

CHALLENGES OF EFFECTIVE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The current Training and Visit (T&V) methods of agricultural extension testified to the gap between the actual understanding of the latest technologies and agricultural production. Agricultural extension is one of the ways of closing this gap by attempting to persuade farmers to adopt relevant technologies developed by researchers based on needs and experience of farmers. But, in many instances, these attempts were found ineffective and inadequate due to some challenges such as insufficient and qualified field extension agents, low rate of adoption of technologies and lack of mobility for extension delivery among others. The study therefore, reviewed the concept of extension education, some challenges of effective agricultural extension service delivery system in Nigeria, roles of researcher, extension agents, farmers and government in extension delivery. It was recommended that adequate awareness campaigns should be carried out through the media, meetings, farms and home visits, seminars etc. before launching any new agricultural technology that is to benefit food production practices of Nigerian farmer and enough recruitment of field extension agents should be carried out by the Federal, State and local government councils to cope with the high level of extension-farmer ratio in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural extension information is an indispensable factor in the practice of farming. It is defined by Agbamu (2005) as data that have been put into meaningful and useful materials which are communicated to the recipients (farmers) who use it to make decisions. Effective agricultural extension service delivery system aims at increasing the efficiency of the farm families, their production and standard of living. Extension of agricultural information is to change farmers' attitude towards their difficulties. It is concerned not just the physical and economic achievements of farmers but also that of the development of the general rural people. The dissemination of agricultural information by extension agents is very crucial to agricultural productivity of farmers because it is only through this means that the farmers can learn about new ideals Agbamu, 2000).

Extension agents therefore, are expected to discuss agricultural and social matters with the farmers, help them to gain clear insight into their problems and also to decide with the farmers on how to overcome the problems. With the importance of agriculture and the need to produce foods (cash and food) crops, both for the farm families and the nation at large, the dissemination of agricultural information to farmers cannot be over emphasized. Therefore, agricultural extension workers are required to offer adequate technical services to farmers and also provide them with necessary inputs to support farmers' production Otu and Emah (2011). However, agricultural extension programme covers a broad area of agriculture which includes disseminating of improved crop and animal varieties, improved water management systems and control of weeds, pests and diseases of plants and animals. Where necessary, agricultural extension may also help to build up farmers' groups or organizations so that the farmers can benefit adequately from various agricultural programmes. According to Isife *et al* (2006), most small scale farmers lack the understanding and awareness of effective agricultural extension service delivery in Nigeria due to their low level of literacy and ineffectiveness of the extension

agents. There was need therefore to document the challenges of effective agricultural extension delivery system in Nigeria by addressing the following objectives:

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this study was to document the challenges of effective agricultural extension service delivery system in Nigeria.

The specific objectives were to review the:

- i. concept of extension education;
- ii. some challenges of agricultural extension service delivery;
- iii. roles of researchers in extension services;
- iv. roles of extension agents in the dissemination of improved agricultural technologies;
- v. roles of farmers in extension service delivery; and
- vi. roles of government in agricultural extension.

Concept of extension education

In agricultural extension education, the farm is the classroom, the farmers are the students, the work materials (e.g. seeds, chemicals, farm equipment etc.) are the inputs while extension agents are the teachers and the researchers are innovation developers. Therefore, the business of extension is an interactive educational process which uses Research Extension-Farmer Input linkage System (REFILS) as a model for effective dissemination of research information to farmers through extension agents working in synergy.

The term extension education was first coined in the nineteenth century, precisely in 1873 by Cambridge University to describe a particular educational innovation, the aim of the extension then was to take the educational advantages of the University to the ordinary people where they lived and worked. It was directed to teaching activities away from the main University Campuses for audiences other than the students admitted for University education (Isife and Emah, 2000).

In the concept of "extension" one thing is very common-reaching out to the less privilege farmers/rural/ people with valuation information from research findings that would enable them change their ways of thinking, operating their economic resources and live well there they find themselves. Nwachukwu (2013) considered extension as a conscious use of communication to help people form sound opinion and make good decisions, while Nwachukwu (2013) sees extension as an informal out of school system of education designed to help rural people satisfy their felt needs. He also considers it as a sanctioned and legitimate activity which seeks to enlarge and improve the abilities of farm people to adopt more appropriate and new practices to adjust to changing conditions and social needs.

Some challenges of agricultural extension service delivery

- ❖ Farmers become indifferent to accepting new technologies because of their lack of understanding of what extension teaching is all about.
- ❖ Research findings suitable for increased food production do not reach the farmers at the grassroots because of shortage of extension staff to deliver the findings.
- ❖ Research itself is restricted to the confines of the research stations which tend to reward staff running on the bases on the number of publications rather than on the number of innovations they can make available to farmers. It is worse when the research workers decide for themselves what they want to do without involving the farmers. Emah and Owen (2000) argued that researchers are underemployed are too isolated from the farmers and extension workers, as a result, research findings are inadequately disseminated.

- ❖ Extension services are poorly organized and often times are subjected to political and administrative abuse. As a result, field agents lack essential logistics to carry out their jobs successfully.
- ❖ Apparent lack of technical direction, regular supervision and monitoring of performance of field staff and the absence of continuous training and visit system by extension staff.
- ❖ The extension staff is unaware of the exact number of farmers he/she is expected to contact in an area of operation due to lack of reliable, workable statistics of extension staff farmers ratio.

Roles of researchers in the extension service

Researchers play the following roles in extension service delivery:

- ❖ Research provides the necessary information required by farmers in the field by promoting agricultural extension and rural development.
- ❖ Provides the working tools for extension agents. That is, it provides technical information for them disseminate to target audience and brings about new discoveries and inventions in extension work
- ❖ Research invokes a demand for successful and positive change
- ❖ Provision of solution to farmers' problems in agricultural production and processing

Roles of extension agents in extension service delivery

Extension agents as the educator and communicator of farmers play the following roles in order to help them improve their living standard:

- ❖ They provide technical advice and inputs to farmers.
- ❖ Extension agents play a primary role in dissemination of new agricultural technologies to farmers for adoption improved food production.
- ❖ Formation of farmers into cooperatives and organizing credits and marketing of farm produce for them.
- ❖ They act as catalyst in participatory process of programme planning, implementation and evaluation involving farmers.
- ❖ It plays a coordinating and developmental role by working with input suppliers and research institutes on behalf of farmers.
- ❖ They are important component of the Training and Visit (T&V) system in Agricultural development programme (ADP).
- ❖ They create the desired awareness in farmers to be interested in the adoption of improved agricultural technologies.

Roles of farmers in extension service delivery

- ❖ Farmers help to make research findings and extension work meaningful.
- ❖ Farmers facilitate diffusion process through farmer to farmer dissemination of new practices.
- ❖ Farmers aid research through the problems they encounter on daily basis when complained to extension agents. In other word, they help researchers to discover lapses in their previous works for continuity.
- ❖ Farmers help to achieve the goals/objectives of agricultural extension.

Roles of Government in extension service delivery

The type of government that has keen interest in the wellbeing of the people and agriculture acts as:

- ❖ Promoters and facilitators of research
- ❖ Generates workable and reliable policies and programmes of the sector

- ❖ Develops infrastructure and adequate social services for the rural people
- ❖ Facilitates the modernization of cooperative laws and regulations by eliminating existing barriers to farmers' cooperative development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper offers the following recommendations as a way of solving lingering problems challenging effective extension delivery system in the country:

- ❖ Adequate awareness campaigns should be carried out through the media, meetings, farms and home visits, seminars etc. before launching any new agricultural programme that is to benefit food production practices of Nigeria farmers.
- ❖ Enough recruitment of field extension agents should be carried out by the Federal, State and local government councils to cope with the high level of extension-farmer ratio in the country.
- ❖ Government should provide logistics that will encourage a smooth working condition of extension agents and farmers across the country.
- ❖ Competent managerial Staff with sound vision should be employed to man the administration of extension programme.
- ❖ Extension policies should be legislated by the country's highest law-making body to provide strong legal backing to effective extension impact. They should make laws that will support the smooth implementation of all Federal and State agricultural development programmes in such a way that if there is a change of hand in government regime, the programmes can still be sustained and not die.
- ❖ Above all, agricultural extension service delivery should be supported with adequate funding.

CONCLUSION

The non-involvement of agricultural extension service in the planning, monitoring and implementation of most of the agricultural programmes and lack of commitment to policy implementation have become problems challenging effective extension service delivery system in Nigeria. In conclusion therefore, until government allows agricultural extension service to be part of the planning and implementation of State and National agricultural programmes, the success of extension services will remain a mirage.

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