

ADOPTING APPROPRIATE METHODS FOR IMPROVING INTEREST IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION: A STRATEGY FOR MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Agriculture is said to be the main occupation of about 75-80% of Nigeria's population living in rural communities. Due partly to their low investment, low output, resulting in low income, rural areas are characterized by misery, poverty, penury, morbidity and neglect creating mass exodus of able bodied youths from the rural to urban centres despite the availability of sound modern methods of agricultural production. It is known that agricultural development agencies (extension agencies) guided by education principles continue to make frantic efforts to enhance the ability of farmers to adopt innovations relevant to high productivity in agriculture. For farmers to have a change of behaviour and have the right attitudes towards innovations, there is absolute need for developing agents (extension agents) to adopt the appropriate methods for improving farmers interest. This will guarantee and enhance farmers' skills and psychological development capable of transforming the Nigerian agriculture from traditional to a modern status.

Introduction

The Advanced Learners' Dictionary (1988) defined the term improving as making better a condition or situation while interest is defined as wanting to be involved to discover more about something. The topic can therefore be referred to mean, making condition or situation of farmers better to have needs of involvement in Agricultural Education that can enhance manpower development. At the level of the individual farmer, it implies skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. The achievement of any of those aspects of personal development is very much tied in with the state of society as a whole (Olaitan, 1986). He further stated that skills, creativity and other parameters of developments are acquired by the individuals due largely to change in behaviour and attitudes. The highlights on some of these methods for improving human interest will help us understand what we can hope for or to achieve in agriculture even in the general economic development. Generally, influencing human behaviour is a serious matter, which raises many questions.

Situations and objectives, for which we influence others, need careful examinations. Most common and important methods can be integrated in order to effect a planned programme as should be found in agricultural education/extension. Agricultural extension adapts relevant education principles to help farmers to live better and more productive lives particularly through the utilization of research results (innovations) (Famoriyo, 1982).

In attempting to get an innovation adopted by farmers, several methods should be employed, one method may be used to draw attention of the farmers to practice while another method is used to stimulate desire for more specific or detail information (Basu, 1969). Basu opines that, there is variation in the speed at which individuals learn. Some persons may already be 'trying' or 'using' a new practice and would desire more details of how to properly use it whereas others may barely be aware of the practice or may just becoming interested in it. It is for these reasons that 'experts' advise that a variety of teaching methods is most effective. A vivid and satisfying previous experience serves to stimulate new learning even in rural adults. Building new learning upon previous experience is a fundamental principle of all associative learning (Basu, 1969)

Some Methods for Influencing Human Interest Compulsion or Coercion

Here, power is exerted by an authority, forcing somebody to do something. This method requires sufficient power to influence the target individual or group, he must be able to check whether the person being covered is behaving in the desired manner.

Application of coercive power on farmers for the adoption of innovations in agricultural production means that the person applying the power is responsible for the behaviour of the farmers he is changing (Hawkins, 1988). He further stated that the method could be applied to a large group to achieve result in a short time. He sighted the 1945 annual report of Kenya's department of agriculture, which saw the need to apply compulsion and continuous pressure on farmers to introduce improved methods and for legal power to enforce soil conservative practice. According to him, before independence in Kenya, extension agents were used to enforce government policies and directives like land reforms, landlord/tenants; legislation etc. The method is expensive to maintain

and control and the people being coerced may not always behave as required (Hawkins, 1988).

As stated, if compulsion or coercion is used appropriately, it is capable of enhancing manpower development in the agricultural sub-economy.

Exchange

Goods and services are exchanged between two individuals or groups. The conditions for using these methods are that each party in the exchange process considered the transaction to be 'in their favour, each has the goods and services desired by the other and each can only deliver his part when the exchange of goods or service have been delivered by the other, or can trust that this will be done (Hawkins, 1988). He stated that exchange is often a very efficient method for meeting needs of different groups. He emphasized that agricultural extension education can play a useful role by drawing the attention of a potentially disadvantaged partner in an exchange to ways of preventing the other gaining an unfair and legal trading agreement with their urban based trading partners. The exchange of grains with farming inputs e.g. fertilizers in a farming community can be adjudged. The exchange method can also be used by progressive farmers to enhance appropriate manpower development in agriculture apart from the extension agents.

Advice

Advice is given on which solution to choose for a certain problem (Hawkins, 1988). He cautioned that we can use this method if the farmer agrees with us about the nature of his problem and the criteria for choosing a correct solution. That we must know enough of the farmer's situation and have adequate information to solve his problem in a way that has been tested scientifically or in-practice. That the farmer is confident that we can and will help him with a solution to his problem. We don't think it necessary or possible for the farmer to solve the problem himself and the farmer has sufficient means at his disposal to carry out the advice. Many farmers in industrialized countries recognize they would be put out of farming business if they continue to farm in the same way a good farm did twenty years ago. Hence they must be kept well informed about new developments in agricultural production technologies and markets as farmers adopt technologies they personally tried than others (Farmer, 1980). Advice has been the major extension strategy in informing agriculture and if carried out well it is capable of enhancing manpower development in the agricultural sector.

Openly Influencing a Farmer's Knowledge Level and Attitude

This method may be applied when we believe that the farmer cannot solve his own problem because he has insufficient or incorrect knowledge and or because his attitude do not match his goals, we consider the farmer can solve his own problems if he has more knowledge or has changed his attitudes, we are prepared to help the farmer collect more and better knowledge to help him change his attitude. We have this knowledge or how to get it, we can use teaching methods to transmit this knowledge or to improving the farmer's attitude and the farmer trusts our expertise and motives and is prepared to cooperate with us in our task of changing his knowledge and attitude (Hawkins, 1988). It is possible to achieve long-term behavioural change using this method. The farmer's self-confidence and capacity to solve other similar problems in future is increased. Example, the teaching of the use of insecticide to spray cowpea, the calibration, precaution in handling agrochemicals etc. Again this is viewed as a possible means of enhancing manpower development in agriculture.

Manipulation or Influencing the Farmer's Knowledge Level and Attitude Without the Farmer Being Aware

It is said that the condition for using this method are; we must believe it is necessary and desirable for the farmer to change his behaviour in a certain direction and that it is unnecessary and undesirable for him to make independent decision, we must control the techniques without them being aware, and the farmers do not actively object to be influenced in this way (Stone and Eswara, 1969). Here, it is said that for an extension agent to effectively change or manipulate his farmers to accepting or adopting a particular technology, he must be aware of the farmers' values, his feelings, and his emotional behaviour. That the person exerting influence bears responsibility for the consequences of his action. They cited two agrochemicals manufactured by two different companies with same active ingredients and quantity but different trade names. That extension was able to make farmers accept one over the other. This method is handled wisely is a fast way of enhancing manpower development in agriculture.

...: The methods discussed so far are directed to influencing farmers themselves directly. However, directing influence on the farmers' situations can also result to important changes and [achievement on the farmers. Example include:

Providing Means

When the farmer does not have the means or does not want to risk this means and we have them and prepare to make them available to the farmer on a temporary or permanent basis (Hawkins, 1988). According to him, the 1945 annual agricultural report in Kenya's department of agriculture has it that farmers readily accepted credit facilities, improved seeds, tractor services when the federal government via extension agents informed the farmers of guaranteed good price (Price Control). The success of this scheme is an indicator of farmers' interest to comply with regulation when it is in their best interest to do so. He stated that taxes on income can be used to recover the costs of production in addition to loan repayment. This method can be used to stimulate farmers into

production (Famoriyo, 1986).

Providing Services

This involves taking over certain tasks from farmers. The method may be used if we have the knowledge and or means available to perform the task better or more economically than the farmer; we agree with the farmer that it is useful to perform these tasks and we are prepared to perform them for him (Hawkins, 1988). The Kenyan 1945 annual report of the agricultural department (Hawkins, 1988 :240-241) has it that fanners' who were approached by extension agents to have their farms sprayed for them with herbicide accepted to achieve good results, which was achieved. This spray could be technical and difficult for farmers to handle on their own. Feasibility studies and professional financial reports on farms have to be handled by professionals as many farmers find it difficult. If free services or assistance is given indefinitely it is likely to make farmers lazy and dependent on the extension agent. They can teach farmers to become self-reliant or be prepare to pay for services. If the extension agents have not got the professional skill he can direct the farmer to the appropriate place.

Changing the Farmer's Social and/or Economic Structure

Methods for changing the social economic structure in rural areas may be important means of influencing, when we agree with the farmer about his optional behaviour the farmer is not in the position to behave in his way because of barriers in the economic and or social structure, we consider changes in this structure to be desirable, we have the freedom to work towards these changes and are in a position to do this either through power conviction (Hawkins, 1988). In 1926, the establishment of a modern farm centre at Yandev changed farmers' attitude to mass planting of economic trees like citrus, mango, and oil palm (Oche, 2000). This method can enhance manpower development because of the economic empowerment attached to the strategy.

Conclusion

The methods of influence vary according to the degree of harmony or conflict of interest between those who influence and those who are influenced. It is important for the farmer and the extension agent to be aware of their common interest in extension topic, each depends on the other, with a change by either one not possibly destroying a mutually beneficial relationship. This is because in many cases the extension agent is the main contact with the rural community and the outside world So he means to the fanner a doctor, engineer, lawyer, chemist, administrator etc. He should be able K» refer farmers to appropriate place (s) what he cannot solve and still retain his worth before farmers Generally, most common and important methods for improving farmers' interest can be integrated IT order, to effect a planned programme capable of achieving the desired manpower development in t!-i agricultural sub-sector of the economy.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will largely improve our human power development ::" followed:

1. Changing the farmer's social and/or economic structure, and
2. Use of integrated methods of influencing behaviour and improving interest of farmers L
Agricultural Education.

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