 % had completed university education, 14 % had completed middle level college education, 26 % had completed high school and 45% had attained primary education while 10 % had not received any formal education. Chi-square statistics was used to examine the relationship between the level of education and adoption of sustainable agriculture where there was a significant relationship at a 5 % confidence level between the two variables (*x*² = 11.471, df = 4, p= .002). This indicated that the level of education influenced the adoption of sustainable agriculture with more educated people practicing sustainable agriculture.

The study established that most of the respondents (64%) earned below Ksh 20,000 (USD155)[[1]](#footnote-1) per month. Given the agro-based economy of the area and the relatively low levels of income, the issue of economic sustainability could be compromised. Chi-square statistics were used to examine the relationship between the income of the farmers and the adoption of sustainable agriculture where there was a significant relationship at a 5 % confidence level between the two variables (*x*² = 7.827, df = 4, p= .037) indicating that the amount of income of the people influenced the adoption of sustainable agriculture with more high-income earners practicing sustainable agriculture.

The sample size was evenly distributed in all the sub-locations based on the population and the number of people practicing agriculture as shown in figure 2 below. It was noted that some agricultural issues were location specific. For instance, Areas within a 5 Km radius of towns and market centres such as Mitheru, Karimba, and Kaanwa were mostly practicing commercial agriculture while areas far from the towns and lacking efficient transport infrastructure such as Mikuu, Gatua and Nkururu mostly practiced subsistence agriculture. The analysis shows that 76 %, 81%, and 69% of the farmers around Mitheru, Karimba, and Kaanwa practice commercial farming respectively. On the other hand, only 48 %, 35% and 44 % of the farmers in Mikuu, Gatua, and Nkururu practiced commercial agriculture.

**Figure 2: Distribution of the respondents in the study area**

**4.2 Adoption of sustainable agricultural practices in Mitheru division.**

As defined by FAO (2014), sustainable agriculture is an environmentally sensitive, economically feasible, culturally appropriate and socially fair approach to agriculture development. The study investigated the presence of these elements of sustainable agriculture in Mitheru division. As discussed in the analysis below, it was clear that some farmers practiced sustainable agriculture while some did not. Some of the outstanding indicators of sustainable agriculture include:

**4.2.1 *Type and reason for practicing agriculture***

It was established that 51.7 % of the people practiced subsistence farming, 16 % practiced commercial agriculture and 31.5 % practiced both commercial and subsistence agriculture. About 78 % of those practicing both commercial and subsistence agriculture indicated that their primary purpose for agriculture was to provide food for the household and to get income from the sale of the surplus and their cash crops.

Given the rural economy is largely agro-based and the fact that 64 % of the people have an income of less than Ksh 20,000 a month, economic sustainability of their agricultural systems may be compromised in a model where only 16 % of the farmers have invested in commercial agriculture. To test if the adoption of sustainable agriculture varies depending on the type of agriculture practiced, an ANOVA test for the two variables was run. As indicated in table 2 below, the results suggest that there are significant differences in the adoption of sustainable agriculture between commercial and subsistence farmers (f = 2.743, p = .023) at a 95 % confidence level. The likelihood of a farmer practicing sustainable agriculture was higher among subsistence farmers (M = 1.92, SD= .996) compared to commercial farmers (M = 1.78, SD= .883)

**Table 2: ANOVA test for type of agriculture and sustainable agriculture**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of agriculture Practiced/ adoption of sustainable agriculture | | | | | |
|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | .196 | 1 | .196 | 2.743 | .023 |
| Within Groups | 70.163 | 87 | .806 |  |  |
| Total | 70.360 | 88 |  |  |  |

**Source: Field survey data, 2024**

**4.2.2 *Familiarity with sustainable agriculture***

Although with few gaps, the community was aware of the concept of sustainable agriculture with 86.5 % of them indicating that they are familiar with the concept. When asked to define sustainable agriculture, 37.1% of the respondents argued that it is an economically, socially and environmentally self-sustaining model of farming while 30 % of them argued that it was an agribusiness and modern method of farming. A cross-tabulation between familiarity with sustainable agriculture and the community definition of the concept revealed that 21.7 % of those who said that they are familiar with the concept could not define or explain what it is about. In their view, agriculture is sustainable as long as it is economically profitable and can provide sufficient food throughout the year. These dynamics on the level of awareness about sustainable agriculture influenced the acceptance of sustainable agricultural practices in that the community could not implement a concept that they were not fully aware of. According to the ANOVA test shown in table 3 below, familiarity with the concept of sustainable agriculture did not contribute significantly to its adoption (f = .772, p = 0.79) at a 95 % confidence level. There was not adequate statistical proof to suggest a relationship between the adoption of sustainable agriculture and its familiarity given that the likelihood of a farmer practicing sustainable agriculture was equal among the farmers who were familiar with the concept (M = 1.50, SD= .501) and the ones who were not (M = 1.45, SD= .798).

**Table 3: ANOVA test for familiarity with sustainable agriculture and its adoption**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Familiarity with sustainable agriculture/adoption of sustainable agriculture | | | | | |
|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | .021 | 1 | .021 | .772 | .079 |
| Within Groups | 26.091 | 87 | .300 |  |  |
| Total | 26.112 | 88 |  |  |  |

**Source: Field survey data, 2024**

**4.2.3 *Interview’s insights on adoption of sustainable agriculture***

According to the county department of agriculture, livestock, and fisheries majority of the farmers are involved in subsistence farming and the excess output is sold within the local market centers. The major food crops cultivate in the area of study were; maize, beans, and bananas while the Cash crops farmed were mainly tea and coffee. Agriculture was the main source of employment for the residents. The agricultural produce not however sufficient to cater for the food and economic demands of the farmers resulting in food insecurity at times.

A representative from the meteorological department indicated that most of the farmers relied on rain-fed agriculture. This was not a sustainable model of farming. The agricultural extension officer indicated that the main challenges faced by farmers include lack of information on proper planting seasons, practices, seeds, appropriate farm inputs, and financial management. This was attributed to inadequate agricultural education programs and funding. To address these challenges, the farmers especially the women had organised themselves into groups that help them consolidate their resources and exchange ideas on agriculture thereby boosting their capacity.

**4.3 *Main challenges facing sustainable agriculture***

In the view of the respondents, an agricultural enterprise that could not enable them to meet their food sufficiency and financial goals was not sustainable. A majority of the respondents (60 %), indicated that practicing agriculture had not enabled them to meet their goals. Fifty one (51%) of the respondents cited financial constraints related to the high cost of farm inputs, low returns on produce, lack of efficient markets for their produce and small pieces of land as the main barrier to achieving their goals. This is in agreement with the observation by Mgomezulu et al. (2023) that, the probability of a household to adopt sustainable agricultural practices depended on its level of income. Setsoafia et al. (2022) further notes that, income from off-farm activities enables the farmers to invest in innovative technologies that improve the performance of their agricultural enterprises. The ANOVA test as shown in table 4 revealed that there was enough statistical evidence that farmers who faced major challenges did not adopt sustainable agriculture (f= 5.897, p = .000). It was more likely to find farmers who experienced fewer challenges adopting sustainable agriculture (M = 1.33, SD = .442) compared to those who experienced major challenges (M = 1.26, SD = .492).

**Table 4: ANOVA test for challenges facing sustainable agriculture and its adoption**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | | | | |
|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | .757 | 1 | .757 | 5.897 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 25.356 | 87 | .291 |  |  |
| Total | 26.112 | 88 |  |  |  |

**Source: Field survey data, 2024**

***4.3.1 Economic Challenges to the adoption of sustainable agriculture***

The study as shown in figure 3 established the main economic challenges that affected the adoption of sustainable agriculture by the farmers in the study area. These challenges included: the high cost of agricultural inputs cited by 36.7 % of the farmers, market dynamics related to low production, less market demand and low prices of farm outputs cited by 31 % of the farmers, Lack of financial capacity to support sustainable agriculture cited by 16.4 % of the farmers, and land dynamics cited by 15.6 % of the farmers. This is in agreement with the findings of Takahashi et al. (2019) that local farmers face high input prices as well as low output prices that make them use less inorganic fertilizers and improved seed varieties. Lack of capital hampers the ability of the farmers to invest in sustainable agricultural activities as well as the necessary knowledge to search for the relevant new technologies (Menozzi et al. 2015, Shah et al. 2021)

**Figure 3: Main economic challenges facing sustainable agriculture**

**Source: Field Survey data, 2024**

To establish the relationship between these economic challenges and adoption of sustainable agriculture, the respondents were requested to indicate the degree to which they were in agreement or disagreement with statements relating to economic challenges affecting sustainable agriculture on a scale of 1-5 (with 1= strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= strongly agree) and circle (O) the option that best represented their opinion. The results were summarized in table 5 below.

**Table 5: Descriptive statistics on economic challenges facing sustainable agriculture**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Agree**  **(SA+A)** | **Disagree**  **(SD+D)** | **Mean** | **STD DEV** |
| There is an enabling economic environment in this area to practice sustainable agriculture | 26.6 % | 58.8 % | 1.86 | 1.332 |
| I would account my inability to practice sustainable agriculture to economic challenges | 43.2 % | 24.3 % | 2.82 | 1.276 |
| I have access to affordable financial credit and reduced cost of farm inputs for agriculture | 28.4 % | 53.6 % | 2.06 | 1.304 |
| There is a ready and reliable market for the farm produce that facilitates high profitability | 42.3 % | 31.3 % | 2.76 | 1.303 |
| My land is large enough and properly located enabling me to practice crop rotation and diversification. | 38.9 % | 43.8 % | 2.39 | 1.024 |
| **Average** | **35.88** | **42.36 %** | **2.38** | **1.248** |

**Source: Field Survey data, 2024**

As shown in Table 5 above, 26 % of the farmers feel that there is need for an enabling economic environment to practice sustainable agriculture. Majority of the farmers (58.8 %) with a mean and a standard deviation of 1.86 and 1.332 respectively feel that the economic environment is not favourable for sustainable agriculture. 43.2 % of the farmers blamed their inability to practice sustainable agriculture on economic related challenges while 24.3 % of them believed that their inability to practice sustainable agriculture was caused by other factors other than the economic ones. According to the data, 53.6 % of the farmers were not able to access financial loans and could not afford basic farm inputs, especially fertilizers, therefore making agriculture financially unsustainable. This is in line with the findings of Mutyasira et al. (2018) that, access to loans enable the farmers to acquire the required technical, mechanical and capital inputs for their farms. Myeni et al. (2019) further observes that, smallholder farmers with low incomes are unable to adopt sustainable agricultural practices that are labour intensive and those that require sophisticated equipment.

Market dynamics were a major challenge to 31.3 % of the farmers who stated that they only rely on the local market for their agricultural produce. On the other hand, 42.3 % of the farmers stated that there was market for their farm produce and the main challenge was inadequate farm produce to meet the demand for the produce. This is in line with the sentiments of Serote et al. (2023) that, better markets and product prices improve farmers’ motivation to produce more. Farmers also argued that there is no market within the areas for traditional food crops such as yams, cassava, sweet potatoes, and arrow roots among others which forced them to transport them to Chuka town hence incurring transportation costs. This is in agreement of with the findings by Bottazzi et al. (2023) that, sustainably produced foods face poor markets due to the unfavourable local consumption habits of the local population who prefer cheap imported products to the locally and ecologically grown products. Land dynamics also presented a major challenge with land fragmentation being the major barrier to the adoption of sustainable agriculture for 43.8 % of the farmers. In their view, their land sizes were too small to allow sustainable agricultural practices such as agroforestry, planting cover crops and perennial crops, practicing crop rotation, and diversification of crops. This is in agreement with the sentiments of Hamakazaka et al (2022) that, to sustain different sustainable agricultural practices adequate land is required. Manda et al. (2016), further notes that Farmers with large pieces of land are more likely to adopt sustainable agriculture than those with small pieces of land and those who are renting the land that they are farming. The aggregate mean and standard deviation of 2.32 and 1.248 respectively indicated that economic challenges are major barriers to adoption of sustainable agriculture by 42.36 % of the farmers.

**4.4.1 *Solutions to the economic challenges facing adoption of sustainable agriculture***

The study sought to determine ways in which the economic barriers to the adoption of sustainable agriculture by the farmers could be addressed. In this case, 44.9 % of the farmers argued that, proper financial planning was the best way to address their challenges. In their view, such plans included; joining credit facility institutions, doing away with middlemen in the market, and providing labor in the farms to reduce the cost of farming. As Serote et al. (2023) observe, training farmers on skills such as price determination and knowledge of the markets can enable them obtain better returns from their investments. On the other hand, 28.1 % of the farmers felt that, the adoption of proper farming methods such as irrigation through rainwater harvesting, drilling of boreholes, and use of locally available farm inputs such as manure was the way to address these challenges.

**4.4.2 *Community cohesion as a Solutions to the economic challenges facing sustainable agriculture***

Farmers felt that the social networks within the community offered solutions to some of the economic challenges that hindered the adoption of sustainable agriculture. This is by providing labor through communal work (13.5 %), provision of a huge local market base for the produce (10.1 %), Capital mobilization through social groups (7.9 %), and sharing of farming tools (9 %). This is in agreement with the sentiments of Donkoh (2019) that, membership to farmers associations increased their probability to access credit and adopt sustainable farming practices. Dessart et al. (2019) further observes that, neighboring farmers may share such knowledge as the real cost of production, benefits and risks of adopting a given sustainable agricultural practice. On the other hand, some farmers felt that these social networks contributed to the farmers not adopting sustainable agricultural practices in different ways. This was by; theft of farm products and inputs by neighbours (7.9%), farmers in the social groups influencing one another to resist new agricultural innovations (16.7 %), and destruction of crops by animals from the neighbors (4.5 %). On the other hand, 17 % of the farmers indicated that their relationship with other members of the community did not influence their decisions on the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. An ANOVA test as shown in table 6 below indicated that there was no significant association between community relationships and adoption of sustainable agriculture (f = 0.369, p = .063). The social linkages did not influence adoption of sustainable agriculture to a great extent given that both the united (M = 1.78, SD = .590) and disunited farmers adopted sustainable agricultural practices to the same degree (M = 1.71, SD = .490).

**Table 6: ANOVA test for social cohesion and sustainable agriculture**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | | | | |
|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | 1.672 | 1 | 1.672 | .369 | .063 |
| Within Groups | 92.710 | 87 | 1.066 |  |  |
| Total | 94.382 | 88 |  |  |  |

**Source: Field survey data, 2024**

***4.4.3 Government assistance***

About 40 % of the farmers indicated that they rarely apply sustainable agricultural practices to address their challenges out of which, 8 % believe that they cannot solve these challenges locally and have to rely on the government and other organizations within the agricultural sector.

**5.0 Conclusion**

About 78% of the farmers in the area of study indicated that their main purpose of practicing agriculture was to for provision of food and income through the sale of the surplus produce and their cash crops. However a majority of these farmers argued that the income from agriculture was not adequate to sustain their needs hence their agriculture enterprises were not economically sustainable. Also, despite majority of the farmers earning less than Ksh. 15, 000 per month, only 16 % of them were practicing commercial agriculture. Given that the economy of the area is largely agro-based, this shows that adoption of economically sustainable agriculture was still low in this region. Additionally considering that some of the sustainable agricultural practices were capital-intensive, the income of the farmers was too low to support it.

It was established that the adoption of sustainable agriculture in the area was largely affected by economic factors such as the level of income of the farmers, cost of inputs, access to credit, efficiency of the markets for the produce with high-income and land issues. Managing these factors would therefore go a long way in enabling the farmers adopt sustainable agriculture practices.

In efforts to adapt to the climate change and coping with the economic barriers Farmers have adopted farming methods such as efficient use of water by using drip irrigation, mulching, timely planting and proper soil management techniques such as tilling across the slope. The social networks of the farmers have also enabled them to address the economic barriers that hinder them from adopting sustainable agricultural practices. These networks enable the farmers to save on labor costs through communal work, provide them with local market base for their produce, facilitate capital mobilization through membership in social groups and reduction of operational costs through sharing of farming tools.

Some of the farmers believe that they cannot solve the economic challenges to the adoption of sustainable agriculture locally and have to rely on the government and other organizations within the agricultural sector to help them out. The government should consequently come up with the appropriate programmes to help farmers achieve agricultural sustainability such as; farmers training on sustainable farming practices, regulating prices of agricultural inputs, sourcing for efficient markets for the produce and providing affordable credit to the farmers.

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