

Implications of Farmers' Attitude Towards Extension Agents on Future Extension Programme Planning in Oyo State of Nigeria

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KEYWORDS Attitude; agent; planning; information

ABSTRACT The focus of this study was on the attitude of farmers towards extension agents in Ogbomoso Zone of Oyo State. Stratified sampling technique was used in the selection of one hundred farmers and thirteen extension agents as the sample for the study. Interview schedule and structured questionnaire were used respectively to elicit information from the respondents. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency counts, mean, percentages, while chi-square, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and T-test were used to test the magnitude of the relationship between dependent and independent variables. The findings showed that majority of the respondents (farmers) had very favourable attitude towards the extension services. The extension teaching methods commonly adopted by the extension agents are farm and home visit (92%), demonstration (84%), posters (77%) among other. However, significance differences exist between frequency of contact and attitude of farmers towards the extension agents

INTRODUCTION

One approach to determining desirable extension agent behaviour and performance is to begin with the farmers' point of view. Some useful indications of farmers expectation of extension agents behaviour was confirmed by Boone (1989), who found widespread resentment towards extension agents among farmers because they resent advice from agents who adopt superior attitudes.

Moreover, Mac Donald (1984) posited that farmers mistrust outsiders and so will resent agents who take ready-made plans for them to follow without prior consultation because they felt, they were being directed or told what to do rather than being helped to make their own decisions.

According to Arene (1994) the quality of the extension service was higher if fewer farmers were visited and that the level of formal education of farmers, farm size, and age of farmers were significantly related to the farmers' adoption rate, and the high-adoption farmer groups showed positive attitude towards the extension services. The employment of more qualified and experienced extension agents, especially subject matter specialists, and the adoption of the "farmer first" approach to agricultural research and development are recommended for farmers to show a positive attitude towards the extension service. There have also been some occasions where farmers complained about the lack of

regular or meaningful contact. In addition when the agent see the farmers, the duration of the visit was too brief to allow for meaningful exchange of ideas and understanding. The conclusion of most farmers was that many extension agents seemed uninterested in their problems exhibited by the limited one sided communication and insensitivity to the farmer's needs.

The above confirms the assertion by Kassa (1999), that extension work in the country has not been participatory. Extension programmes and policies have been formulated without due consideration to the farmers' opinions and traditional knowledge system. Apart from the fact that the number of extension workers in the country is very small, their qualification and communication skills leave a lot to be desired. Many factors most of which are policy related obstruct extension agents from carrying out their duties properly. The government should adopt a responsible and pragmatic approach to improve the current working conditions of the extension agents (e.g. transportation and housing) and implement adequate budget allocation. Over the years, the involvement of extension agents in activities other than extension work has played against their reputation as development workers. Many people in rural areas look upon extension agents as government prosecutors rather than facilitators in the process of rural development. The extensionists' duties should be clearly defined and they should not be made to handle

other responsibility that may compromise their professional integrity.

Farmers resent extension agents using unfamiliar terminology to explain recommended agricultural practices to them. Extension education can facilitate this assurance because it encourages change agents to know farmers' characteristics and to use simple words that express clearly the ideas being communicated.

According to Francis et al, (1987) most farmers see access to resources, in particular credit and inputs, rather than to technical knowledge as the main constraint on production, and extension workers are seen not only as a source of technical advice but also as a means of access to official credit. Furthermore, the form in which technical recommendations are given is often in appropriate to farmer current knowledge and practices.

However, Igben (1987), While evaluating the proportion of farmers reached by extension agents, the scope of advice given by the agents, the availability of demonstration plots and the relative number of farmers who had adopted new technologies, it is observed that the extension systems have not been very effective. Effective performance has been constrained by excessive bureaucracy, lack of technological innovations and inadequate liaison between the extension system and agricultural research institutes.

Technologies compatible with existing farm practices encourage a positive attitude towards change, improve the agent's credibility, and may be adopted faster. Doorman, (1991) posited that by starting the generation of new technology with the analysis of production conditions and resulting problems at farm level, the role of farmers in setting research policies can be increased. This should lead to the development of new technology that is better adapted to small farm production conditions.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the study were collected from both farmers (100) and Thirteen Extension agents sampled in the study area. The study was conducted in Ogbomoso Zone of Oyo State of Nigeria. Stratified sampling technique was adopted in selecting the farmers for the study while, all the extension agents in the area were interviewed. The data collection were done using interview schedule for farmers, and questionnaire

for the extension agents. Data collected include, information on the frequency of contact, training techniques adopted, measurement of farmers' attitude towards extension agents and personal and demographic information of respondents. Data analyses were done using both descriptive and inferential statistics like frequency counts, percentages and paired sampled t-test.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Information Characteristics of Farmers: Majority (95%) of the farmers indicated the extension agent as their main source of information on improved farm practices. Another 90% mentioned the radio as being next in rank to the extension agent. These two sources though complementary are very vital to the development of farmers. The significance of these two sources is further justified by the low rating of other, sources (see Table 1). The concentration of development in these two sources of information is a necessary step towards sustainable agricultural extension services in Nigeria.

The second section of the table present results on the most, preferred sources by the farmers. Findings show that the extension agent

Table 1: Distribution of respondents based on information sources used

Sources of information	Frequency	Percentages
Extension agents	95	95.0
Radio	90	90.0
Own experience	28	28.0
Friends and relatives	27	27.0
Television	25	25.0
Neighbours	9	9.0
Extension publication	4	4.0
Newspaper	3	3.0
<i>Preferred Source</i>		
Extension agents	88	90.7
Radio	4	4.1
Own experience	2	2.1
Friends and relatives	2	2.1
Television	1	1.0
Neighbours	-	-
Extension publication	-	-
Newspaper	-	-
Total	97	100.0
<i>Frequency of Contact</i>		
None	3	3.0
Daily	10	10.0
Weekly	3	3.0
Fortnightly	58	58.0
Monthly	25	25.0
Yearly	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Survey Data, 2003

is still the most preferred sources of information. This further lends credence to the results in the first section of the table, that the extension agent provides the best solution to farmers training and information needs. These findings corroborate the findings of Oladosu (2000), and Arene (1994) that extension agent is the best source of information and training for farmers' participatory development.

When further asked about their frequency of contacts with extension agents, majority of the farmers (90.7%) claimed to be visited on fortnightly bases. That is they come in contact with the extension agent every two weeks. This implies that the condition for implementing the training and visit extension system is being met as recommended by Benor and Baxter (1984).

Effectiveness of Extension Methods

Adopted: When asked about effective extension teaching methods used to reach the farmers by extension agents (Table 2), majority mentioned the farm and home visit extension method (92.3%), Demonstration (84.6%) posters (77%) and group discussions (69.2%) respectively. These findings indicate that no single extension method is sufficient in the training of farmers. A combination of two or more methods produces positive effects on farmers' acceptance of information than only one technique (Isiaka, 2001).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on effective extension methods being used.

<i>Method</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Farm and home visits	12	92.3
Demonstration	11	84.6
Agricultural shows	3	23.1
Group discussion	9	69.2
Excursion and tours	-	-
Posters & magazines	10	77.0
Total	100	100

Source: Survey Data, 2003

Farmers Attitude Towards Extension Services:

Farmers' rating of their level of satisfaction with extension services from very satisfied to very dissatisfied is presented in table 3. About half (50.5%) of the farmers are satisfied with the quality of extension services; while about one third (33%) are dissatisfied with extension services in the area. These claims imply a dismal performance in the area, that is, the quality of extension services rendered to the farmers in the area is poor. This finding substantiates the reports of Asiabaka (1992) and Igben (1987).

Table 3: Distribution of respondents based on the endorsement of extension services

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Very satisfied	16	16.5
Satisfied	49	50.5
Dissatisfied	29	29.9
Very dissatisfied	3	3.1
Total	97	100.0
<i>Attitude Score</i>		
Low 51-61	10	10.3
Moderate 62-72	38	39.2
Favorable 73-83	49	50.5
Total	97	100.0

Source: Survey, 2003.

Farmers were further asked to rate extension services on 21 attitude statements. The maximum score obtainable is 105 and a mean of 63. Scores above the mean were considered favourable and those below as low or unfavourable attitude towards extension services, using a normal distribution with standard mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10, the farmers were rated as low (<50 score) moderate (51 to 60) and high (61 and above) attitude towards extension services. Majority (89.7%) of the respondents reported moderate to favourable attitude towards extension services. This result further confirms farmers confidence about the extension services as the panacea for agricultural development (Oladosu, 2003).

Dasgupta (1998) explains these findings in relation to the variation in farmers' attitude towards extension agents. He therefore recommended that farmers feeling, what motivate them, what appeals, to them, their priorities and needs should be understood by the extension programme planners. This will engender positive working relationship with their clients.

Result of Hypothesis of Frequency of Contact and Attitude towards Extension Services :

The result of t-test analysis carried out on the variables is presented in table 4. The result through significant ($t = -50.217$) at $p < 0.01$ shows an inverse relationship between the two variables. The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the means of frequency of contacts and farmers attitude towards extension activities is rejected. The result shows that the attitude of farmers towards extension services decreases with frequency of contact. However, this may be unexpected, nevertheless, it has implication, on the planning of extension services by limiting extension contacts to the desirability for it. That is visits should be made only when it is neces-

Table 4: Result of paired sample t-test between frequency of contact and attitude of farmers.

Pair	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error of Mean	95% Confidence interval of the difference		t-value
				Lower	Upper	
Frequency of contacts and attitude of farmers	-66.10	13.16	1.32	-68.71	-63.49	-50.22

Source: Data analysis 2003

sary and directed at giving useful and relevant information and training to farmers. Ban van den and Hawkins (1998) argued that attitudes are difficult to measure because people have different goals at the same time. It can be very difficult to estimate how each characteristic of an attitude contributes to the optimization of the aggregate of these goals.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings in the study revealed that the extension agent and the radio were the main sources of information to the farmers. The group extension teaching methods except the farm and home visits were the most widely used methods adopted in training farmers. The effectiveness of extension methods is medium, with an inverse relationship existing between frequency of contacts and the attitude of farmers towards extension services.

The implication of the findings on future extension programming areas follows, that:

- (1) Extension programmes should still be interpreted by extension agents who should also receive adequate training.
- (2) A combination of extension teaching methods should be adopted when planning extension programmes.
- (3) Training must focus on the felt needs of the farmers; and finally;
- (4) Extension contacts must be well planned and desirable in order to maintain credibility of extension agents.

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