

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WORKERS' PERCEPTION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TASKS PERFORMED IN ONDO STATE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (ODSADP)

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ABSTRACT

Agricultural extension is vital in ensuring the development of the agricultural sector. Hence, there is need to ensure the effective performance of the extension workers. The purpose of the study is to determine the perception of Agricultural Extension Workers about the importance of tasks performed in Ondo State Agricultural Development Project (ODSADP), Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined the perceived level of importance of the tasks performed by the agricultural extension workers and determined the working conditions influencing the performance of tasks by agricultural extension workers. Random sampling procedure was used in selecting eighty (80) extension workers in Ondo State Agricultural Development Project. Data were obtained through the use of structured questionnaire and were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Results showed that the extension workers perceived all the twenty job tasks listed in the study as important, all the tasks had mean values equal to or above the mean cut off of 2.5. Pearson correlation showed significant but moderate ($r= 0.506, p<0.05$) relationship between task performed and the job conditions of the respondents. Based on the findings, efforts should be made by government to pay necessary allowances and provide sponsorship for the workers to obtain additional qualifications. If performance will be enhanced, awards should be given regularly to the extension staff.

Keywords: Agricultural Extension Workers, working conditions, job, Agricultural Development Project and task performance

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture in Nigeria occupies a central position amongst several sectors of the nation's economy, following its huge contribution to the Gross Domestic Product of the country. Hence, the exigent need to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of this sector. The achievement of this is hinged on a number of factors with most important among these factors being the enhancement and strengthening of the extension sub-sector. Agricultural extension by its nature has an important role in promoting the adoption of new technologies and innovations (Jamilah *et al.*, 2010). The role of extension agents is to act as a bridge linking community/farmers and agencies in the process of knowledge and technology transfer to rural community/farmers. Agricultural extension brings about changes in farmers' attitude, knowledge and skills through education and communication (Ali *et al.*, 2012).

Extension workers are professionals in the extension system responsible for developing individuals in the community and relating with the farmers. They are professional body of agricultural experts, teaching improved methods of farming, demonstrating innovations, and helping farmers to identify, organise and solve their problems. The quality of the performance of extension workers is as good as the purpose of their engagement and activities. The effectiveness of extension services is also highly dependent on the ability of extension workers who are competent as the whole extension process is dependent on them to transfer information from extension organisations to the clients (Sinkaiye, 2005). The Performance of

extension agents is expected to increase if they have access to some factors and programme development competencies that will further improve their performance. These competencies must be considered and the necessary factors such as the job working condition must be continuously assessed (Tiraieyari *et al.*, 2010).

Working condition refers to working environment and all existing circumstances affecting labour in the workplace, including; job hours, physical aspects (i.e chairs to sit while in office, tools for mobility while on field like motorbikes, adequate power supply for preparation of teaching aids among others), legal rights and responsibilities (annual leave, maternity leave, sick leave, notification before disengagement by employer and notification to employee before withdrawal of service). Conducive work environments ensure the well-being of employees, which has been found to enable them exert themselves to their roles with all force that may translate to higher productivity (Akinyele, 2007). The workplace environment and job working condition of employees set in place impacts employee morale, productivity and engagement, both positively and negatively (Chandrasekar, 2011). According to Heath (2006), the quality of the employees' workplace and work condition influences the motivation level and thereafter the performance of the employees within the organisation. There are many factors that affect the performance of employees in organisations. Workplace environment and job condition plays an essential role towards workers' performance and productivity in any organisation (El-Zeiny, 2013).

Agricultural extension plays a crucial role in agricultural and rural development. It functions in the identification of research and policy modification that benefit rural communities (Spielman and Birner, 2008); provision of framework for farmers to be organised into functional groups (Christoplos 2008). In spite of these cardinal roles agricultural extension plays, its functionality has been greatly hampered by inadequate funding. Auta and Dafwang (2010) investigated the status and policy of ADPs in Nigeria and found that over 63% of the ADPs had a weak or very weak funding status while over 22% had a good to excellent status. Furthermore, most of the ADPs had reduced their extension workers in recent times due to poor funding. Ammaniet *al.* (2010) investigated the “challenges to the sustainability of the ADP system in Nigeria” and discovered inadequate funding was the focal problem.

If funding is dwindling definitely it will have direct or indirect impact on the ability of the extension workers to carry out their tasks; regardless of how crucial or otherwise these tasks may be. The perceptions of the workers about their tasks could also be affected. It is in view of the crucial roles of extension services to the development of agriculture and the challenges of funding facing it, that this study assessed the perception of Agricultural Extension workers on the level of importance of various tasks performed and also determined the influence of working conditions on tasks performed.

The general objective of the study was to determine the perception of the Agricultural Extension workers of ODSADP about the level of importance of various tasks they perform.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. determine the perceived level of importance of tasks performed by the agricultural extension workers; and
2. determine the job working conditions influencing the performance of agricultural extension workers.

The hypothesis of the study; There is no significant relationship between tasks performed and the working conditions influencing the tasks performed by the respondents.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Ondo state. Ondo State is located in the South Western part of Nigeria. Eighty respondents for this study were drawn randomly from the list of extension workers of Ondo State Agricultural Development Programme (ODSADEP). A well-structured questionnaire subjected to validation by expert's judgment was used to obtain data from the respondents.

The perception of the extension personnel about the importance of the job tasks they perform was measured in a 4-point rating scale of very important = 4, important = 3, fairly important = 2, not important = 1. Cut off point of 2.5 was adopted. Any mean value below the mean cut off point of 2.5 was regarded as not important while tasks with mean values equal to and above 2.5 was categorized as important tasks. Job working conditions influencing the performance of agricultural extension workers were measured utilising a 4-point scale of; very great influence = 4, great influence = 3, slight influence = 2 and no influence = 1. For positive job working conditions, they were scored as “no influence” = 1, slight influence = 2, great influence = 3 and very great influence = 4, reverse scoring system was employed for negative statements. The grand mean score was used as cut off. Job working condition with mean values equal to or above the grand mean values were classified as having High influence (HI) on the extension worker's job task performance. Job working conditions with values below grand mean was regarded as having low influence (LI) Data were analysed using percentage and mean statistics. Hypothesis was tested with multiple regression.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceived importance of tasks performed by the respondents

Table 1a and b revealed the respondents' perception about the importance of tasks they perform as agricultural extension staff. From table 1a, 78.8% of the respondents perceived rendering of technical advice and formation of groups as ‘very important’ tasks while 21.2% rated these tasks as ‘important’. In addition, 77.5 % perceived creation of awareness on new innovation as ‘very important’ and 22.5 % rated it as ‘important’. The work of extension agent is easier to work with groups of farmers, as such the task of formation farmers into groups was rated as ‘very important’. Technical information and general information provision about innovations are cardinal roles of extension agents as such these tasks were rated as ‘very important’ by over 70% of the respondents. These tasks will go a long way to determine failure or success of the extension services rendered to the farmers. This view was supported by Van Mele (2007) by stating that Agricultural Extension staff ensures the supply of information and new technologies to farming communities. Furthermore, in table 1a, 76.2% rated serving as link between researchers and farmers as ‘very important’, 23.8% rated it as ‘important’ while in Table 1b, 75.0% and 23.7% perceived selection of contact farmers as ‘very important’ and ‘important’ respectively. The work of Agricultural Extension agents is easier when they use contact farmers. Contact farmers (CFs), serve as points of contact between extension

agents (EAs) and other farmers and are ubiquitously used as messengers of information

(Kondyliset al, 2017).Table 1a and b revealed that the entire 20 tasks listed were rated as ‘important’.

Table 1a: Perceived Importance of Tasks Performed by the Respondents (n=80)

Tasks Performed by extension workers	VI	I	SI	NI	Remarks
Provision of agro chemical skill training to improve farmers understanding.	72.5	27.5	2.5	-	Important
Rendering of technical advice to farmers to boost their knowledge towards new agricultural practices.	78.8	21.2	-	-	Important
Formation of farmer groups which provide various services among farmers.	78.8	21.2	-	-	Important
Development of leadership capacity in motivating clientele in the rural area.	77.5	22.5	-	-	Important
Serves as an intermediary between researcher and farmers to increase the level of work performed by the researchers.	76.2	23.8	-	-	Important
Advice to farmers on cultural practices on crop	75.0	25.0	-	-	Important
Creating awareness on innovation to improve the standard of living of farmers.	77.5	20.0	-	-	Important
Linking of farmers with sources of farming inputs	75.0	25.0	-	-	Important
Personal contact with farmers during training and visit programme to foster relationship during (TandV).	67.5	32.5	-	-	Important

VI= Very important, I= Important, SI= slightly important, NI= Not important.

Tasks above or equal to mean cut off of 2.5= important task.

Tasks below mean cut off of 2.5= Not important task.

Source: Field survey, 2018.

Table 1b: Perceived Importance of Tasks Performed by the Respondents (n=80)

Tasks Performed by extension workers	VI	I	SI	NI	Remarks
Formation of women groups to allow interaction among rural women.	73.8	26.2	-	-	Important
Food utilisation demonstration to farmers for proper understanding.	73.8	25.0	1.2	-	Important
Selection of contact farmers to increase agricultural production.	75.0	23.8	1.2	-	Important
Provision of adult education service to enable farmers to become literate	72.5	27.5	-	-	Important
Helping the farmers to broaden their existing knowledge.	71.2	28.8	-	-	Important
Demonstration of improved technology to improve the understanding of farmers towards new agricultural practices.	68.8	31.2	-	-	Important
Educating clientele on good health practices.	68.8	31.2	-	-	Important
Appropriate record keeping of various activities carried out on the farm.	66.2	33.8	-	-	Important
Assisting the subject matter specialist (SMS) in disseminating information to farmers.	80.0	20.0	-	-	Important
Teaching rural and urban clientele and how to use their resources to solve their problems.	67.5	32.5	-	-	Important
Persuasion of farmers to adopt new technologies and new ideas	52.5	47.5	-	-	Important
Grand mean	3.72				

VI= Very important, I= Important, SI= slightly important, NI= Not important. Mean ≥ 2.5 = important task.

Source: Field survey, 2018.

Working conditions influencing tasks performed by the respondents

Table 2a showed that 80% and 17.5% of the extension agents rated provision of sponsorship for additional qualification as having ‘very great influence’ and ‘great influence’ respectively on the performance of tasks by the respondents. This could be attributed to the desire of the respondents to further their education but lacked the financial capability. Therefore, provision of such sponsorship will serve as an impetus for better performance of their tasks. The table also revealed that 71.2% and 28.8 % perceived payment of leave bonus and giving of awards as having ‘very great influence’ and ‘great influence’ respectively on task performance by the extension agents. When awards are given to workers it boosts their morale and it is a form of incentive which may not necessarily be cash. Plaque can be given and other incentives in kind as well. This will give the workers a sense of being recognized for their efforts. In Table 2b, 72.5% of the extension agents rated dearth of staff as having ‘very great influence’ while 27.5% opined that dearth of staff has ‘great influence’. The dearth of staff has been a

major problem of the agricultural extension delivery in Nigeria. Presently the extension agents available find it difficult to visit the required number of farmers in a fortnight. Many farmers do not have access to extension service because of inadequate man power. It is recommended by FAO that one extension agent (EA) should serve a maximum of one thousand (1000) farm families (FF) in developing countries. Unfortunately, the ratio across state in Nigeria is higher than the FAO recommendation. According to Haruna and Abdullahi (2013), On the average and across Nigeria, the ADPs EA: FFs ratio oscillated from 1:1700, 1:2132, 1:3385, 1:2950 and 1: 3011 between the years 2008 and 2012. This trend of diminishing number of VEAs had persisted over the years because most ADPs could not recruit new EAs even with the dire needs. As inadequacy is a serious issue that inhibits effective dissemination of new and useful information of agricultural technologies. In table 2a and b only four job conditions out of the twenty conditions listed were in the category of low influence (LI) while the remaining sixteen were in the category of high influence (HI).

Table 2a: Job Working Conditions Influencing the Tasks Performed by the Respondents (n=80)

Variables	VGI	GI	SI	NI	Remarks
Provision of Sponsorship for additional qualification/Training.	80.0	17.5	2.5	-	HI
Payment of leave bonus to encourage workers.	71.2	28.8	-	-	HI
Giving of awards to motivate better performance.	71.2	28.8	-	-	HI
Study leave to peruse training or study	68.8	31.2			HI
Lateness of salary which reduce the activities performed	67.5	31.2	1.2	-	HI
Involvement in training to improve knowledge and understanding about agriculture (FNT, MTRM etc.)	65.0	35.0	-	-	HI
Satisfaction of working with the farmers.	62.5	37.5	-	-	HI
Arrangement of pension scheme after retirement.	63.8	35.0	-	-	HI
Provision of funds and loans to improve the activities performed	60.0	38.8	1.2	-	HI
Avenue to go places to learn new things (tourism).	56.2	41.2	2.5	-	HI
Job Security	38.8	53.8	7.5	-	LI
Delayed promotion	51.2	40.0	8.8	-	LI
Lack of sufficient training (through seminars and workshop).	48.8	46.2	5.0	-	LI
poor road infrastructure in farming communities	55.0	37.5	5.0	-	LI

VGI= Very great influence, GI = Great influence, SI= Small influence, NI= No influence.

Mean above ≥ 2.57 High Influence (HI); Mean below 2.5= Low Influence (LI)

Grand Mean= 2.57

Source: Field survey, 2018.

Table 2b: Job Working Conditions Influencing the Tasks Performed by the Respondents (n=80)

Variables	VGI (%)	GI (%)	SI (%)	NI (%)	Remarks
Irregular allowance which reduces the work activities on farmer's field.	53.8	43.8	2.5	-	LI
Poor linking mechanism with researcher which affects dissemination of information to clientele	51.2	48.8	-	-	LI
Limited access to funds and loans.	66.2	31.2	1.2	-	LI
Poor transportation means for staff to disseminate information to farmers	65.0	35.0	-	-	LI
Poor attitude of clientele towards new technologies.	71.2	28.8	-	-	LI
Dearth of staff.	72.5	27.5	-	-	LI

Source: Field survey, 2018. Grand Mean= 2.57

VGI= Very great influence, GI = Great influence, SI= Small influence, NI= No influence.

Mean above ≥ 2.57 High Influence (HI); Mean below 2.5= Low Influence (LI)

Test of Hypothesis

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between tasks performed and the perceived working conditions influencing the tasks performed by the respondents

Result of the Pearson Product Moment correlation in Table 3 shows that there was medium, positive but significant relationship ($r= 0.506$, $p<0.05$) between the tasks performed by the extension agents and the job working conditions of the

extension agents. This implies the tasks performed are influenced by the perceived working conditions of the respondents. This assertion is supported by Salauet *al* (2014) who stated that work conditions often affect performance of tasks. This connotes that the extension agent's performance of their tasks will improve if the job conditions are improved since the relationship has positive coefficient.

Table 3: Correlation between Tasks Performed and Job Working Conditions (n=80)

Variables	r-value	p-value	Remark
Task performed vs. job working conditions influencing the task performed	0.106	0.042	Significant

Source: Computed from Field Survey, (2018)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study had been able to ascertain that extension workers attach great importance to various activities and tasks they perform. This implies that they are heartily engaged in these activities, also the study has established that job conditions has influence on the tasks performed by the agricultural extensionagents, therefore the government should consistently ensure that the working conditions of the extension agents are favourable to encourage them. Priority should be given to Provision of sponsorship for additional qualification and training, payment of leave bonus, awards to motivate performance and granting of study leave for professional advancement.

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