Issues in Developing a National Policy on Agricultural Extension Service in Nigeria: The Perception of Extension Professionals

Caroline O. Albert and Benjamin I. Isife
Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension,
Rivers State University of Science and Technology, P.M.B. 5080, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract: The need to develop a national policy on agricultural extension service in Nigeria, its critical components and the ways to enhance the policy formed the basis for this study. A study on the perception of 20 extension workers on the issues was conducted in Rivers State, Southern Nigeria. The extension workers included 2 extension supervisors and 2 extension agents randomly selected from each of 5 establishments involved in agricultural extension services in the state. Data were collected from the extension workers using questionnaires and frequency counts, percentages and mean scores were applied for data analysis. The study identified critical components of agricultural extension policy to include institutional framework and structures, safety/security, monitoring and evaluation, sustainability, funding, research, information communication technology, globalization and personnel training. It was advanced that a national policy on agricultural extension shall bring forth a minimum standard for extension activities, personnel quality and ratio to recipients, personnel training and efficient institutional framework to enhance agricultural development in Nigeria.

Key words: Policy issues, agricultural extension, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Before Nigeria gained her independence, agriculture played a very dominant role in the national economy. It was the most important sector of the economy from the standpoint of rural employment, adequate food for the increasing population, raw materials for building industrial sector, public revenue, employment opportunities for an expanding labour force, foreign exchange and internal market for industrial goods and services (Moro, 1994). The performance of the pre-independence agriculture was laudable and there was economic boom (Ekong, 1986). Agricultural activities are as multilateral as their economic benefits. It cannot be a unilateral pursuit if the potential must be fully harnassed to boost economic production, supplies for industrialization, distribution and commerce (Mellor, 1974). It is a historical fact that no nation has actually developed either actually become great without developing agriculture and its agricultural potentials. Development of the sector is not possible unless all the component units and efforts are actually harnassed for maximum benefit. Development programmes and projects are built from policies and when effectively executed result in national development.

The national agricultural policy for Nigeria approved in 1988 was premised on the expected role of the economy. The goal of the policy is the structural transformation necessary for the socio-economic development of the rural areas. The specific objectives of the policy were the attainment of self sufficiency in basic food commodities, increase production of agricultural raw materials, integrated agricultural and rural development and combating environmental threats to food security (Idachaba, 1988). The Nigerian agricultural policy also focuses on food production, agro-industry, environmental conservation, agricultural credit and insurance, agricultural mechanization, poverty alleviation and agricultural information and management (Idachaba, 1985). A national policy on agriculture must be holistic, taking into consideration the interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary nature of agricultural development. It must therefore, be anchored on multidisciplinary approach. The complementary disciplines and interfaces must be integrated in the approach or considered on their merit in fashioning out policy for real time growth and sustainable development. From the Nigerian agricultural policy, it is obvious that not much has been put in place for agricultural extension service. Agricultural extension service, simply put, is the transmission of agriculture

Corresponding Author: Caroline O. Albert, Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension,
Rivers State University of Science and Technology, P.M.B. 5080, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

awareness/information in terms of modern practices, techniques, innovations and technology to end users. It is out-of-door agricultural education, social and cultural development of modern agriculture among rural people outside the regularly organized schools or classes. The relativity in the world of today offers the advantage to translate from primitive agriculture to modern agriculture. But how much of modern or improved knowledge have been transferred is a matter of concern to stakeholders.

National Agricultural Research Institutes, Colleges and Universities of Agriculture are established in the bid to develop modern practices in agriculture for productivity as to furnish the agricultural sector with new techniques/technologies and manpower. The dynamism education has brought to Nigeria society is not reflected visibly in the agricultural sector. The reason is not far fetched; it is due to absence of adequate articulated extension policy as a pivot for agricultural development. This study, therefore, aims at bringing to the fore the key issues that must be considered in fashioning a national extension policy for enhancement of agricultural development in Nigeria.

The broad objective of the study was to consider issues that are relevant in the development of national policy on agricultural extension in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to:

* Fashion out critical components of national policy on agricultural extension.
* Elucidate or establish the importance of national policy on extension services.
  Suggest ways to enhance national policy on agricultural extension.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Rivers State, located in the Niger Delta region of the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. Two stage sampling methods were used to select the respondents for this study. The first stage involved the purposive sampling technique in which 5 establishments that carry out agricultural extension services were chosen. The establishments were: Rivers State Agricultural Development Project (RISADEP), Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC), Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC), Elf Petroleum Nigeria Limited (EPNL) and Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA). The second stage was the random selection of extension agents and extension supervisors in each of the establishments. Two extension agents and two extension supervisors were selected for the study from each agency. A total of 10 extension

supervisors and 10 extension agents were interviewed. This gave a total of 20 respondents for the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency counts, percentages and mean scores (arising from four point Likert rating scale).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that most of the extension agents and supervisors 80% were in their active age bracket of between 20-30 years. Their mean age was 33 years. By this age, most of the extension workers are expected to discharge their assigned field functions effectively.

The results in Table 2 reveal that all the extension workers interviewed were literate. The breakdown of the results shows that 25% had Higher National Diploma, 65% had B.Sc/B. Agric in Agriculture and 10% had master of science degree. Majority of the respondents are first degree holders probably in various disciplines in agriculture. Their levels of education is appropriate to enable them undertake the extension work.

Table 3 indicates that 85% of the respondents saw institution framework, structures, safety/security and monitoring/evaluation as the most important issues to consider when creating extension policy, followed by 80% of the respondents who agreed with sustainability in finance/funding, research, information communication technology, globalization and training/personnel development, while 75% of the respondents believed that cultural constraint and roles of other stakeholders should also be considered.

Institution refers to the form of national or regional organization set up for articulation, coordination and implementation/actualization of agricultural extension policy. It also includes definition of the forms of organizations that may be put in place for actualization of policy, the way the institution should be structured, organized or arranged to achieve maximum result and for

Table 1: Age status of the respondents

Age (years)	No. of respondents	Percentage
20-30	7	35.0
30-40	9	45.0
40 and above	4	20.0
Total	20	100.0
Mean age = 33 years		

Field Survey (2008)

Table 2: Educational levels of the respondents

Qualification	No. of respondents	Percentage
HND	5	25.0
B.Sc	5	25.0
B. Agric.	8	40.0
M.Sc	2	10.0
Total	20	100.0

Field Survey (2008)

Table 3: Critical components in agricultural extension policy

Issues	ADP	NDBDA	ELF	AGIP	SHELL	No. of respondents	(%)
Institution framework	3	3	3	4	4	17	85.0
Structures	3	4	4	3	3	17	85.0
Safety/security	4	4	3	3	3	17	85.0
Monitoring/evaluation	3	4	4	3	3	17	85.0
Sustainability	3	3	4	4	3	17	80.0
Finance/funding	4	4	2	3	3	16	80.0
Research	2	4	4	3	3	16	80.0
Information communication Tech.	3	3	2	4	4	16	80.0
Globalization	3	3	4	2	4	16	80.0
Training/personnel development	3	4	3	4	2	16	80.0
Cultural constraint	2	3	3	3	4	15	75.0
Roles of other stakeholders	4	2	3	3	3	15	75.0

Field Survey (2008)

national benefit. The structure defines how agriculture extension policy would be organized. The framework signifies the pattern or system that would evolve. This implies arrangement of all units to form single whole system: the connection of all the parts, the reporting lines, organizational structure and inter-relationship within the components of the structure. The structure determines the projects and programmes to be operated for system optimization and efficiency. The security of the policy, the system and operators must be well enshrined in government gazette and national statute book. The security of the system is critical to its continuity and patronage by professionals including career seekers. The personal security of field educators or extension workers through a special insurance scheme would boost interest and motivate practitioners.

Constant monitoring of the policy to ensure its implementation is very important. This will reduce or prevent the discontinuity of a policy when a new government comes to power. Also, the evaluation of the policy will help to make it effective. The policy must be such that it can be implemented. There must be continuity and sustainability from year to year, from one administration to another. It must be such that it is applicable considering, the nation's state of development. Adequate provision of basic infrastructure such as good communication network is necessary for sustainability of policy. Finance and adequate funding would be required for sustainability. Therefore, government and stakeholders must appreciate this aspect of the challenges. Government administration, both state and national with multiministerial departments and the multisectoral nature of national economic structure as interfaces would pose a lot of challenges to the implementation of policy on extension services.

The policy to be fashioned must examine the current field practices and state of extension service in the country. It should also identify the need for research in development of new and better methods, processes and equipment. The scope of research should be enlarged to cover upstream and downstream agriculture. The relationship of all sectors or disciplines and collation of research results as well as networking for national development should be emphasized. There should be provision for system re-engineering, re-invention and development in extension service. Efficient technology developed from simple local practices should be considered in the policy. The constraints of total mechanization of agriculture and cultural aversion to new methods should be addressed. Information Communication Technology (ICT) is a tool that makes communication easy in our present day situation. It is important in mass education. This would only be possible and sustained by development of good electricity infrastructure and telecommunication in the rural areas where majority of farmers reside.

In fashioning, national policy on agricultural extension, current practices and policies in this sector, as in other parts of the world, particularly in the developed world, must be examined. This would help to avoid mistakes, update information and benefit maximum from globalization as well as networking. Availability of manpower or adequately trained personnel for effective implementation of policy is another important issue. Therefore, the training of technical personnel to meet demand of manpower is very critical in sustainability of the policy. The question that must be answered here are: Are there enough colleges, universities and departments training extension workers? Is there need to set up more departments, colleges or universities of agriculture that would train and furnish the sector with manpower? Is there jobs guaranteed for graduates of agricultural extension as to galvanize interest for enrolment of candidates? Cultural diversity is a factor always considered in national education policy implementation. English language is a lingua franca. Majority of people particularly farmers residing in the rural areas do not understand English language yet the educators are men and women trained in English language. There is wide cultural diversity from North to South, East to West with

Table 4: Importance of agricultural extension policies

Importance	No. of respondents	Rank
Provides the mechanism for continuous collection and processing of data for planning future projects	18	1st
Policy when established will put in place minimum standard for extension services personnel quality and ratio to recipients, training of personnel and institutional framework.	18	1st
One of the fundamentals of agricultural growth and development.	17	2nd
Policy and the agricultural research system when collaborated with international programme would generate new technologies from the agricultural research institutes, universities/colleges of agriculture.	17	2nd
Give hope to people in the profession and also encourage more people into the field.	16	3rd
Stakeholders will be efficient in their roles.	14	4th

Field Survey (2008)

Table 5: How to enhance agricultural extension policy

Options	Mean score	Remarks
Creation of federal, state and local extension offices with their various sectors	3.40	Strongly agreed
Stakeholders in the different establishments of extension should be consulted when formulating policy	2.00	Agreed
Planning/programme should be designed on operation, execution, coordination, monitoring and evaluation, research and review	3.20	Strongly agreed
There should be deliberate effort to produce more workers through the educational systems like polytechnics, universities/colleges of Agriculture	2.2	Agreed

Mean score ≥3.00; Strongly Agree; Mean score <3.00-Agree; Field Survey (2008)

regard to agricultural practices. In some cultures, certain occupations or practice are exclusive for men. In some places men are restricted from women so much so that men are not allowed to teach women and vice versa. All these are constraints that should be addressed in fashioning out the policy. Apart from government, there are other stakeholders who would be interested in extension work such as individuals, groups, non-governmental organizations and companies. Some companies have, as their corporate responsibility, to develop agriculture in their host communities. In the Niger Delta of Nigeria, for instance, Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria, Elf Petroleum, Nigeria Agip Oil Company, among others, have agricultural extension services in localities where they exploit oil. Therefore, a policy that would encourage all interest groups would be appropriate.

As shown in Table 4, it was established that it is important to consider critical issues when creating extension policies because of the following reasons:

- It will put in place the minimum standard for extension services, personnel quality and ratio to recipients, training of personnel and institutional framework.
- The policy and agricultural research system when collaborated with international programmes would generate new technologies.
- It will provide the mechanism of continuous collection and processing of data for planning of future projects.
- It is one of the fundamentals to agricultural growth and development.
- It will give hope to people in the profession and also encourage more people into the field/profession.

From Table 5, to enhance national policy on agricultural extension, the following should be considered:

- Planning or programme should be designed on operation, execution, coordination, monitoring and evaluation, research and review.
- Local, state and federal extension offices be created with all the various sectors put in place.

CONCLUSION

Researches resulting in new models and methods in agriculture are not sufficient on their own without a chance of translating them to physical and practical reality. This is the point where agricultural extension gains prominence. It is the link between research and application as it informs, educates, communicates and teaches new methods, models and techniques to end users (farmers). Agricultural extension facilitates transition from primitive to modern agriculture. Therefore, development of agriculture is not possible without a functional agricultural extension policy. Hence, any effort aimed at developing agriculture to present day millennium standard would require an articulated policy on agricultural extension with defined roles, goals and targets in extension services. Issues as institutions-organizations, forms, types, structure, procedures, methods and operation would arise. In addition, sustainability of policy and the system/structure, security, culture diversity, personnel/manpower, information communication technology, role of other stakeholders including non-governmental organizations, current field practices, globalization are key issues that would arise in fashioning a national policy on agricultural extension. It

is the policy that provides the roadmap as it determines how the system would be structured and procedures to be followed in order to actualize it.

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