

THE EFFECT OF THE CHANGING PATTERN OF NIGERIAN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES ON THE PERFORMANCE OF EXTENSION WORKERS

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SUMMARY

Nigerian Extension Services have experienced so many changes and reorganizations within the last century. These changes have not brought any significant contribution to agricultural production in the country. This situation has left a puzzle as to why Nigerian agriculture still remain traditional and fails to witness any scientific transformation. This paper therefore reviews the various reorganizations of agricultural Extension Services in Nigeria and throws light on specific changes that have occurred and their implications on the effectiveness of the country's agricultural Extension Services.

I. INTRODUCTION

Within the last century, the agricultural sector in Nigeria has experienced a considerably high level of evolution occasioned primarily by a desire on the part of various state and federal governments to increase food production to ensure self-sufficiency and improve the quality of life of our rural people. In spite of all the efforts, it has been observed that the ultimate results in terms of higher yields have not been forthcoming. One of the major reasons that have been adduced for the state of affairs in our agricultural development programmes according to Williams (1988) has been

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attributed to the relegation of the agricultural extension services to a peripheral position in the scheme of things.

Agricultural extension work assists farmers to utilize resources available to them in solving their current farm and home problems. By offering farmers educational and material services, using effective extension methods, the extension service stimulates them to make such changes in their farm operation as will result in more efficient production and more profitable marketing farm products. It is now widely recognized that sustained high level agricultural production and food self-sufficiency cannot be attained without effective extension services, and input procurement and distributions system supported by a rural infrastructural development programme geared to the needs of the farmers and the rural areas.

Because of the urgent need to increase food production with a view to improving the standard of living conditions of Nigerians, this paper examines the changing pattern of Agricultural Extension Services in Nigeria and how it can affect the performance of extension workers.

II. Traditional Education in Nigeria

From time immemorial, traditional agricultural education existed in Nigeria. It was evidenced that serious attention was paid to teaching the children how to produce good crops. Though there was no organized research, there is evidence that conscious efforts were made to select high-yielding crops and thus improve agriculture. Most of our present day varieties, in fact, are the result of conscious efforts by our pioneer peasant farmers.

According to Fafunwa (1974), there was very strict training in the cultivation of the various crops planted among the peasant farmers in Nigeria. In the first place, children were taught how to discriminate between fertile and nonfertile soil. At the same time, the soil that was declared unsuitable for one type of crop was also declared good for another type. The children were shown how suitable or unsuitable the land was by dipping the cutlass into the soil. If during the course of dipping the cutlass into the soil it touched some stones, immediate verdict was given that such type of soil would never be suitable for deep-rooted crops. Children were also taught how to clear the bush by

burning and how to cultivate and weed by hoes.

Another important stage in agricultural education was the need to understand the different planting and harvesting seasons. There are only two seasons apparently known to the people: the raining and the dry seasons. It has been abundantly demonstrated that the informal education handed on for example by a father to his son was both wise and valuable. For instance, a father told his children not to turn the buds downwards while planting cassava stems for to do so would mean the end of that plant.

From the evidence obtained, it was clear that there was no specialization of agriculture. In other words, a farmer was free to plant any kind of crop he wanted on his farm.

It is evident that traditional agricultural education has limitations which acted as a basis for agricultural backwardness in Nigeria. In the first place, this type of education is geared to meeting the basic needs of the child within his restricted environment. In the second place, it is described as conservative and conforming in that it does not train the child to challenge or change those aspects that are considered unprogressive within the agricultural sector. As a result, it was impossible for a child to adopt new ideas from other village or culture since he was not exposed to them. Lastly, a child was not educated in the economic use of the land. As a result of a child's exposure to traditional education, it is natural to expect that he would want to carry on the traditional activities he learned from his father. This implies that traditionalism was part of the farmer's make-up and that he would hardly become a true innovator without changing his normative system of farming.

III. Agricultural Extension during the Colonial Period

With the advent of the British and the colonization of Nigeria, modern agriculture appeared. This period is the beginning of direct government involvement in the development of agriculture. Though what was regarded as extension work in the early days cannot be so interpreted in our modern view so the history of extension service in Nigeria must be seen in terms of agriculture and its development.

Locating the birth date of agricultural extension in Nigeria depends on one's definition of extension. If it is defined as the

dissemination of information to producers with references to specific organizations or institutions particularly responsible for that dissemination, then agricultural extension occurred in Nigeria as early as its history as the indigenous producers learnt and adopted new crops or farming practices. And this dates back to the early 1900s when cocoa and groundnuts were introduced (Kincaid 1968). But if one defines extension as an educational service performed by an organization or agency which has been specifically charged with the responsibility to disseminate information to and from rural people then extension's beginning occurred sometime about 1921 when the unified Department of Agriculture was established for the whole country in 1954 when three separate regional governments were formed with their constituted ministries of agriculture (Kincaid 1968).

The caveat here though is that in the early years following 1921, the ministry's programme was largely regulatory. However, the establishment of a central department of agriculture constitutes another milestone; it thus became possible to set up the necessary machinery for central planning and policy-making.

The central Department of Agriculture pursued a vigorous policy aimed at increasing export crops, primarily for the British market. Efforts were made to improve the efficiency of crop handling and marketing, and laws were passed to set standards which would improve the quality of the major export crop production. This early emphasis on the production of export crops, it is generally believed, gave Nigeria its rather one-side development. But despite this criticism, the central department established a solid foundation on which expansion could take place, and agriculture eventually became the basis of Nigeria economy.

IV. Agricultural Extension Services as from the Independent Period

The second change in Nigerian agricultural extension services occurred in 1963 when the Mid-Western Region was created the third and the most recent change occurred in the early 1970s when the country was divided into states. Historically, the ministry of agriculture that houses Extension Services in Nigeria comprised two main components, the administrative and the technical divisions. The

Permanent Secretary, who was the administrative head of the ministry was also the chief adviser to the government on all matters pertaining to agricultural development and programmes. The technical component comprised five divisions: Agriculture, Forestry, Veterinary Science, Produce Inspection and Fisheries. Each division was headed by a technical chief responsible to the Permanent Secretary for all activities under his portfolio. An important responsibility of these chiefs was to translate government policies and programmes into field action (Williams 1973).

The agricultural division was further divided into two main sections – Planning and Project Division (Extension Service Division). The Extension Service Division was headed by the Chief Agricultural Officer (CAO), who was responsible for general policy regarding extension work. He was assisted by Principal Agricultural Officers (PAO) assigned to duty on the basis of subject matter. At the field level, states were divided into circles, each supervised by a Senior Agricultural Officer (SAO). Each circle was further divided into divisions with the Agricultural Officer (AO) in charge of each division. Each of these was sub-divided into Agricultural Assistant Areas (AA) each supervised by an Agricultural Superintendent (AS). In turn each (AA) supervised the work of Field Overseers (FO) who were responsible for maintaining contact with the farmers at the village level.

The financial support for extension came mainly from the government in the form of budgetary allocation. It covered staff salaries, maintenance of extension work stations and production of planting materials to be distributed to farmers at a subsidized rate. The general objective of the Ministry of Agriculture was to raise the income and level of living of the population. In the past as in most African countries, the Nigerian government agricultural field staff were mainly involved in passing on, and frequently endorsing government orders and instructions to the farming communities. That is, their duties were mainly of a regulatory and police nature (FAO 1966). And this tended to alienate their clients (peasant farmers).

As far as the extension activities are concerned, some observers of the Nigerian extension service have described it as vastly different from the commonly accepted definition of agricultural extension. Different in the sense that rather than restricting its activities on rural

education, advising farmers on improved practices in agriculture, the extension services in the promotion and distribution of agricultural inputs, as a result of non-existence of a private agricultural business sector. It has drawn into activities such as (1) production programme for cocoa, cotton, groundnuts, maize, rice and rubber; (2) tractor hire units; (3) farm settlement scheme; (4) home economics and young farmer's club and (5) agricultural information. As a result of expansion on activities undertaken, the agricultural extension service has continued to experience an increased demand for finance and manpower – the two are usually provided by government.

V. The Changing Pattern of Extension Service

1. After 1976 Local Government Reforms

In 1976, the Federal Military Government (FMG) undertook a reform of the local government system. The result was that there had been a "divorce between the people and government institutions at their most basic levels" (FMG 1976). Thus the FMG decided to recognize Local Government as the third tier of governmental activity in the country, and specified functions which local governments should perform. Functions which should be devolved to local governments were divided into two classes;

- (a) items which are the responsibility of local government save under exceptional or temporary circumstances,
- (b) items which should be regarded as local government responsibilities although state governments and other organizations may also perform part or whole of these functions if local governments are not equipped to perform them initially.

The only agricultural related functions in class (a) are gracing grounds. While class (b) includes, agricultural extension, animal health extension and veterinary clinics.

It is interesting to note that in the forward to the booklet containing the Guidelines, the FMG emphasized the point that they were no more than guidelines for action by state governments the FMG does not intend to impose any solutions or indeed any structure on the country at the local government level. A number of states such as Sokoto State implemented the suggested guidelines at least as they

TABLE I Extension related functions and their control after Local Government Reforms in 1976 : Sokoto State

Ministry of Agriculture	Ministry of Local Government
Seed multiplication	– Agricultural extension
Horticulture	– Animal health extension services
Fisheries	– Veterinary clinic
Tractor hiring	– Gracing grounds
Crop protection	– Collection of revenue for forestry products
Irrigation	– Cattle tax
Soil conservation	
Forest resources	
Verterinary services	
Poultry	
Training	

affect agricultural extension services. This necessitated the transfer of a number of staff from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Local Government. The staff affected ranged from agricultural superintendents to field instructors. The implication is that while supervisory and agricultural policy decision-making staff from the Agricultural Officer's grade upwards remained in the Ministry of Agriculture, all staff responsible for the day to day field extension work were moved to a different administratively controlled set-up.

Thus following the 1976 Local Government Reforms, the control of extension related functions became as shown in Table 1.

There is no doubt that these reorganizations have some merits. For example, the importance of Local Government at the grass root level is recognized. Theoretically, extension is one of those functions for which a detailed local knowledge is required for efficient performance and in which success depends on community response and participation. The reorganization right from the independence has been moving to this direction. Prior to the reorganizations, there was a tendency for field extension staff to allocate far too many responsibilities, for example, the sale of farm inputs, the administration of credit, tractor hiring services and farm advisory work. This helped to create an overburdened staff who had less than

adequate time to do say of his assigned duties efficiently. In a way, the reorganizations can minimize this particular problem.

The above points notwithstanding a number of difficulties have surfaced in practice. The most serious problem is that created by the separation of interrelated functions in different ministries. A good example of this problem relates to fertilizer use. For example, knowledge as to the best type of fertilizer to purchase for a given situation abounds in the ministry of agriculture. But the actual purchase and distribution of the input is done by staff of the Ministry of Rural Development with no reference to the Ministry of Agriculture, while the educational programme on the use of fertilizer is mounted by the Ministry of Local Government. The implication is that there is an inadequate professional control and supervision both in the purchase and distribution of farm inputs, as well as in the education of farmers.

2. After Establishing a Ministry of Rural Development in 1979

About the same time when local government reforms were being discussed and implemented, the Federal in conjunction with some State Governments and the World Bank initiated a set of three integrated rural development projects at Funtua, Gusau and Gombe. These projects have various components: intensive extension efforts; road and dam construction to provide needed water and the provision of credit and improved farm inputs. At the Federal level, a Department of Rural Development was created within the Ministry of Agriculture with the primary objective of coordinating the activities of these and other World assisted rural development projects.

After the first three ADPs which were begun in 1975, the Lafia (Plateau State) and Ayangba (Benue State) ADPs were begun in 1978. At present, governments have expanded the ADP concept to all appropriate States in the Federation. All functions of Extension Services have been transferred to the ADPs. One of the most Important aspects of the ADP programme is to close linkage to the newly reformed Local Government Council system and its dependency on the latter for local decision making and shared policy and development planning at a local level.

For example, Kwara Agricultural Development Project's (KWADP) area is divided into five zones each headed by a Zonal Coordinator. Each zone is further divided into districts with a District Extension Officer (DEO) in-charge of each district. Each district is further divided into wards with a Ward Extension Officer (WEO) in-charge of each ward. There is the Principal Extension Officer (PEO) who is head of extension. There are three Subject Matter Specialists (SMS) i.e., Agronomy, Crop Protection and Soil Management. They are based at the headquarters and they go out as a team to each of the zones once every fortnight for training (FNT).

The overall objective of the ADP is to optimize yield through better cultural practices and planting of improved crop seeds. Small Plot Adoption Technique (SPAT) plots are used to practically convince farmers to adopt.

Department of Kwara ADP

Kwara ADP has eight departments, four of which are service departments while others are supportive.

A) Agricultural Services Department

(i) Extension Services Department

- Provision of sound and well-coordinated technical services to the farmers in areas of crops, livestock and home management.
- Basic erosion control measures form part of extension service programme.

(ii) Technical Services Department

- Undertakes on-farm adaptive research.
- Provision of various types of improved seeds for sale to farmers.
- Introduction of animal-powered traction into the farming system.
- Improvement of animal health services.
- Agro-forestry and erosion control programmes.

(iii) Commercial Services Department

- Improvement and procurement and distribution of farm inputs like fertilizers, agrochemicals and seeds.
- Promotion of private retailing of farm inputs.
- Limited rehabilitation of wholesale warehouses.
- Mobilization of rural credit and saving.
- Agro-processing.

(iv) Rural Infrastructural Department

- Rehabilitation of feeder roads.
- Periodic maintenance of feeder roads.
- Construction of more feeder roads.
- Provision of rural water supply facilities (boreholes and wells).
- Development of small-scale irrigation.
- Formation of water users association.

B) Supportive Department

- (a) Administration
- (b) Finance
- (c) Manpower Development and Training
- (d) Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation.

With the introduction of the ADP concepts, most of the serious problems highlighted earlier in this paper have been taken care of. For example, separation of interrelated functions in different ministries have disappeared. That is, experts who are to impart knowledge as to the best type of fertilizer to purchase, best agrochemicals to use etc. are found within ADP. In short, there is now adequate professional control and supervision without making reference to the Ministries of Agriculture or Rural Development.

VI. Measures for Improving the Effectiveness of Extension Services in Nigeria

We have discussed the changing patterns and reorganizations of

extension services and how these changes have affected the effectiveness of extension services in Nigeria. We have also tried as much as possible to discuss merits and demerits of these changes and reorganizations in view of suggesting appropriate measures for the improvement of the effectiveness of extension services in Nigeria.

In discussing measures for improving the effectiveness of extension, we shall raise four pertinent issues which we feel are crucial to the effectiveness of extension services. The first issue deals with the fact that extension has made little impact because it has not found answers to deal with the new and different economic and social problems that now lie at the door steps of farmers in the face of the oil boom and massive desertation of the rural areas to find better fortune in other areas than in agriculture (Williams 1980).

The potential of the concept of extension in helping to solve the urgent problems of rural areas is tremendous. To realise this potential, extension agents must appreciate the fact that the application of the concept of extension education to rural economic and social problems lies not only in agriculture and home economics alone but also in a comprehensive view of rural life which goes beyond the subject matter areas of agriculture and home economics. This might be the rational behind the establishment of the Ministry of Rural Development in 1979. Furthermore, it must be realised that the application of the concept of extension education also lies in the development of rural women for agricultural production. This is based upon the fact that more men than women migrate to towns and it has been realised that women also have great potential for farming. It is therefore of an urgent matter to identify the areas of agricultural production in which rural women are involved with a view to finding possible solutions to alleviate constraints militating against their involvement.

The second issue deals with the involvement of extension agents in the planning of projects for rural areas. It is observed that extension agents in this country are functioning almost entirely in a reactive mode: responding to both opportunities and problems as they arise on an ad hoc basis. This hinders the agents' ability to prioritize his own activities. The end result is that the agent is unable to achieve significant impact in the village, even though he may be very useful to some farmers and even though his time may be fully occupied.

For successful programme implementation – to achieve measurable impact it is suggested that a proactive stance is required. This requires setting both long-term and short-time goals, prioritizing activities. In order to achieve this, extension agents should be allowed to get involved in the planning of programmes which support their efforts. Acting as a member of a larger team with well defined priorities and objectives, the agents' ability to prioritize his own educational efforts is enhanced and the tendency for the agent to be left as a single individual reacting to their environment on an "on demand" basis is reduced.

The third issue deals with extension control in this country. We have discussed the changing pattern of extension services in this country from the pre-colonial period to the present time. Control of extension services within this period took various forms. Some difficulties surfaced in practice as the result of constant reorganizations that were accompanied by various styles of administration and implementation. One important source of problem that has been observed in extension control in the country can be termed "politically conditioned events." In this paper, "conditioned events" denote those events which in large part flow from political decision or are associated with political behaviours. Since agricultural production contains a sequence of activities that involves different categories of officers, the behaviour and work pattern of extension agents have been conditioned by their officers in such a way that they respond more to targets designed by the government planning machinery than serious concern with the needs and aspirations of the farm people. In this process, the activities of extension agents can be described as "target oriented": that is to say that in order for the extension agents to fulfill the goals or aims of their superior officers, they have formed the habit of running around the villages identified as target locations, having in mind specific farmers that they consider "modern" enough who will help them achieve their superior officers' designed objectives. In this process, a whole make believe world is created in which Extension workers receive orders from above in terms of these targets. This have been affecting the performance of Extension workers in this country.

In light of the above it is suggested that there must be a way whereby a ward extension officer at least be part of any decision on

what to pass to the farmers. His interest must be first and foremost to help the farmers and their families. The philosophy of extension control should therefore be based upon individual freedom and respect for one another and must create an environment where individual (rich or poor, literate or illiterate) can express himself / herself and uses his / her initiative. In short, the effectiveness of an extension workers is highly dependent on the organizational soundness of the extension services and the extent it (extension services) creates access for different categories of farmers to the services they render.

Furthermore, it has been observed that the objective and policy guidelines for agricultural development and hence for extension lack focus. This is why we have a myriad of programmes such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the National Accelerated Food Production Project (NFPP), Green Revolution (GR), and Food First Programme (FFP). Most of which are uncoordinated. Such managerial policies tend to "dent" the credibility of the agents before the farmers as the farmers continue to ask "what have they (extension agents) brought now and what will follow next." Thus the control of extension have been pushed from one organization to another without adequate financial backing to enable extension carry them through. It is therefore suggested in this paper that policy and guidelines for agricultural development and extension services must have a clear focus.

The fourth and the last issue deals with Extension Services linkages. Idachaba (1989) and Williams (1989) have stressed this important issue. After so many years of government involvement in agricultural research and Extension, Nigerian agriculture still remain traditional and fails to witness any scientific transformation. This is an urgent matter for urgent attention. Many of our Extension specialists have suggested some factors that have been contributing to low food production and the ineffectiveness of extension services in this country. For example, Williams (1989), discussed a factor that deals with lack of effective linkages between the research, extension, universities and the training systems. He (Williams) argued that agricultural technologies need to be generated continuously and transfer to the extension system for onward transmission to the farmers in order to solve their farm problems. Also, the Extension

system must be provided with channels through which farmers problem can be communicated to the research system. Furthermore, the training system must provide opportunities for the extension agents, researchers and the farmers to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and favorable attitude to solve problems of agricultural production. At the present time, this linkages is either non-existence or weak.

In order to witness scientific transformation in Nigerian agriculture and in order to enhance the effectiveness of the extension services, there must be functional linkages between the universities, research institutes and the extension services. That is, the universities and research institutes need to work out collaborative research programmes especially the national adaptive research trials for key commodities. The university should also assist in training of staff for effective extension work. Finally, Faculty of Agriculture in Nigerian universities should assist by introducing relevant courses such as agricultural journalism for agricultural students. Such a course is lacking in most of Nigerian universities. As a result, most of our extension workers are not well equipped with communication skill.

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