

## Review

# The role of extension officers and extension services in the development of agriculture in Nigeria

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The role of agricultural extension in the development of agriculture throughout the world is not in doubt. It has remained one of the prime movers in the development of agriculture and invariably in the rural development. This paper reviewed the role of extension officers and extension services in the development of agriculture in Nigeria. The paper dwelt on the basic concepts underlying the scope, understanding and meaning of agricultural extension, role of extension service and extension officers. It is the belief of this paper that no nation will have real growth in the agricultural sector without effective extension service. It is also the belief of this paper that total eradication of agricultural development problems can be achieved through extension service approach if the role of extension is properly conceived and effectively administered.

**Key words:** Agricultural extension, farmer education, SPATs, FNT, MTRM, subject matter specialist, BES, EAs.

## INTRODUCTION

### Concept and scope of extension services

The crucial role of agricultural Extension (i.e. farmer education) in the social and economic development of the nation cannot be over-emphasized. Never before in Nigerian history has the necessity for educating and raising the productive capacity of our farmers been of such importance as it is today. Increased agricultural productivity depends primarily upon the acceptance of cultural and technological changes at the rural farm level.

Thus, for Nigerian agriculture to improve, our farmers have no alternative but to learn and adopt recommended scientific farming techniques in place of their traditional practices. Perhaps, the slow development of Nigerian agriculture can be attributed to the inability of the Nigerian farmers to respond positively to new ideas or innovations. For farmers to respond positively to new ideas, they must be properly educated on how best to apply the new ideas or practices to their farming

activities. This is because the new ideas are often complex, technical and can hardly be understood by most of our farmers. Nigeria cannot achieve increased agricultural productivity on rural farm level, except through the provision of basic agricultural education, particularly, the non-formal or extension type that will help move millions of the farmers from traditional to progressive farming, thereby improving the overall quality of rural life. It is not very easy to define agricultural extension in a short concise, phrase or statement. Any attempt to define it properly would involve lengthy explanation of several principles and philosophies. However, different authorities and experts have defined extension in different forms and ways, all ending on the improvement of the standard of living of the people. Fisher (1983) defined extension as a system of education extending beyond the classroom to individuals on the farms and is available to every member of the family. Fisher, thus, analyzed extension in terms of family approach system whereby all members of the family are taking into consideration in planning extension programme.

Vanden Ban and Hawkin (1988), defined extension as involving the conscious use of communication of

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information to help people form sound opinions and make good decisions. They explained extension systematically as a process which helps farmers to analyze their present and expected future situations, helps farmers to become aware of the problems, which can arise in such an analysis, increase knowledge and develops into problems and helps to structure farmers' existing knowledge, helps farmers to acquire specific knowledge related to certain problems, solutions and their consequences so that they can act on possible alternatives, helps farmers to evaluate and improve their own opinion-forming and decision-making skills.

Asiabaka (2002) tried to look at Extension from modern perspective and thus, explained it from the aim, which extension seek to accomplish; which is to teach both the rural and urban clientele how to determine their problems and be able to rise to such problems using their own resources. He further explained Extension as having three important dimensions namely; educational component, which involves changing the behavior complex and attitude of the people, economic dimension, which includes; increased income of the clientele, increased crop yield, better financial management, better methods of food preservation, social dimension, which also includes; improved health of the clientele, leadership development, better grooming, development co-operation, increased zeal for development.

He summarized that the clientele of extension are not only farmers, rather other members of the citizenry who will benefit from the extension service hence, extension education. Obibuaku (1983) saw extension as an informal system of education meant to improve the living standard of the local people who did not have the opportunity of formal education. Maunder (1972) defined extension as a science, which deals with the creation, transmission and application of knowledge designed to bring about planned changes in the behavioural complex of people with a view to helping them live a better life through learning new ways of improving their vocation, enterprise and institution.

There are however, three basic concepts that clarify the scope, understanding and meaning of extension. They are; extension as educational process, which consists of four phases or steps, namely; knowing the rural/urban community, programme planning and development, implementation or execution of the programme, evaluation of the executed programme. Extension as education/change, which means that extension brings about change in the behaviour, attitude and skills of the people and is done using a systematic and planned method, utilizing the basic principles of teaching and learning in extension education, extension as salesmanship, which means that extension sells its ideas and knowledge to others to help them grow and improve.

It then means that the techniques being used by the professional salesmanship can be modified and used by

extension service. However, extension service unlike salesmanship is more interested in result than in profit making, which is the hallmark of the salesmanship. Although, extension service may adopt the same propaganda and techniques to convince farmers, it is worth mentioning that the watchword in extension is honesty. (Uwakah, 1989).

Finally, William (1979) summed up three basic tasks of extension as; disseminating useful information, applying it to the analysis of practical problems and help people to use it to help themselves. Extension today goes beyond informal, non-formal and formal forms of education as it fits in the three forms of education known throughout the world.

### **Scope of extension services**

Extension services are the different programmes/projects /recommendations, which the extension service make available to their clientele through the use of extension education process. Agricultural extension services encompasses all aspects of agriculture. It includes the provision of timely information, the linking of farmers with sources of farming inputs and credit facilities and most importantly, the provision of education services to farmers.

The mistake people have been making was that of limiting agricultural extension services to helping the farmers to procure their planting inputs and other inputs needed on their farms; but people through hard experiences have come to realize the fact that for any agricultural project or programme to succeed, agricultural extensionists must be fully involved, so as to participate in all its activities from planning to execution. Modern agricultural extension work in Nigeria today, covers a wide spectrum of services, which include; improvement in production, marketing, storage, processing, fish farming, agro-forestry, input supply and distribution, man-power development, home economics/women in agriculture, irrigation, land management, farm mechanization, erosion control, livestock management, human resources/development, administration/management, programme planning and evaluation, youth development programmes etc (Anaeto, 2003).

It is important to emphasize here that Extension is a weak instrument when it stands alone, but it becomes powerful when combined with price incentives, input supply, credit, seed multiplication and so forth. (Contado, 1979). This becomes an improvement on already known relationship between Research-Extension-Farmer Linkage thus resulting in birth of Research-Extension-Farmer-Input Linkages (REFILS). The truth remains that even this linkage has not really improved the outlook of extension service hence Anaeto (2003) mentioned the need for involving extension service in direct input distribution in addition to their educational services.

### Role of agricultural extension service

A role may be defined as a set of norms, values and interaction patterns associated with a given category of individuals. It is therefore, the job or function attached to a given status. It can be clarified with the economic concept of division of labour, which states that individuals work in different sectors of the economy. Agricultural extension service could be the government agency or ministry responsible for promoting the adoption and utilization of new scientific farming practices through educational procedures (Uwakah, 1984).

Many agricultural extension services could also be found in many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), many private firms and private organizations such as NTC, Coffee-Growers Association, Shell Corporation, Church organizations etc. Role of extension service therefore include; act as an intermediary or go between or even link between agricultural development institutions such as research institutes, universities, colleges of agriculture and target groups (which may be the farmer, women group, youths etc.), carries out the formulated agricultural extension policies, links the farmer with sources of farming inputs and credit facilities, provide the timely information on new innovations and practices meaningful agricultural development, provides educational services to farmers, and plays active role in the rural community development of any nation.

This explains why it remains one of the strategies for rural development through out the world, assist people to determine their own problems, help them find desirable solutions and encourage them to take action, foster beneficial changes in the outlook of all people, re-appraise its work periodically to meet changing conditions and to modify its programs to suit the changing conditions, to provide maximum opportunity for the youth and the family to participate in attaining a better and more rewarding life, to maintain the highest level of proficiency in its workers by exposing them to relevant and continual training, to encourage and aid in the wise use and conservation of all human and natural resources, to promote the use and the development of volunteer leaders and help in the execution of extension programs, to promote efficient agricultural production and the development of institutions to ensure proper handling of the products for welfare of both the producers and consumers, it aids through educational efforts, the diffusion among people of all appropriate research and practical information relating to agriculture, home economics, health and encourage their application and above all, it promotes the social and economic life of all people (Adams, 1982).

### Role of extension officers

In most developing countries such as Nigeria,

subsistence or traditional agriculture dominates the economy and for national progress to occur, change in agriculture is essential. The change is needed not only to increase production, but to liberate households from poverty. A great deal of the responsibility for bringing about this change rests on the shoulders of extension workers. That is the men and women at the front line of the struggle for progressive change in agriculture. An extension worker helps farmers increase the productivity of their farms and improve their living standards. An extension worker has many roles. He is an adviser, a technician and a middleman operating between agricultural research institutions and the farm families. He is a change agent, consultant and advocate helping farmers to identify their problems and find their own solution. He works for the creation of community harmony essential for group projects. He is a manger planning and organizing his work and that of his assistants.

In most extension organizations such as in ADPs, Ministry of Agriculture etc, Extension Staff or Officers are organized on a 3 or 4 tier system or hierarchy namely; the state headquarter, the zonal offices, the local Government offices/blocks and the village levels/circles/cells. At the state headquarters, the chief extension officer heads the extension organization. He is vested with formal authority over the organization and his management functions can be categorized by using the acronym POSDCORB which stand for:

**Planning:** Outlining philosophy, policy, objectives and resultant things to be accomplished and techniques for accomplishment.

**Organizing:** Establishing structures and systems through which activities are arranged, defined and coordinated in terms of some specific objectives.

**Staffing:** Fulfilling the personnel function, this includes selecting and training staff and maintaining favourable work conditions.

**Directing:** Clarifying, guiding, teaching and encouraging employees.

**Coordinating:** Inter relating the various parts of the work.

**Reporting:** Keeping those to whom he is responsible, including both staff and public informed.

**Budgeting:** Making financial plans, maintaining accounting and management control of revenue and keeping costs in line with objectives.

Other officers at the state headquarter for Ministry of Agriculture include; Deputy Chief Agric. Officer, Asst. Chief Agric. Officer etc. while ADP has a deputy Chief Extension officer. They attend the management meeting and are in close touch with other heads in the large body of the ministry. At the zonal level, the Zonal Extension Officer (ZEO) heads the extension unit in the zone organizes the FNT. He is in charge of all extension activities going on in the zone. He is in close touch with the zonal manager as well as the subject matter

specialists who impart the knowledge got from research on the extension agents and extension supervisors. Testing research findings in pilot trails and building them into the extension programme, ensuring inputs are available for extension agents, supervision and training of extension agents and extension supervisors.

At the local government level or block level as used in ADP, the block extension supervisors are in charge. They conduct on the spot supervision of the activities of the extension agents following the extension agent's field visit schedule. He organizes the Block meetings where he reviews what were taught in the FNT and records the farmer's problems as reported by the extension agents for onward transfer to FNT and down to MTRM. The Block extension supervisor oversees the activities of extension service at the local government levels. He facilitates, encourages and supports the efforts of management to achieve goals through other people who work directly on the job.

At the village level or circle/cell, the extension agent becomes the contact man between the extension agency and the farmer. The extension agent is the last and at the same time the most important link in the chain connecting research and the farmers. The key function of the extension agent is the continual moulding and re-moulding of the farmers farming habit in accordance with proven and most up to date technologies and research recommendation in other to enable the farmers increase their farm production at reasonable costs. The extension agent divides his operational area circle into sub-circles based on the farming areas. He would then select his target farmers the contact farmers. He would also draw his fixed schedule of visit which would guide his activities from Tuesday to Fridays every week.

Every Monday is kept aside for the two important training for the EA namely the FNT and BM. The EA is expected also to render reports of his daily activities at the end of every month. He establishes the Small Plot Adoption Techniques (SPATS) with which he disseminates information to his farmers. He is the agricultural expert which the farmer knows. It must be realized that agriculture is a very dynamic subject and processes involved in its practice are season and times specific, hence the need for regular and constant training to update those involved.

He together with his Block Extension supervisor organizes field days where farmers are brought together and taught by subject matter specialists invited from the zones or headquarters. He also assists the subject matter specialists in selecting sites for OFAR and contract farming. It is necessary that the extension agent must be familiar with the local farming system and have a thorough knowledge of and sympathy with, decision-making problems of the small farmer, both theoretical and practical. He must also be capable of giving farmers practical field demonstrations of appropriate improved techniques, help them to locate farm supplies and

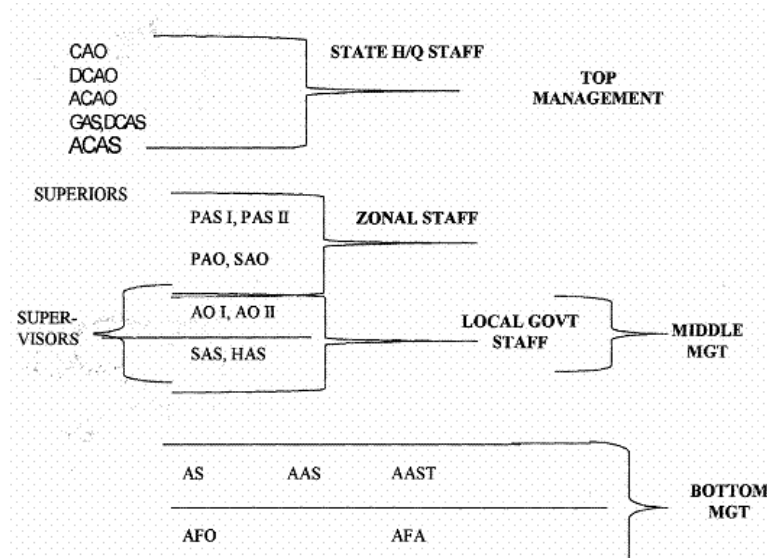
equipment, advice them on sources of credit and follow up their requests with the organizations involved. Before the advent of Agricultural Development Programmes, agricultural extension follows the pattern illustrated in Figure 1. Under the Ministry of Agric arrangement.

AS	-	Agric Superintendent
AAS	-	Assistant Agric Superintendent
AAST	-	Assistant Agric Superintendent II
AFO	-	Agric Field Officer
AFA	-	Agric Field Assistant
CAO	-	Chief Agric Officer
DCAO	-	Deputy Chief Agric Officer
ACAO	-	Assistant Chief Agric Officer
CAS	-	Chief Agric Superintendent
DCAS	-	Deputy Chief Agric Superintendent
ACAS	-	Assistant Chief Agric Superintendent
PAS	-	Principal Agric Superintendent
PAO	-	Principal Agric Officer
SAG	-	Senior Agric Superintendent
HAS	-	High Agric Superintendent

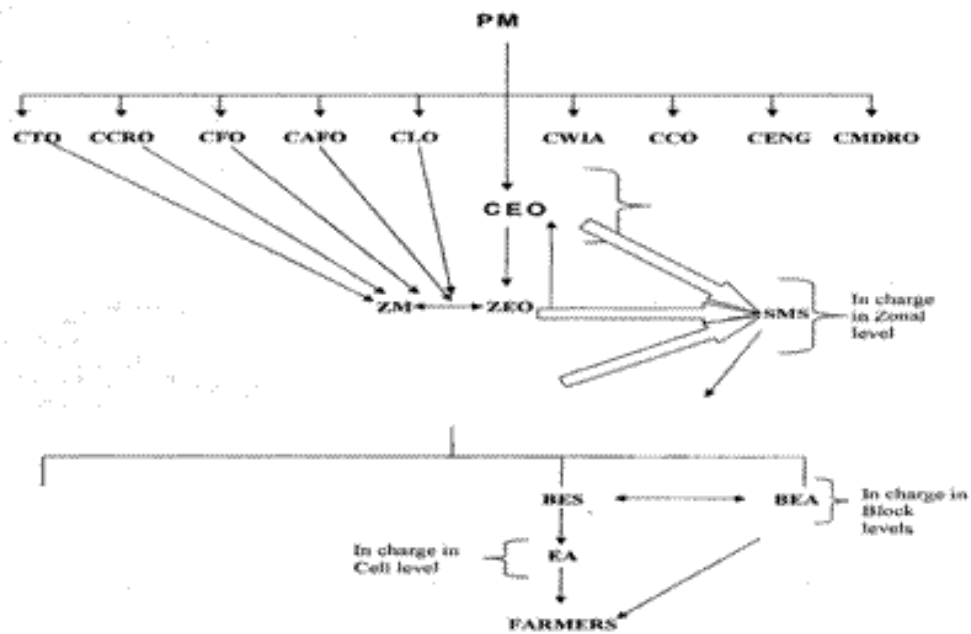
Agric extension today is mostly carried out by the state. Agric Development programme and it takes the pattern shown in figure 2.

CEO	-	Chief Extension Officer
PM	-	Project Manager
CTO	-	Chief Technical Officer
CCRO	-	Chief Crop Research Officer
CFO	-	Chief Fisheries Officer
CAFO	-	Chief Agro Forestry Officer
CENG	-	Chief Engineer
CWIA	-	Chief Women in Agric
CMDRO	-	Chief Manpower & Research Development Officer
CCO	-	Chief Commercial Officer
CLO	-	Chief Livestock Officer
ZM	-	Zonal Manager
ZEO	-	Zonal Extension Officer
SMS	-	Subject Matter Specialist•
BES	-	Block Extension Supervisor
BEA	-	Block Extension Agent
EA	-	Extension Agent

From the figures 1 and 2, it is seen that the bulk of agric extension service rests on the supervisors and Extension Agents Programmes developed from research at the end of the day, gets to the Block extension supervisors who then supervise the extension Agents who impart the knowledge to the farmers. Also problems from field take the same form of getting to the supervisors through the agents who would then send it up the ladder till it gets to research for solution. This, therefore, means that Extension management is done from the HQ by the CEO with the assistance of different chiefs in their subject matter, at Zonal level by the BES and BEA, while at the



**Figure 1.** Agricultural pattern before advent of agricultural development programmes. Source: Adapted from Madukwe M.C. The role of supervision in extension, UNN 1985.



**Figure 2.** At HQ level, the CEO is completely in charge of extension service. SMS Level-SMS Fisheries, SMS Agro - forestry SMS Training/information, SMS crops, SMS livestock, SMS WIA.

circle level the extension agents.

**SUMMARY**

Planned development of any type requires new

knowledge, skills to use it and attitudes that place value on innovation. To know about a recommended practice is not enough, to gain the skill necessary to apply it is not enough. To believe that it is valuable is essential but still not enough. A farmer's education must encompass these qualities. A modern agriculture must be viewed as a

system involving many complex interactions between numerous essential components which require managerial knowledge and Extension education can be the primary process through which farmers can learn the reasons for change, the value of change, results that change is achieved, and uncertainties inherent in change. It can be the primary source of a farmer's ability to analyze alternative actions and choose from among them the most desirable. Therefore, the extension educational process, if effectively administered, reduces delays in translating research findings into action. If these field extension workers are not taken care of, all our efforts will meet brick wall. It is also important that Extension be made more lucrative and attractive so that the young men and women would be very willing to make career and living out of it. This thus calls for possibility of privatization and commercialization of the extension services. It is also important for a paradigm shift where extension becomes demand driven rather than supply – driven so that their clients begin to appreciate their need and importance. A leaf must be borrowed from other professions such as Medicine, Law, Architecture, Petroleum industry etc where the clients go looking for them rather than the opposite as it is in extension today- where the clients are being appealed to accept a change meant to better them. No doubt, most people often don't appreciate whatever is given free of matter the relative advantage and this has remained one of the undoing of extension service. It is therefore important to see and handle extension not just as service provided to the people in need out of pity and sympathy but should be seen and appreciated both as a career and profession. It should not be completely left under the public service.

## CONCLUSION

The role of Agricultural extension in national agricultural development is pertinent. It has been established that no nation will have real growth in the agricultural sector without effective extension service. The Agricultural Extension Organization (extension workers and services) have an important role to play in order to actualize the crucial role of agricultural extension in national development. agricultural extension is an educational process and brings about desired behavioural change in farmers and other stakeholders. Extension also uses its own delivery mechanism to reach its clientele. Four personal qualities essential for extension work include; Ability to communicate well with farmers, ability to get on with people, enthusiasm for the job, common sense and initiative. Some extension workers are more professional than others. They have developed qualities which enable them to succeed in their profession. To some people, those qualities come easily while to others, they have professional qualities which include; Empathy, credibility (safety and competency), humility, professional commitment, listening, observation, encouragement,

questioning, summarizing, timing, flexibility and openness. Finally, Extension service is meant for those staff that have chosen them as a choice and not by chance.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ADP	-	Agricultural Development Programme
FNT	-	Fortnightly Training
MTRM	-	Monthly Training Review Meeting
EA	-	Extension Agent
BES	-	Block Extension Supervisor
BEA	-	Block Extension Agent
BM	-	Block Meeting
OFAR	-	On-Farm Adaptive Research

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