

THE CHALLENGES OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION TEACHING METHODS IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Agricultural Extension is consensually agreed to be an information delivery system that ensures effective flow of ideas between the extension worker and the farmer, as well as the correct application of the new ideas by the farmers. This means that Agricultural Extension services should operate under the principles of learning by doing, teaching through the demonstration approach, farmer-centred programmes planned to satisfy their need and consistent with their expectation and the principle of beginning where the people are, rather than planning and implementing educational programmes beyond their capabilities. It is in this vein, that the paper highlights the roles of Agricultural Extension vis-a-vis the challenges limiting efficiency of Agricultural Extension teaching methods.

Introduction

Agricultural extension is an educational assistance and advice given by an organization or a individual who seeks to help particular farmers to identify and solve their farming problems by themselves (Chukwudi, 1994). It is created to fill the cultural gap between farmers and extension workers.

Agricultural extension services and programmes have developed around a philosophy of helping farmers help themselves in the identification and solution of their farm and home problems] In a predominantly subsistent rural agriculture, the small-scale farmers are less able to deal effectively with their individual daily problems. Neighbouring farmers are all experiencing similar problems and cannot be of much help to one another. There is little challenge, encouragement or hope in the environment to help farmers believe that things could be better. This leads to apathy and an inability to deal with the problems objectively.

Agricultural extension brings help through education and encourages the farmers to organize cooperatively among themselves. Extension workers can encourage the sharing of information and cooperation under conditions of equality, mutual trust and respect for the culture, values and belief systems of the farmers. Education in this context is voluntary, non-formal and purposeful]

Agricultural extension respects the ability of rural peoples to participate actively in decisions rather than accepting new information passively. Agricultural extension services according to Ekperere and Durrani, (1975) should operate under the principles of:

- i. Helping people help themselves;
- ii. Beginning where the people are, rather than planning and implementing educational programmes beyond their capacities;
- iii. Learning by doing-encouraging local participation in extension programmes;
- iv. Teaching through the demonstration approach;
- v. Voluntary involvement, with absence of force or coercion;
- vi. Farmer-centred programmes planned to satisfy- their needs and consistent with their expectations;
- vii. Development of programmes based on mutual trust and respect; and
- viii. The belief that farmers are rational, have basic needs, are knowledgeable in farming and are motivated in seeking goals consistent with these needs.

Roles of Agricultural Extension

The role of extension in agricultural development involves improvement in the performance of those involved in primary production. Higher levels of production efficiency in the provision of goods and services are attempted in order to increase their per capita income, quality of the life and national welfare. Farming involves a broad understanding of natural phenomena and this is difficult without education or informed assistance.

Extension can assist farmers by increasing their awareness of improved agricultural technology and improving their decision-making skills.

According to Ekpere and Durant, (1975). The roles of Agricultural extension can be summarized as follows: i. Stimulation of farmers to try, accept and use new agricultural practices ;

ii. Dissemination of research results through the development of appropriate production packages and encouraging rural farmers in their use; iii. Organization of credit, marketing and farmer's cooperatives' iv. Provision of farm-management advisory services; v. Guidance and general education.

Agricultural Extension Teaching Method in Nigeria

Teaching is the imparting of information and extension teaching guides the learning process so that the farmer learns more and better.

Extension teaching methods are devices which facilitate learning by farmers so that they become interested to learn about, develop skills in, and make use of, new agricultural technology.

These according to Maunder, (1972) Adams, (1982) include:

(a) Mass Methods

The mass extension teaching methods include these methods which use an audiovisual approach, e.g. television and films, those that are primarily audio, e.g. radio and those that use the print media and rely primarily on literacy skills. The main characteristic of the mass method is that information can be directed to a large number of people in different locations. The use of any particular type of the mass method depends on the audience and the availability of the equipment needed. Mass methods are particularly useful for creating a general awareness of a particular phenomenon, for example,

Information on the invasion of locust or the outbreak of a disease can be disseminated quickly.

The mass methods which have become effective in extension teaching in Nigeria according to Maunder, (1972) and Ekpere and Durrant, (1975) includes radio, television, newspapers, extension bulletins leaflets, circular letters and posters, cinema vans and public address systems.

(b) Group Methods

Extension teaching aimed at groups includes meetings, formal lectures, discussions and panel groups, agricultural shows, tours, field days and demonstrations.

(i) Demonstration

The demonstration method is used to teach a new skill or a new way of doing something. The demonstration method attracts and holds the attention of willing learners, particularly if they are interested in what is demonstrated; it shows by example, the practical application of knowledge can convince those who doubt that a new practice could be successful or that they themselves could use it.

(ii) Agricultural Shows

In these exhibitions, farmers are invited to show off their produce and compete with other farmers for prizes. These provide learning and rewards for farmers. Agro-industries, research, training institutions and government agencies are involved in agricultural development and this enables farmers to make contacts and to learn about new developments.

(iii) Tours and field trips

This involves planned visits to places outside the farmer's village and farm. For example, the extension worker may take farmers to visit an agricultural research institute, an extension workstation, an agro-business establishment or a training institution.

urs and field trips provide opportunities for new experience and learning, stimulate interest, allow farmers to learn by doing and encourage group discussion of difficult ideas.

(c) **Individual Methods**

Extension workers in Nigeria need to reach individual farmers in order to convey new methods and information. There is little money to provide mass or group teaching methods and the farmers are not always able to make use of them when they are provided. For these reasons, extension workers rely on: farm and home visits; training and visits, office visits; personal letters, consultation and telephone calls. In farm and home visits, the extension workers go to a village to become acquainted with some of the farmers. Visit sometimes reestablish old relationships and the extension worker may be invited by a farmer or group to solve a specific problem or explain a new government policy.

The training and visit approach was developed by the World Bank.. The extension worker combines frequent visits to the farm with weekly or bi-weekly training to learn the necessary recommendations and practices for the farm operations of that week. In office call, a farmer with a problem needing immediate solution will go to the extension worker's office in search of a solution but only highly motivated farmers will make an office call.

Challenges of Agricultural Extension Teaching Methods in Nigeria in 21st Century

As Okonkwo (1987) and Adams (1982) mentioned several challenges responsible for ineffectiveness of agricultural extension teaching methods to include the following: (i)

Inadequate Training for Staff and Farmers

Extension workers need adequate training in modern agriculture to be effective in teaching farmers. They should be equipped to be able to develop practical skills in their clientele. Extension workers must be involved in farmer education programmes designed to teach managerial skills and provide knowledge.

(ii) **Poor Management and Communication Channels**

Extension work and supervision is weak. The line of communication and teaching is too long making most teaching methods boring. In most cases also, the complex chain of command tends to delay and distort information.

(iii) **Poor Ratio of Extension Staff to Farmers**

Very few extension workers are available to serve too many farmers. This is why most teaching methods cannot be effective. A ratio of one extension staff to over 1,000 farm families cannot ensure effective communication. It is suggested that the ratio of extension workers to farmer should be between 1 to 500 and 1 to 100 instead of the current 1 to 3,000 farmers, (Chukwudi, 1994).

(iv) **Lack of Teaching Evaluation**

Most teaching programmes in agriculture are not evaluated against set objectives. There is the need for effective monitoring of teaching methods. Periodic evaluation is necessary in order to appraise accomplishment.

(v) **Inadequate Teaching Equipment**

The use of any particular method of the teaching in Agricultural extension depends on the audience and availability of the equipment needed. Some of these equipment and organization of programmes are very expensive e.g. Agricultural show.

(vi) **Illiteracy, Roads and Language Barrier**

Some of these farmers are illiterates and so could not be able to cope with whichever agricultural extension teaching method used. Most roads to the village where farmers are staying are terribly bad and sometimes interpreters are needed since some of these farmers do

not understand English Language. Any idea in conflict with beliefs and social values of the community will be rejected.

Suggestions for Improvement

1. Appropriate agricultural extension teaching methods should be encouraged and demonstrated practically for the farmers by agricultural extension officers.
2. Farmers should be made to attend regular workshops and seminars organized by the Agricultural extension officers.
3. There should be provision of more funds by the government to enable extension officers purchase substantial teaching equipment, training of staff and farmers including proper supervision.
4. Agricultural extension officers should have ability to structure information for different audiences in the process of teaching.
5. They should have ability to communicate with individuals and groups on knowledge and skills in agriculture.
6. Farmers should be properly stimulated during teaching to try, accept and use new agricultural practices. There should be road to the rural areas and farmers should also be properly guided and educated.

Conclusion

The basic aim of Agricultural extension is to increase agricultural production through the diffusion of improved techniques. Therefore, appropriate agricultural extension teaching methods should continue to be encouraged and demonstrated practically for the farmers to be convinced, accept and use these new agricultural practices.

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