

ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION OF EXTENSION FIELD STAFF AND THEIR TRAINING NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

The study analyzed academic qualifications of field extension staff in Abia and Akwa-Ibom States of Nigeria. The sample comprised of all the 647 ZEOs, SMSs, BESs and EAs on the roll of the two ADPs at the time of data collection. Analysis of data revealed that: (1) high percentage of staff positions have been filled in the extension services in Abia (80.1%) and Akwa-Ibom (85.4%) States. (2) About 14.4% of staff does not have the minimum entry qualification of OND even as their highest academic qualification is the First School Leaving Certificate or West African School Certificate. Staff with OND are 17.3%. Only 12.2% holds Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) while 20.7% and 32.6% holds HND and B.Sc respectively. The remaining 2.8% holds PGD, M.Sc or Ph.D. It was argued that the OND minimum requirement for employment of EAs and HND for BESs and SMSs are inadequate because these staff is like teachers who must not only be masters of what to teach, but also of how to teach it. The curriculum for OND, HND, BSc, MSc and PhD in Agriculture does not prepare graduates for teaching. If the Federal Ministry of Education has insisted that possession of at least, a certificate in education should be a condition for recruitment of new and retention of old teaching staff, much more would EAs, BESs, and SMSs require adequate training and skills in methodology for teaching. Teaching, informing and advising farmers, who are largely illiterates requires greater skill in the art of teaching. It was recommended that the minimum entry qualification for EAs would be NCE in Agricultural Science or in other science subjects. The policy of holding a minimum of NCE or a certificate in education or Adult education by all field staff in the extension system should be put in place for its obvious implications for effective technology transfer.

Key words: academic qualification, extension field staff, training needs

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural extension plays indispensable roles in the process of raising agricultural productivity and small holder's welfare. It has been described as the kingpin in the process of technology generation, transfer and utilization (Anwanane, 1990; Ilevbaoje, 1991; and Nahdy 2002). Nigeria can be said to be a country with an extension system in constant evolution. Over the years, a number of extension approaches have been implemented. For example, the Conventional Ministry Operated extension, Project Development Approach, Sectorial/Commodity extension, University-based extension, Integrated Rural Development Approach, and Farmer-Focused extension approaches (Ilevebaoje, 1991, Unamma, 2004). Most of these efforts were adjudged ineffective and inefficient (Ekpo and Olaniyi, 1995).

The Training and Visit (T & V) extension management system was eventually introduced under the nomenclature of "Unified Agricultural Extension Service" (UAES) between 1986 and 1990 (Unamma, 2004). The success of the T&V in bringing about agricultural development in Nigeria was not in doubt. For example, Olatunji (2005) cited reports from Idachaba, 1983, Balogun, 1986, Okorie, 1986; Anyichi, 1995, Olawoye, 1995, Ilevbaoje 1993 and 2004, and others which suggest that the T&V system made quite noticeable positive impact on farmers' productivity and living conditions.

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The unabated criticisms that have trailed the implementation of the T&V (operated as UAES) in Nigeria in the last one decade or so have been blamed on (1) ignorance of what T&V is or is out to achieve and (2) poor implementation (Unamma, 2004; Olatunji, 2005). One aspect that critics of T&V management system operated in the United Agricultural Extension Service (UAES) emphasize is that of entry qualification and professionalism of the Extension Agents. Benor, Horrison and Baxter (1984) have explained that professionalism is one of the seven key features of T&V, which if modified unnecessarily, will atrophy T&V implementation and render the system ineffective. Professionalism implies that extension would employ only staff that have specialized training and requisite knowledge, skills and ability to identify production constraints in the field, develop appropriate solutions to problems, teach, inform, advise farmers and be able to handle their responsibilities in a professional manner. Those requirements would exclude all non-professionals from extension field work.

In the UAES, an Extension Agent (EA) has the responsibilities of informing, teaching, and advising farmers as well as getting feedback to research and input agencies. The Subject Matter-Specialist (SMS) has the responsibility of teaching Extension Agents fortnightly the production recommendations to extend to farmers. The SMSs, in turn, have their technical know-how and skills continuously upgraded as they are taught at the Monthly Technological Review Meetings (MTRMs) by relevant team of farming systems research scientists of mandated institutes. Thus, all EAs, BESs, SMSs and research scientists are involved in some form of teaching. A professional teacher is one who is not only a master of **what** to teach but also, **how** to teach it. This requires adequate training and skills in the methodology of teaching.

In Nigeria, possession of Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) are stipulated as the minimum entry qualifications for EAs and SMSs, respectively. It is obvious that the curricula for OND and HND in Agriculture do not prepare their graduates for teaching. Ability to teach, advise and adapt instruction to particular situations of farmers requires professional training. This investigation was, therefore, prompted by the need to:

1. ascertain if all vacancies for field staff have been adequately filled as expected in a professional extension system
2. find out if all staff in the Extension Subsector of the ADPs have basic required minimum entry academic qualifications
3. determine the training needs of field extension staff in the area of study

METHODOLOGY

Sample: The population of study comprised of all the field extension staff (ZEOs, Zonal SMSs, BESs, and EAs) in Abia and Akwa-Ibom States Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs). The entire population (647) was selected for the study because the population is not too large as to necessitate selection of a sample. Data for the study were elicited through documentary sources. Relevant data were obtained from the record sections in both ADPs.

Procedure

Data for the research were subjected to descriptive statistical analyses (percentage and ranking), and the findings presented in frequency tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of data analysis are as presented in tables 1 and 2.

Number of staff of all cadres

The first objective of the study is to ascertain if all vacancies for field extension staff have been filled as is expected in a professional extension. The finding in table 1 suggests that 80.1% and 85.4% of staff positions have been filled in the extension services in Abia and Akwa-Ibom States respectively. Obviously, the percentage staffing is high at all levels (ranging from 76.3% to 100% in some cases). It should be noted that the funding and control of extension services have been transferred to the State governments since 1999 (FGN, 2004). The fact that both ADPs have continued to keep high percentage of staff positions filled is contrary to expectation but is very commendable.

Table 1: Distribution of extension field staff (ZEOs, SMSs, BESs and EAs) in Abia ADP and AKADEP

Staff cadre	Required	ABI ADP		Required	AKADEP	
		No Available	% available		No available	% available
ZEOs	6	6	100	7	7	100
Zonal SMSs	30	24	80.0	35	29	82.9
Bes	38	29	76.3	40	40	100
BEAs	38	36	94.7	40	38	95
EAs	274	214	78.1	274	224	81.8
Total	386	309	80.1	396	338	85.4
EA:FF Ratio	1:1490			1:1410		

Table 2: Distribution of all extension field staff (ZEOs, SMSs, BESs & EAs) by highest academic qualification

Highest Education	ABIA ADP			AKADEP			TOTAL	
	No	Percent		No	Percent		No	Percent
FSLC	17	5.5	} 9.4	3.9	11.5	} 18.9	56	8.7
WAEC/Cert	12	3.9		25	7.4		37	5.7
OND	39	12.7	} 90.6	73	21.6	} 81.1	112	17.3
NCE	18	5.8		61	18.0		79	12.2
HND	79	25.5		55	16.3		134	20.7
BSc	135	43.7		76	22.5		24	32.6
PGD	5	1.6		-	-		5	0.8
MSc	3	1.0		7	2.1		10	1.5
PhD	1	0.3	2	0.6	3	0.5		
Total	309	100		338	100		647	100

At the level of EAs, only 78.1% and 81.8% of the positions are already filled in Abia and Akwa-Ibom ADPs respectively. This implies that the EA: Farm Family ratio stood at 1:1490 for Abia ADP and 1:1410 for AKADEP. In both cases, the EA's jurisdiction is still larger

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than the recommended 1:800-1:1000 ratios and 1:800-1:1200 national recommendations. (Benor *et al*, 1984, Unamma *et al* 2004). The present EA: Farm family ratios are still very large and it would be impossible for any EA to have serious impact on all farmers in his circle. This is so, especially if we recall that the present method of computing EA: Farmer ratio is not really what it should be; rather, what is computed is EA: Farm family ratio. This means that if we are to get down to individual farmer, the ratio may be 1:5000 to 6000. The implication is that the UAES that has been put in place in both Abia and Akwa Ibom States is yet to attain complete professionalism.

Qualification of staff of all cadres

As shown in table 2, about 9.4% and 18.9% of staff in Abia ADP and AKADEP do not have the mandatory entry qualification of OND. They hold either the First School Leaving Certificate or the West African Examination Council Certificate or GCE. These percentages are high enough to put a limitation on the effectiveness of a UAES. The T&V conceptualized by Benor and Baxter (1984), were who its proponents, and does not provide room for any unqualified field staff. These categories of staff do not have the minimum academic qualification necessary to fully and effectively understand the technologies they are expected to extend to farmers. Further enquiries suggests that majority of staff in these category are those staff who were transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Extension Service. Many of them are aged men and women who have lost ambition for further academic training. The implication is that farmers in their circles would not be benefiting maximally from the provisions of the extension service. It is not likely that these unqualified staff would be able to effectively extend the technologies, which they themselves may not understand properly.

It is, however, commendable that both ADPs have been able to achieve high percentage (85.6%) of qualified staff with OND, NCE, HND, BSc, PGD, MSc and even PhD certificate holders.

Training needs of field extension staff

There is a preponderance of staff with OND, HND, B.Sc and M.Sc in both Abia and Akwa Ibom States ADPs. With these large numbers of “qualified” staff, one may ask, why does the extension still wobble? Why has greater impact not been recorded over the years? Why has the attitude of most farmers still largely conservative towards adoption of proven improved production technologies? Why has these “professional extension staff” not been able to make significant changes in the attitude of farmers through effective teaching, information and advice? The researcher’s observation leads to the opinion is that most of the so called “qualified” staff are “not qualified” in the actual sense of academic qualification. Obviously, holders of OND, HND, PGD, MSc and PhD in Agricultural science cannot be regarded as professionals in agricultural education and extension. Referring to OND, HND, PGD, M.Sc and PhD certificate holders as professionals in agricultural extension and education is akin to calling a “Butcher” a “Surgeon.” The curricular for these programmes do not prepare their graduates for teaching. Extension involves teaching and a teacher must not only be **a master of what to teach** but also **how to teach it**. Acquisition of knowledge, skills and appropriate methodologies for effective teaching are usually the focus of the general teacher-education or adult education curriculum. Holders of OND, HND, PGD, M.Sc and PhD in Agriculture and agricultural science related courses may have acquired the knowledge of what to teach/disseminate or extend but more likely than not fail woefully in teaching because they have not learnt the methodology of communicating the knowledge to learners/farmers.

Knowledge transfer is an act that must be acquired by extension field staff - more so as majority of Nigeria’s farmers are adults and illiterates whose teachers would require

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specialized training in general education or adult education. Although, the teaching of youths is less cumbersome, the Federal Government of Nigeria realized the importance of the knowledge of teaching methodology for teachers. Currently, OND, HND, PGD, M.Sc and PhD holders have been mandated to acquire additional certificate in education as a condition for entry or remaining in its services to primary and secondary schools. Much more, the Agricultural Extension Agents whose “students” teach largely illiterate adults farmers should be professionally qualified educators or adult educators if sustainable agricultural development is the nation’s desire and if that desire is expected to be realized.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that staff positions in extension services in the study areas have been filled revealing a high percentage staffing at all levels. Interestingly, both ADPs have been able to achieve high percentage of qualified staff with OND, NCE, HND, BSc, PGD, MSc and even PhD certificate holders. In line with the identified training needs of extension field staff in this study, it is recommended:

- i. that the minimum entry qualification for EAs would be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) in agricultural science.
- ii. that the Block Extension Supervisors be holders of B.Sc in agricultural education or Masters of Education (MSc.Ed) holders in agricultural science related disciplines or at least have a Certificate in Education in addition to B.Sc, HND, or M.Sc in Agriculture.
- iii. that, in effect, all field extension staff should have background training in education. All field staff that is already in the employment of the ADPs should be allowed 5-6 years within which they would acquire, at least, a certificate in general education or adult education.
- iv. that existing vacancies in both ADPs be filled in order to ensure that all farmers in the area of study benefit from the provisions of extension and that staff already in the field are not overworked.
- v. the large percentage of all FSLC and WAEC/GCE holders (9.4% in Abia and 18.9% in AKADEP) should be replaced with professionally qualified staff.

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