

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE EXTENSION SERVICES IN NIGERIA: THE NEXUS OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AND STAFF MOTIVATION

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Abstract

Extension services is a veritable tool for increase agricultural productivity. This paper posits that information provided through ICT utilization and integration in extension service would make it more effective and efficient. Furthermore it was suggested that extension service be adequately funded and its staff properly motivated for optimum service. The twin impacts of motivated extension workers and effective of ICTs would help increase Agricultural production.

Introduction

Agriculture plays an important role in the life of any nation. In third world countries such as Nigeria, it serves as; source of food for the increasing population, raw materials for the industries, foreign exchange and revenue for the country and employment for a majority of the people. These multilateral and sundry benefits make it necessary to harness its potentials. More so, as the changing macro and micro situations confronting agriculture has given rise to challenging demands and needs in the areas of new solutions and strategies. No nation has significantly developed without developing its agricultural potentials. For this to be possible all the component units and efforts have to be galvanized. Information Communication Technology (ICT), a tool in this era, should be utilized and integrated into the dissemination of information in modern agricultural practices, methods and technologies. The role of extension services as the means of transmitting agricultural awareness/information in terms of modern practices, techniques, innovation and technology to end users must be brought to the fore and strengthened (FAO, 2009). The dwindling number of extension agents and supervisor should be forestalled and they should be motivated to provide effective and efficient service.

Extension Service in Nigeria

Over 60% of Nigerians, about 90 million people of an estimated population of 150 million (over 140 million, 2006 census) practice agriculture in one form or other. Agriculture constitutes 23.3% of GDP (2005) and is therefore a major source of livelihood for most Nigerians. It should be remarked that this is a drop from 41% of GDP, 2001. This underlines the need to co-ordinate the sub-systems of agriculture which include research support, client and extension to improve the agricultural fortunes of the 95% subsistence farmers (small holders) and 55 commercial farmers. Agricultural advisory or extension service is needed to inform, educate, communicate and teach modern methods, models and techniques to rural end users (farmers). In Nigeria, transmitting agricultural information is the responsibility of National Agricultural extension and research liaison service (NAERLS) and Agricultural development projects (ADPS). There are 37 ADPS in Nigeria. The evolution of NAERLS was through five major stages namely: 1920-62, when it was known as Agricultural research and advisory services. 1963-68, it was called Research Liaison services. 1969-75, Extension research liaison services. 1976-86, Agricultural extension research liaison service. 1987- Presently, national Agricultural extension and research liaison service (NAERLS), (Oladimeji, 2006). NAERLS responsibilities include:

- a. To coordinate the overall planning and development of extension liaison service and collaborate with research institutes.
- ii. To co-ordinate national training activities, conferences and workshops, conduct research on technology transfer and adoption.

Zonal offices are located through out the country based on the Agro-ecological division of the country, these are: South west, South east, north east, Northwest, Middle belt.

Complementarily, Agricultural development project (ADP) began as a world bank assisted integrated rural development package with the establishment of the pilot/enclave ADPS in Funtua (Kaduna State) and Gussau (Sokoto State) in 1975. The core features of ADP activities include: an input delivery and credit supply system through a network of farm service, rural feeder road network; intensive and systematic extension training programme with input updated with modern techniques and skills, credit and adaptive research services; and project management together with built in project monitoring and evaluation (Patel, 1983). The Federal Government subsequently established six more enclaves at Anyanbaba, Lafia, Bida, Ilorin, Ekiti-Akoko and Oyo North (1979-1982). Presently a nation wide Agricultural development project to cover all the 36 states and Abuja have been created. The APs operate as a separate organizational structure, with tripartite by the World Bank, Federal government and State governments. The Federal Agricultural Coordinating Unit (FACU) co-ordinates their activities. ADPs provide the largest agricultural extension service in Nigeria.

Views about extension in Nigeria as in many other third world countries especially in Africa have been critical. Madukwe (2006) consider extension as lacking in adequate government funding, resulting in irregular service delivery to the end users. It is also affected by market liberalization and globalization sweeping across the world, giving rise to initiatives, when on the better side of these moving events but stifling and degeneracy when on the wrong side of these situations. Similarly, Johnson (2003) noted that there is a “tragic weakening of agricultural extension system in Nigeria first by under funding, neglect and mismanagement.”

Important components needed for effective extension service include:

1. A sound policy implementation
2. Adapting extension services to end users’ social, cultural and gender characteristics.
3. Aligned production to meet market demands, to encourage farmers to produce at optimum level and avoid loses.
4. Government or public funding of extension service
5. Decentralization to make way for an all inclusive decision making processes for stake holders
6. Provision and development of support infrastructures such as roads, electricity and other social amenities incorporated into poverty reduction and rural development programmes.
7. Adequate remuneration, mobility, insurance and other personnel benefits to motivate extension workers and boost their morale.
8. Putting in place the minimum standard for extension services, personnel and institutional framework.
9. Use of ICTs to enable extension workers reach many more farmers simultaneously.

Extension service is information dependent. There is need to use other means of communication apart from the farmer preferred “face to face” contact to reduce the large ratio of extension worker to farmers (Opara, 2003). This Abubakar (2009) suggested being as high as 15,000 – 1:20,000 in most states compared to the world bank’s recommended ratio of one extension worker to 1000 farmers. Arokoyo (2003) reported that currently, the village extension agent is served to

farmers in a ratio of 1:848- 1:1650 which means that many farmers in Nigeria have no access to extension services.

There is need therefore to employ other means that afford mass information of farmers for sustainable growth and productivity in the Agricultural sector of our economy.

Impact of ICT on Extension Service

Agricultural extension today suffers from several problems. The challenge of training and visit (T and V) is also negatively impacted on the extension workers' lack of mobility. To ameliorate these challenges there have to be:

1. Means of disseminating information to large number of farmers while ensuring that such information remain relevant and appropriate for farmers' utilization.
2. Means of reaching out to farmers in the quickest, cost effective way that is not affected by the demographic, geographic and socio-cultural barriers usually encountered by extension workers.

ICTs presently in use (traditional ICTs) and the sophisticated ICTs provides the immediate plausible means of mitigating the many challenges posed to extension service in Nigeria, and many third world countries. Despite the seeming odds against it in terms of cost, technical skills required for it utilization, level of literacy of rural farmers and lack of basic infrastructure such as electricity needed for its use.

Use of ICTs in Nigeria Extension Service

ICT in extension service is practical response to the declining situation of agricultural extension. The information it brings into agriculture aligns agricultural practices with what obtains in other sectors of our economy. In our present innovation and creativity era with productivity fueled by knowledge based economy (KBE), knowledge and more knowledge as provided by ICTs have become a major driver of the wheel of technological growth and development. This facility can equally be employed by Agricultural extension to impact on its techniques with rewarding results that positively reflect its set objectives. Nigeria extension services are supported by media, mobile cinema, radio and television agricultural programmes and videos. The information provided according to Arokoyo (2003) is "provider driven." This implies that it does not necessarily take to cognizance the situation of individual farmers. Despite government policy supports the use of radio channels for education and other purposes, rural or community radios still do not exist. Their capacity; rural radios and television stations to boost extension service delivery especially as they attend to the agricultural challenges of their community swiftly and precisely are appreciably put in to use in Zambia and Uganda (FAO, 2006). Farmers are encouraged to try out the suggested methods, technologies and solutions for themselves. They are assisted by extension staff that use ICTs such as video to record the feedback and new information is then compiled and incorporated into future extension material (CTA, 2009).

Though constraints exist in ICT use. They should be seen as further development challenges that should be mitigated. Present challenges are pointers to the third world status (developing state) of Nigeria. These are erratic power supply, poor and inadequately maintained ICT Infrastructures, high illiteracy of the information users or extension service clients, limited coverage of AM/FM stations that are largely privatized or commercialized; poor policy implementations, limited use of computers and the internet in rural areas (absence of cyber café).

The potentials of ICT utilization in extension service far outweigh its drawbacks if there is the political will to make ICT a priority in Nigeria agriculture. For instance, over 60 million Nigerians possess a mobile telephone line which means communication between 'extensionist' and the client is very possible through this medium. This facility can be improved upon to produce broadband internet connection, which is now possible, though expensive. Government can facilitate their acquisition or provide same through government private sector partnership for extension use. Made in Nigeria computer "Zionx" can be produced at cheaper government subsidized rates and made available to extension workers and their clients. The launch of Nigeria sat -1- satellite in September 26th, 2006 is a boost to agricultural development if its intentions are sustained.

ICT integration and utilization in extension service would help in the collection, processing and transmission of data resulting in faster extension service delivery in form of quality information to more farmers. It also opens up easier communication access between 'extensionist' and the end user. (CTA, 2003).

Impact of Staff Motivation on Extension Service

When extension goals become difficult to attain apart from the challenges of extension services both macro and micro situations, it implies a management failure since goals are set normally within achievable limits. The role of extension managers is to ensure that set goals are achieved. The manager uses resources available, human and material to achieve this. When goals are not achieved, the concern is to find out why. Equally relevant in this regard is to question (investigate) the behavior of extension agents and their attitude towards the assigned task. Judge (1998) maintains that attitudes to work do affect performance and such is normally influenced by personal ability and level of motivation. Obadan (2001) reveals that the public sector extension service is affected by problems which include, irregular salary payment, deficiently trained extension agents, lack of mobility, inadequate incentives and other motivational problems. The consequence is a negative attitude to assigned tasks. The existence of motivation and its nature can be deduced from observation and experience of behavior. Motivation is therefore a tool that can be manipulated by management (manager) to effectively achieve set organizational goals by blending the goals of the individuals in the organization with it. The social system model by Getzel and Cuba supports this concept. It suggests that role congruence would bring harmony to organizations while opposing roles, between an individual and the organization result in conflict. This underscores the need to motivate extension agents (workers) in management's desire to achieve set goal.

Management can employ steps to motivate workers, to include:

1. Ascertain the motivational need for extension workers
2. Attempt to meet the motivation needs of individual workers by taken cognizance of individual differences of the extension agents and their different circumstances.
3. Selecting and applying motivators (motivational packages) this involves what, when and which person place and situation it can be used.
4. Feedback; ascertains result and take corrective actions (White 2001). In applying motivational and co-operation should be sought. It is important that the welfare of extension agents be looked into. This helps to create more positive feeling towards the organization and increase the work output. Communication has shown to be a vital tool in strengthening role congruence between management and workers. It should be frequently employed to increase enthusiasm, and improve team work and morale. This gives extension workers the sense of being needed and wanted. And also induce better spirit and morale. In a study conducted by Omoregie (2009) in Edo State on motivational factors that impact on job performance of

extension agents in Edo State ADP. A random sample of 53 out of the 66 extension agents in the state was taken, constituting 83% of the population of extension agents. Questionnaire which sought to consider the relative importance of ten motivational variables (factors) was administered on the agents. Result obtained is shown in the table below in order of motivational importance.

Respondents' Perception of the Relative Importance of Motivational Factors

	Frequency	%
Prompt payment of salary	50	94.3
Increase in salary	48	90.6
Prompt promotion	45	84.9
Provision of mobility	44	83.0
Training opportunity	40	75.5
Pension/retirement benefit	40	75.5
Job security	38	71.1
Provision of medical facilities/accommodation	35	66.0
Recognition of achievement	30	56.6
Participation in decision making	18	34.0

Source: Field survey data, 2009

n=53

The fact that extension agents could order their motivational factors suggests that their individual need priority was used to determine the order of the motivational impact of the ten variables. This shows that there is a need hierarchy possessed by every extension work which might not necessarily align with Maslow's hierarchy of need but must be identified and responded to by extension manager if the extension worker would perform his task optimally.

Recommendation

There is need to:

1. Integrate ICT utilization into the curriculum of agricultural extension to produce better trained extension workers
2. Extension workers in the field should be trained to use the more sophisticated ICTs such as computer and internet in T & V and also in recording their observations.
3. There is need to fund extension service to provide better remuneration and welfare package for extension workers.
4. The nexus of ICTs and staff motivation should be employed to optimize extension services provided to end user.

It should be recognized that while it may be appropriate to introduce new technologies to increase agricultural productivity. It is plausible to motivate the staff that facilitate the process.

Conclusion

This era is the age of information communication technology. Its integration into many aspects of our every day activities means that extension service as a tool for increase agricultural productivity cannot be insulated from it. It is already used in our agricultural production extension service in form of radios and television extension programmes such that its further integration and utilization should be optimized.

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