When Rains come:

Whether good harvest or none at all

It is all a farmer’s choice
Introduction

Lack of adequate rainfall is the biggest problem facing farmers in the southern rangelands of Kenya.

However, the problem is worsened by some farmers whose practice make it more difficult to produce good crop yield with the little rainfall available.

The Problem

Late land preparation
The rains often start before many farmers prepare their farms for planting crops or grasses. Farmers who wish to avoid weeding wait until weeds grow up so as to plant as they plough the weeds.

These practices are caused by failure to understand the nature of rainfall in the southern rangelands and end up making a bad situation worse.

Understanding rainfall
In every season rainfall comes in definite quantities just like there is a definite amount water in a glass full of water.

In Makueni district this definite amount is about 290 mm for the Short rains (Nthwa) and about 180 mm for the Long rains (Uua)

There are times when the rainfall is more than this definite amount like it was during the El Nino rains of 1997 and the Nthwa rains of 2006.

Other times, it is much less than this amount as it was during the La Nina rains of 2000 and the Uua rains of 2007.

Growing crops
If the rainfall for a season is definite like a glass of water it means that crops planted before the start or at the beginning of the rains will use all the rain water or the full glass of water. This will result to a good harvest.

However, when rains start before planting or when farmers wait for weeds to grow so as to plough and plant as they do the first weeding, the crops planted will have less than the full amount of rain water (perhaps half the amount) available for growth during the season, and the crops are likely to fail.

This means that the crops you plant after the rains have started are likely to fail and disappoint you while crops planted before the start or at the beginning of the rains are likely to succeed and give you good harvest.

Thus, it is your choice to plant early and have a good harvest or plant late and have no harvest at all.