

FARMERS' PERCEPTION OF EFFECTIVENESS OF EXTENSION AGENTS IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study assessed the farmers' perception of the extension agents' effectiveness in Osun State, Nigeria. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select 240 farmers. Data were analysed using descriptive statistic such as frequency counts, mean and percentage. The result reveals that 57.25 percent of the respondents were male with their mean age and household size estimated at 47 years and 7 persons respectively. Distribution of respondents based on perceived assessment of extension agents' (EAs) knowledge/mastery of subject matter revealed that 32.50 percent, 21.67 percent and 55.0 percent of the respondents perceived EAs as low in term of benefits from the messages, moderate in term of integrate theories with practical and high in term of topics presentation, respectively. Major areas in agricultural practices covered by EAs as perceived by the respondents are crop production technologies (67.50 percent), processing/storage technology (51.67 percent), input distribution (37.50 percent), income generating strategies (32.50 percent) and marketing strategies (41.67 percent). It is concluded that the respondents perceived EAs' knowledge/mastery of Subject matter in term of information on new technologies low but high in term of integrating theories with practical. The research therefore recommends training and revalidating should be organized to extension agent to boost their knowledge on subject matter.

Keywords: Extension agents; subject matter; marketing and technology dissemination

Introduction

Over the years, agricultural extension has been at the fore-front in the delivery of adequate information to farmers for increased productivity. According to Apantaku and Oyegunle (2016), agricultural extension service delivery all over the world has been concerned with communicating research findings and improved agricultural practices to farmers. Agricultural extension service is saddled with the responsibility of disseminating innovation that could transform agricultural production to ensure food security and economic development of agrarian community. The roles of extension today go beyond technology transfer and training of farmers but include assisting farmer to form groups, dealing with marketing issues, addressing public interest issues in rural areas such as resource conservation, health, monitoring of food security and agricultural production, food safety, nutrition, family education, and youth development and partnering with a broad range of service providers and other agencies (Ijeoma and Adesope, 2015).

Agricultural extension is essential to agricultural development. In Nigeria, the Ministry of Agriculture

and Food Security (MAFS) (2001) reports that agricultural extension aims at improving the productivity of agricultural systems, raising the incomes of farm families and improving the life of farm households. In different approaches of organizing extension services to farmers, the extension agents have many roles to play. In a nutshell extension education is an educational process that uses varieties of extension methods designed to helps farmers improve their living standards through educational procedures. Extension methods could be used for understanding the best ways to handle the farmers, identifying conflicts and solutions so as to improve their standards of living, (Obibuaku, 1983). Various agricultural extension approaches have been employed to deliver extension services to farmers in the world. Such extension approaches include general ministry-based extension services; training and visit; integrated extension; university-based extension; commodity-based extension; input supply extension; private-based extension; client-based extension; participatory extension; and farming systems research and extension (Sonoko, 2017). Some extension approaches were successful than others, but none of

them were exceptionally good in reaching and involving the majority of poor farmers. More importantly, in all of the above listed extension approaches, the farmers have never been looked at as partners but as ignorant people who should be filled with all agricultural innovations from professional extensionists (Mbozi, 2017).

Information and knowledge are very vital in agricultural development of any community and where they are poorly disseminated the community is at a risk of development. Omotayo (2015) observed that agricultural extension depends largely on information exchange between farmers and broad range of other actors who are the front line extension workers that are the direct link between farmers and other actors in the agricultural knowledge and information system (AKIS). Ijeoma and Adesope (2015) opined that the mission of the extension service is to provide research-based information, educational programs, and technology transfer and needs of the people, enabling them to make informed decisions about their economic, social and cultural well-being. When farmers lack access to knowledge and information that would help them achieve maximum agricultural yield, or relevant information are not disseminated to them on agricultural activities/practices, they not only grope in the dark, but are driven by circumstances to migrate about in search of formal employment, as the only option for survival, which will eventually reduce agricultural activities in the country (Munyua, 2020).

Problem Statement

Traditional farming is the most predominant practice adopted by many farmers in Nigeria which usually resulted in declining in agricultural production of the years (MAFC, 2019). The blame on the observed decline in crop productivity was caused by dependency of farmers on traditional agricultural technologies and producing mainly for subsistence (MINAG, 2014). Based on this, a wide range of policies, strategies, and approaches were formulated by the Nigeria government to reverse the worsening food and agricultural trends towards sustaining agricultural growth. These included, introducing a range of agricultural initiatives and the Agricultural Development Project (ADP). Despite all these efforts, farmers seem to have not benefited from agricultural sector initiatives especially food crop farmers in Oyo state in particular have failed to benefit from services delivered by agricultural extension agents under the introduced initiatives. According to Saidia *et al.* (2016), food crop farmers in rural areas have been experiencing low yields per unit area and this has been

attributed to lack of extension services and poor technical know-how of farmers. Also, Ewbank *et al.* (2007) asserted that general extension approaches have limited effectiveness in making available a range of technological options from which farmers can choose due to little understanding of the needs of farmers. As a result, the general extension approaches have been seen as being ineffective in enhancing farmers' adoption of innovations. Due to limited effectiveness of the general extension approaches as described above, the farmer-to-farmer extension (FTF) approach has the potential of supplementing existing extension approaches and improves farmers' access to extension services. The FTF approach promotes farmers and other rural people as the principal agents of change in provision of extension services. The FTF approach is effective in serving farmers' needs, institutionally more sustainable, comparably inexpensive and used in areas where there is inadequate or absence of government extension staff. Furthermore, the FTF approach is also thought to reach and include the majority of poor farmers, thus increasing adoption of innovations (Ewbank *et al.*, 2017)

Therefore, the interaction between the extension agents and the farmers and the extent to which farmers perceived extension agents as useful to them is vital to bringing change in agricultural output and could explain the dynamics embedded in advices adopted by farmers in a given locale. For example, the frequency of contact by extension agents is crucial because it is through this that important and useful information about improved and recommended agricultural practices are disseminated to farmers (Sarker and Ithora, 2019). The amount or type of useful information disseminated to farmers could be used to determine the effectiveness of extension agents in transferring knowledge needed by farmers to improve production. This study therefore, gathered information about the extent to which farmers viewed their extension agents as being effective in transferring the required information and knowledge necessary to enable them achieve optimal production in farming. Hence, the study assessed farmers' perception of effectiveness of extension agents in Oyo State. The specific objectives are to ascertain the frequency of contact between farmers and extension agents as well as determine the respondents' assessment of extension agents' effectiveness through performance in knowledge/mastering of subject matters, teaching and communication skills, areas of coverage and relevance of messages to need.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Osun State, South Western Nigeria. It is an inland state in south-western Nigeria, with its capital at Osogbo. It is bounded in the north by Kwara state, in the east by Ekiti State and partly by Ondo State, in the south by Ogun State and in the west by Oyo State. It has a tropical climate with rainforest vegetation on its southern part and a derived savannah on its northern end. It has an estimated land area of 9,251 square kilometers. The estimated human population is 3,416,959 (2006 population census) and it is characterized commercially by a dual economic focus, the burgeoning industrial sector and a dominant agricultural sector.

Sampling Techniques

Multistage sampling technique was used to select 240 food crop farmers from 18 communities in two agricultural zones of Oyo State (Ife and Iwo).

First stage involved the selection of two Zones which are Ife and Iwo randomly. Second stage involved simple random selection of three (3) blocks from each of the two ADP zones respectively making 6 blocks. Stage three involved random selection of four (4) cells from each of the 6 blocks making 24 cells. While the last stage involved random selection of eleven (10)

rural households from each of the 24 cells making 240 rural households. Primary data were collected using structured interview guide. Data were analysed using frequency count, percentage and mean.

Results and Discussion

Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents in the study area

Table 1 revealed the socioeconomic characteristics such as Age, Marital status, Education, Farm size, Religion and Household size of the respondents in the study area. The study showed that 57.50 percent of the respondents were male with means age of the respondent estimated at 45 years. This was in line with Davis (2013) who also showed the mean age of the respondents to be 48 years. In terms of marital status, 56.67 percent of the respondents were married, 24.17 percent were single while 11.67 percent were divorced. On the educational level, 25.00 percent of the respondents had primary education, 40.00 percent of the respondents had secondary education, and those with tertiary education were 10.00 percent, while 10.83 percent of the respondent had no formal education.

Table 1: Distribution of Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents

CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN
Age			
Less than 30	66	27.50	47
30 – 40	38	15.83	
41 – 50	46	19.17	
51 - 60	22	9.17	
Above 60	68	28.33	
Marital Status			
Single	58	24.17	
Married	136	56.67	
Widowed	28	11.67	
Divorced	18	7.50	
Gender			
Male	138	57.50	
Female	102	42.50	
Occupation			
Farming	52	21.85	
Trading/Civil servant	138	57.50	
Artisan	50	20.65	
Household size			
Less than 4	88	36.97	7
4 – 8	86	36.13	
9 - 12	52	21.85	
Above 12	12	5.04	
Education level			
Primary Education	60	25.00	



Secondary Education	96	40.00	
Tertiary Education	24	10.00	
No formal Education	60	25.00	
Religion			
Christian	78	32.50	
Islam	128	53.33	
Traditional	28	14.13	
Income (₦)			
Less than 50,000	156	65.00	49,500.50
50,000 - 100,000	60	25.00	
Above 100,000	24	10.00	
Total	240	100.00	

Perceived Assessment of Extension agent knowledge/Mastery of Subject matter

Table 2 revealed the perceived assessment of extension agent knowledge/mastery of subject matter by the respondents in the study area. Based on good knowledge of subject matter, 35.83 percent perceived them low. Also, 32.50 percent, 21.67 percent and 55.0

percent of the respondents perceived the extension agent as low in term of beneficial of the messages, medium in term of integrate theories with practical and high in term of topics presentation respectively. Also, 52.50 percent of the respondents perceived extension agent as high in term of explanatory of subject matter.

Table 2: Perceived Assessment of Extension agent knowledge/Mastery of Subject matter

S/No	Assessment questions	Low Freq (%)	Medium Freq (%)	High Freq (%)
1	Have good knowledge of subject matter	84 (35.83)	34 (14.17)	120 (50.00)
2	Have a lot of new technologies	94 (39.17)	64 (30.83)	72 (30.00)
3	Messages are beneficial	78 (32.50)	44 (18.33)	116 (49.16)
4	Integrate theories and practical	118 (49.17)	52 (21.67)	70 (29.17)
5	Presentation of topics is good	86 (35.83)	22 (9.17)	132 (55.00)
6	Listen to your problem	82 (34.17)	56 (23.33)	102 (42.50)
7	Act as if they know all	78 (32.50)	96 (40.00)	66 (27.50)
8	Impose their ideas	98 (40.83)	100 (41.67)	42 (17.50)
9	Extension agent is very explanatory	84 (35.00)	30 (12.50)	126 (52.50)

Percentages are in parentheses

Perceived areas covered by Extension agents

The result of respondents' perceived areas in agricultural practices covered by extension agents in the study area was presented in Table 3. Majority (67.50 percent) of the respondents perceived that the extension agents covered areas on commodity crop production technologies as against 32.50 percent that perceived they didn't cover areas on commodity crop production. Also, 51.67 percent, 37.50 percent, 32.50

percent and 41.67 percent perceived that the extension agents covered areas on processing/storage technology, input distribution, income generating strategies and marketing respectively. Furthermore, 58.33 percent, 21.6 percent and 25.0 percent of the respondents perceived that the extension agents didn't cover areas that have to do with micro-credit, environmental and health issues.

Table 3: Perceived areas covered by Extension agents

S/No	Coverage areas	Yes Freq (%)	No Freq (%)
1	Commodity crop production technologies	78 (32.50)	162 (67.50)
2	Processing and Storage technologies	116 (48.33)	124 (51.67)
3	Input distribution	150 (62.50)	90 (37.50)
4	Income generating strategies	162 (67.50)	78 (32.50)
5	Marketing	140 (58.33)	100 (41.67)

6	Micro-Credit	140 (58.33)	100 (41.67)
7	Environmental issue	52 (21.67)	188 (78.33)
8	Health issue	60 (25.00)	180 (75.00)
9	Information and Communication technology	116 (48.33)	124 (51.67)

Percentages are in parentheses

Relevance of Extension agents message to respondents technological/Needs/Problem

Table 4 revealed the distribution of respondents on their perceived relevance of extension agents message to their technological needs or problems. In term of message on improved varieties, 38.33 percent, 34.17 percent and 27.50 percent perceived the message as

highly relevant, low relevant and not relevant respectively. Also, in terms of messages/information on processing technology, fertilizer application and storage technology, 31.67 percent, 63.33 percent and 24.37 percent of the respondents perceived EAs message as highly relevant, low relevant and not relevant respectively.

Table 4: Distributions of respondents on relevance of Extension agents message to respondents Needs/Problem

S/No	Relevance of EAs message	High relevant Freq (%)	Low relevant Freq (%)	Not relevant Freq (%)
1	Improved varieties	92 (38.33)	82 (34.17)	66 (27.50)
2	Processing	76 (31.67)	70 (29.17)	94 (39.17)
3	Fertilizer application	72 (30.00)	16 (6.67)	152 (63.33)
4	Harvesting technique	70 (29.17)	50 (20.83)	120 (50.00)
5	Storage need/problem	72 (30.25)	58 (24.37)	108 (45.38)
6	Application of herbicides and Pesticides	72 (30.00)	10 (4.17)	158 (65.83)

Percentages are in parentheses

Conclusions and Recommendation

The study assessed farmers' perception of effectiveness of extension agents in Oyo state, Nigeria. The study revealed that male (57.52 percent) dominate farming activities in the study area. Majority (56.67 percent) of the respondents are married with mean age and household size estimated at 47 years and 7 persons respectively. Perceived assessment of EAs knowledge/mastery of subject matter by the respondents showed that 32.50 percent, 21.67 percent and 55.0 percent of the respondents perceived the EAs as low in term of beneficial of the messages, medium in term of integrate theories with practical and high in term of topics presentation respectively. Also perceived distribution of the respondents based on relevance of EAs message to their technological needs or problems revealed 51.67 percent, 37.50 percent and 41.67 percent perceived that the extension agents covered areas on processing/storage technology, input distribution, income generating strategies and marketing respectively highly relevant, low relevant and not relevant respectively. The study recommends training and revalidating should be organized to extension agent to boost their knowledge on subject matter. Also, proper monitoring of extension agents from time to time and provision of incentives for them which will serve as motivation.

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