

Perception of Village Extension Agents in Disseminating Agricultural Information in Oyo Agricultural Zone of Oyo-State

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KEYWORDS Agriculture; fertilizer; local herb; extension agents; gender; marital status; education

ABSTRACT The study examined the perception of village Extension Agents in disseminating Agricultural information in Oyo agricultural zone of Oyo-State. A well structured, pretested and validated interview scheduled was used to collect information from the farmers. Analysis of data was carried out using frequencies, percentages and weighted mean score. Also correlation coefficient was used to establish relationship between the variables. The result showed that fertilizer application to crops ($r = 0.445$), planting of soyabean ($r = 0.361$), improved goat housing on a raised floor ($r = 0.344$), maize dressing with apron plus ($r = 0.278$), control of mange using local herb ($r = 0.251$) and improved rabbit housing on raised plat form ($r = 0.220$) had positive and significant relationship with farmers' perception of Extension agents. Also marital status ($f = 2.37$) Gender ($f = 1.68$), level of education ($f = 1.68$) had significant relationship with perception of extension activities of the farmers.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural Extension department is the most important public service institution with the widest range of responsibilities for agricultural and rural development (Akinbode, 1976). Williams (1978) reports that the conduct of agricultural extension work in Nigeria shows that one of the primary responsibilities is to help farmers make efficient use of available resources to meet the nation's food needs. The goal of agricultural extension services in Nigeria is to facilitate farmers acceptance while the ultimate goal of Agricultural extension is to improve standard of living through the transfer of improved farming practices to the rural people (Bzugu and Guary, 2004).

Agricultural extension services carry out this particular responsibility by using various strategies to encourage farmers to adopt agricultural innovations. These strategies include establishment of farm institutes, extension work station, experimental farms, visits to farms and various types of farm settlement schemes. Each strategy has met with some amount of success but the rate of farmers acceptance and use of Agricultural innovations has been low. Although about 75% of Nigerians are peasant farmers who reside in the rural areas. This small scale farming is responsible for the low agricultural outputs. In addition, the shift from agricultural production to oil boom causes

low food output. Several attempts have been made by the government to revitalize and ameliorate agriculture by way of introducing some programmes such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), Green Revolution (GR), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) and the likes.

According to Falusi (1991), Agricultural development is a rural development approach through which the right technology, effective extension services access to physical inputs, adequate market and complementary infrastructural facilities essential to improve productivity and boost the standard of living of rural dwellers are provide. Much of the Agricultural development programme have become relevant in the nation's drive attain food sufficiency and sustainability of agricultural products the best is yet to be seen or the goal is for from being attained. Many factors are however responsible for this state of self-insufficiency in food production and raw materials. However one major constraint in the attainment of the desired and laudable goal is (the problem of) low ratio of village extension agents (VEA) to farmers (1:1200). The VEA's are charged with the responsibilities of educating and disseminating useful and timely agricultural information to the farmers. This study is therefore aimed at studying the farmers' perception of village extension agents as a way of evaluating them apart from the monitoring and evaluation

unit of the ADP. This is to have right assessment of their performance with regards to their working with the farmers. It is also to know whether the agents are up to the task or they be improved. This study will provide answers to the following questions:

- i. What are the extension information being disseminated by the extension agents?
- ii. What are the extension teaching methods employed?
- iii. What is the perception of the extension agents by the farmers.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the farmers perception of village extension agents in the dissemination of Agricultural information in Oyo zone of Oyo-State. The specific objectives are to

- i. determine the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers.
- ii. identify the information disseminated to farmers.
- iii. determine farmers' perception of village extension agents in the area of information dissemination.

Hypotheses of the Study

- i. There is no significant relationship between selected socio-economic characteristics of the farmers and their perception of extension activities.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between farmers' perception of extension agent and farmers' acceptance of agricultural information disseminated by the extension agent.

METHODOLOGY

Oyo zone of the of the Oyo State Agricultural Development Programme (OYSADEP) was purposively selected for the study. A systematic random sampling technique was used to select 140 farmers from the 18 cells in the zone. A well structured pretested and validated interview schedule was used to collect information from the farmers. Information was collected on the farmers' socio-economic characteristics, the extension information disseminated to farmers and the farmers' perception of the village extension agents in disseminating information to the farmers.

Measurement of Variables

The dependent variable was the farmers' perception of village extension agents in disseminating information to the farmers. It was measured by the characteristics of the Extension Agents and their dedication towards their duty i.e. punctuality, reliability, patience, appreciability, ability to carry people along, knowledge ability, ability to demonstrate, ability to keep to visit schedule etc. The independent variable are socio-economic characteristics of the farmers, extension teaching methods and extension formation disseminated. Analysis of data was carried out using frequency count, percentages, and chi-square.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Personal and Socio-Economic Characteristics: The data in Table 1 show the distribution of the respondents by their socio-economic characteristics. About 6.42% of the farmers are in the age range of 25-35years, 60.34% fell within age range of 36-55years, while 32.12% of the farmers are in the age range of 56years and above, 84.43 percent of the farmers are male while 13.75

Table 1: Distribution of farmers by their socio-economic characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Age</i>		
25-35 years	9	6.42
36-45 years	38	27.13
46-55 years	48	33.21
56-65 years	37	26.43
66-75 years	8	5.69
<i>Education</i>		
No formal Education	50	35.71
1-6 years	39	27.86
7-12 years	21	15
12-16 years	16	11.43
Adult literacy	14	10
<i>Farming Experience</i>		
1-10 years	19	13.55
11-20 years	43	30.72
21-30 years	35	24.99
31-40 years	32	36.69
41-50 years	7	4.99
51-60 years	4	2.85
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	3	2.14
Married	133	95
Widowed	3	2.14
Divorced	1	0.17
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	121	86.43
Female	19	13.57

are females. About 35.71 percent of the farmers had no formal education, 54.29 percent of the farmers had one form of formal education or the other while 10 percent had adult literacy education.

About 36.69 percent of the farmers have highest farming experience of 31-40 years followed by farmers with 20-21 years of farming experience (30.72%), 24.99 percent of the farmers had 21-30 years of farming experience while 7.84% had 41-60 years of farming experience. Majority (95%) of the respondents are married, 2.14% are singled and widowed respectively while 0.71% are divorced.

Information Disseminated by the Extension

Agent: The data in Table 2 show the distribution of the information disseminated by the extension agents. Information were disseminated to the farmers on crops, livestock, fishery and Home economics. Majority (95%) of the farmers heard information on control of downey mildew and maize dressing with apron plus. About 93.58% of the farmers heard about planting of soybean and 91.43% of the farmers had information on insect pest control of cowpea while preparation of yam minisets has the least (68%). Also about 94.29% of the farmers heard information in the dissemination of control of manage through the use of local concoction, followed by improved housing on a raised platform for rabbit and goat (90.72%). Devorming is next at 80.72% and treatment of diarrhoea (73.57%). The table also revealed that farmers commended agents in passing messages on introduction of homestead fish pond (87.14), Pond site selection, management and empoundment had above 80% on the average while fish nutrition had the least 64.28%. Messages on women in agriculture were well disseminated.

On the average more than 90% of the farmers claimed to have heard information on water purification (91.43%), processing techniques of crops and their importance (90%), maintenance of processing centers (92.57%) while production of weaning diets for infants had the least with 66.15%.

Acceptance of Agricultural Information by the Farmers: Data in Table 3 show the acceptability of agricultural message by the farmers as fertilizer application to crops ranked highest with the mean of 5.57, this is closely followed by maize dressing with apron plus (5.35), next was planting of soyabean (5.31) and control

of mange using local herb (5.20). Others are in the following order "Control of downey mildew" (4.95), improved goat housing on a raised floor (4.80), Insect pest control on cowpea production (4.65), Improved rabbit housing on raised plat form (4.50), preparation of yam minisets (3.95) introduction of homestead fish pond (3.60), Harvesting, processing & storage of crops (3.45), Pond site selection (2.75), Pond management (2.50), maintenance of tree crops (2.00) and the least pond impoundment (1.97). The result showed that farmers were favourably disposed messages that are on crops and livestock but were a little weary on messages regarding fisheries.

Extension Teaching Methods Used: Data in

Table 2: Distribution of farmers by the information of agricultural message heard

Message	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Crop Message</i>		
Control of downey mildew	133	95
Maize dressing with apron plus	133	95
Fertilizer application to crops	117	83.57
Preparation of yam minisets	98	68
Maintenance of tree crops	118	84.29
Planting of soybean	131	93.58
Insect pest control of cowpea production	128	91.43
Harvesting processing and storage of crops	124	88.57
<i>Livestock Message</i>		
Improved housing on a raised floor	127	90.72
Improved rabbit housing on raised platform	132	94.29
Control of manage using local herb	103	73.57
Treatment of diarrhoea	113	80.72
<i>Fishery</i>		
Introduction of homestead fish pond	122	87.14
Pond site selection	117	83.57
Pond management	116	82.86
Pond impoundment	96	82.14
Application into fish pond	99	70.72
Fish nutrition	90	64.24
Integrated fish farming	99	70.72
Improvement of restoration fish pond after harvest	103	73.57
<i>WIA Message</i>		
Water purification	128	91.43
Processing of good quality palm oil	135	96.13
Processing techniques of crops & their importance	126	90
Production of weaning diets for infants	108	66.15
Maintenance of processing centers	131	92.57

Table 3: Distribution of farmers by the acceptability of agricultural messages

<i>Agricultural Messages</i>	<i>WMS</i>
Fertilizer application to crops	5.57
Maize dressing with apron plus	5.35
Planting of soyabean	5.31
Control of mange using local herb	5.2
Control of mange mildew	4.95
Improved goat housing on a raised floor	4.8
Insect pest control on cowpea production	4.65
Improved rabbit housing on raised platform	4.5
Preparation of yam minisets	3.95
Introduction of homestead fish pond	3.6
Harvesting, processing & storage of crops	3.45
Pond site selection	2.75
Pong management	2.5
Maintenance of tree crops	2
Pond impoundment	1.97

Table 4 show the distribution of farmers by extension methods used. Most of the extension agents adopted individual contact method (88.57) in disseminating information to the farmers. About 7.14% of the agents employed group contact method while only 4.29% of them employed mass contact method of extension.

Farmers' Perception of Village Extension Agents in Area of Information Disseminated: Data in Table 5 show the farmers' perception score of the extension agents by the attribute exhibited by the agents. More than 90 percent and above of the farmers reported that the extension Agents were punctual, reliable, energetic, patient transparent, approachable, knowledgeable, cheerful, polite and well skilled in the dissemination of the messages. About 80% and above reported that Extension Agents were cordial and had no interest in non-agricultural problems of the farmers. About 69.58% claimed that Extension Agents had ability to proffer solution to problems while 41.43% of the farmers revealed that Extension Agents do not accept offer of cash/kind.

Relationship Between Farmers' Perception of E.A and Acceptance of Agricultural Messages: Data in Table 6 show a positive and significant relationship between farmers' perception of extension agent and fertilizer application to crops ($r = 0.445$), planting of soyabean ($r = 0.361$),

Table 4: Distribution of farmers by extension teaching method

<i>Extension Method</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Individual contact	124	88.57
Group method	10	7.14
Mass contact	6	4.29

Table 5: Distribution of farmers' by perception of the extension agents

<i>Attributes of E.A</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Punctuality	139	99.29
Reliability	139	99.29
Energetic	137	97.85
Patience	129	92.15
Transparency	129	92.15
Comprehension	139	99.29
Approachability	129	92.15
Ability to carry people along	138	98.29
Ability to demonstrate	118	84.29
Politeners	135	96.43
Ability to keep to visit schedule	127	90.71
No interest in non-agricultural problem of farmers	112	80
Accepts no offer in cash/kind	58	41.43
Cheerfulness	137	97.85
Cordiality	124	88.57
Ability to proffer solutions to problems	96	69.56
Skill in presentation of message	130	92.86

improved goat housing on a raised floor ($r = 0.344$), maize dressing with apron plus ($r = 0.278$), control of mange using local herb ($r = 0.251$) and improved rabbit housing on raised platform ($r = 0.220$). others that had positive but not significant relationship are maintenance of tree crops ($r = 0.112$), insect pest control on cowpea production ($r = 0.111$), control of downey mildew ($r = 0.121$), introduction of homestead pond (0.0791), Pond site selection ($r = 0.0609$), Pond impoundment ($r = 0.0691$), Pond management ($r = 0.054$) and preparation of yam minisets ($r = 0.051$). The implication of this study is that the farmers were favourably disposed to the extension agents because of the well proven attributes manifested by the agents. This made the farmers to build confidence and trust in extension agents hence the acceptance of the messages.

Table 6: Result correlation analysis of farmers' perception of E A and acceptability of agricultural messages

<i>Acceptability of agricultural message</i>	<i>R</i>
Fertilizer application to crops	0.445**
Maize dressing with apron plus	0.278**
Planting of soyabean	0.361**
Control of mange using local herb	0.251*
Control of downey mildew	0.121
Improved goat housing on a raised floor	0.344**
Insect pest control on cowpea production	0.111
Improved rabbit housing on raised platform	0.2195*
Preparation of yam minisets.	0.051
Introduction of homestead fish pond	0.0791
Harvesting, processing & storage of crops	0.159
Pond site selection	0.0609
Maintenance of tree crops	0.1123
Pond impoundment	0.0691

Relationship Between Perception of Extension Activities and Socio-economic Characteristics of the Farmers: Table 7 shows that there is significant relationship between gender ($f = 1.98$), level of education ($f = 1.68$), marital status ($f = 2.37$), farming experience ($f = 1.07$), age ($f = 1.01$) and perception of extension activities of the farmers.

Table 7: Analysis of socio-economic characteristics and perception of extension activities

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>F-value</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Gender	1.98**	0.0066
Level of education	1.68*	0.0311
Marital status	2.37*	0.008
Farming experience	1.07	0.3753
Age	1.01	0.0311

CONCLUSION

Majority of the farmers are in their active age ranging between 25 years and 55 years. About 95 percent were married and 84.43% were males. All the respondents had one form of farming experience or the other, about 64.29 percent had one form of education while 34.79 had no, formal education at all. Information on livestock, crops fishery and home economics were disseminated to the farmers by the extension agents. Messages on crops and livestock were well

accepted than those messages on fisheries. Individual contact method were mostly used by the extension agents to disseminate information to the farmers.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the finding of this study the following recommendations were made. The extension services must be well staffed, sufficient number of the extension agent must be provided on the field. Also they must be well remunerated with adequate training courses. Emphasis must be placed on the positive attributes of the extension agents during their training. Adequate mobility should be provided for the extension agent for effective coverage and they should be kept abreast of information on any new technology for quick dissemination.

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