

# JOURNAL OF SUSTAINABLE TROPICAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

## VOLUME 13

*An international and interdisciplinary academic journal for the publication of critical reviews, analytical expositions, theoretical and empirical research reports in all areas of tropical agriculture and related disciplines:*

- Agricultural Administration
- Agricultural Biology
- Agricultural Chemistry
- Agricultural Economics
- Agricultural Education
- Agricultural Engineering
- Agricultural History
- Agricultural Sociology
- Agriculture & Environment
- Animal Science
- Aquatic & Fisheries Science
- Crop Science
- Food Processing
- Forestry & Wildlife
- Home Economics
- Soil Science
- Others

Prof. Lawrence Etim (Ph.D., B.Sc.)

Editor-in-Chief/Executive Editor

2005 Treasure Publishers, Nigeria ISSN 1596-079X

Jo★



# FORMS AND REGULARITY OF PARTICIPATION OF CONTACT GROUPS IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE AKWA IBOM AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

AKPABIO, Iniobong Aniefiok

Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, University of Uyo, Nigeria.  
E-mail: dr\_akpabio@yahoo.com

## ABSTRACT

Contact groups are indispensable for equitable and sustained agricultural development. This study attempted to determine the forms of participation and regularity of performance of activities attributed to contact groups in the Training and Visit system, as operational in the Akwa-Ibom Agricultural Development Programme (AKADEP). Results reveal that contact groups were hardly involved in the performance of activities involved in the Training and visit system in the study area. Recommendations are offered to remedy the situation.

**Keywords:** Participation, contact groups, training and visit system, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria.

## CITATION

Akpabio, I. A. 2005. Forms and regularity of participation of contact groups in the activities of the Akwa Ibom Agricultural development programme. *Journal of Sustainable Tropical Agricultural Research*. 13: 41 – 47

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of a participatory approach to development has been in the fore of policy discourses since the early 1970's, based on a profound disillusion with performance of conventional development strategies, which were regarded as lacking the basic ingredients of participation. Oakley and Marsden (1984) had insisted that participation should converge in a concern for giving the rural poor a voice in development decisions, access to productive assets and a share in development. However participation is meaningless outside the collective context. According to Burkey (1995) participatory development implies a collective process of self-reliant development, through, like-minded groups.

The concept of participation has been practiced in various ways (Pretty, 1995). Ghai (1990) however distinguishes between three different interpretations of the term participation, to include: (i) mobilisation of people to undertake socio-economic development projects which are conceived from above; (ii) decentralisation in government or related organisation's machinery, whereby resources and decision making powers are transferred to lower level organisations; (iii) empowerment of the deprived and excluded, through the creation of organisations of the poor, which are democratic, independent and self-reliant.

With reference to agricultural development, participatory approaches emerged in the 1980s, as a response to continued failures. Farmer participatory research (FPR) then became the approach to adapt technologies to farmers' conditions and by the 1990s, to develop technologies together with farmers (Hagmann, et al, 1999). The concept of FPR had been separately discussed by Ashby (1987) and Salami (2000). Biggs (1989) distinguished four types of farmer participation, to include; (i) contractual – where scientists contract farmers to provide land and / or services; (ii) consultative – where scientists consult farmers about their problems and develop solutions; (iii) collaborative – where scientists and farmers collaborate as partners in the research process; and (iv) collegiate – where scientists strengthen the independent informal research and development system in rural areas.

The bug of participation has also visited the provision of agricultural extension services, which over time has been criticised for the linear unidimensional flow of information from research to farmers. The criticisms had become more strident due to the paucity of resources for effective extension services. The Training and Visit (T and V) system was formulated to remedy the weaknesses of traditional extension work, by rendering research relevant to farmers' situations; and it has been espoused (Ghouri, 1985) as having stood the test of time and the challenge of widely differing environments and farming conditions. Success in the T and V system is however predicated on a high level of involvement of the generality of farmers, in its operations. Presently the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) operate the T and V system through the contact group strategy, where farmers are delivered improved technologies on a group basis. The contact group approach has been well applauded (Ogunbameru, 1998; Carney, 1996; Garforth, 1993) as being more cost



effective and efficient than the earlier adopted "contact farmer" strategy, especially when viewed against the dwindling funding status of the ADPs.

The Akwa-Ibom Agricultural Development Programme (AKADEP) adopted the contact group approach in 1994; this was when the first contact groups were utilised for extension activities. As at 2000 AD; there were 424 contact groups operating in Uyo zone of the AKADEP. Based on the potential benefits accruing from the contact group strategy, this study was designed to identify the level of participation and form of linkages existing between contact groups and extension/research officers in the T and V system, as operational in Akwa-Ibom State. It is expected that results of this study may help bring into focus, the level of practice of the "participation" principle, with respect to the categorizations of Biggs (1989) Ghai (1990) and Pretty (1995). This will ultimately highlight areas of deficiency in the practice of the contact group strategy and attempt to proffer practicable solutions as to remedy the situation.

## **METHODS**

The study area was Uyo zone, one of the six zones making up the AKADEP. Uyo zone comprises Six Local Government Areas (LGAs) made up of 8 blocks and 53 cells. Each cell has an average of eight villages or sub-circles. Each sub-circle makes up a contact group, and each contact group is composed of an average of about 10 contact farmers. The universe for the study was all the 424 contact groups and all the 34 extension agents in Uyo zone of the AKADEP. A multi stage sampling procedure was utilized to produce a sample size of 133 respondents, made up of 79 contact group members and 34 extension agents. Data was generated through interviews and a structured questionnaire. These were thereafter analysed with the aid of descriptive statistics.

To determine form of participation (linkage pattern) of contact groups with research and extension officials, seven forms of participation patterns were identified, based on available literature and interaction with respondents. Contact group members were thereafter requested to indicate their regularity of interaction with extension officials on each of the seven items. This was done with the aid of a 3 – point likert continuum of "Regularly" (3); "Sometimes" (2); and "Not At All" (1). A mean regularity of interaction score was thereafter computed for each item using a cut-off point of 2.5 ( $3+2+1/3+0.5$ ). Thus an item with a mean score of 2.5 and above; was regarded as "regularly performed", while a participation item with a mean regularity score of less than 2.5 was regarded as "not regularly performed". The same procedure, as outlined above for contact group members; was also utilised to enable extension officers provide responses in respect of their regularity of performance of 16 identified forms of participation.

To determine regularity of participation of contact groups in the T and V system, nine role activities were identified. Contact group members were thereafter requested to indicate their regularity of performance of each listed activity. This was done with the aid of a 3-point like continuum of "Never" (1); "Sometimes" (2) and "Regularly" (3). A mean regularity score was thereafter computed for each role activity and using a cut-off point of 2.5; role activities were demarcated into "high" ( $x \geq 2.5$ ) and "low" ( $x < 2.5$ ).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Forms of Participation of Contact Groups with Extension Officers of the AKADEP:** Results on Table 1 revealed that there were two main forms of interaction between farmers; and extension officials. The farmers were either (i) "merely given instructions on what to do" ( $x = 2.6$ ; regularity = 73.4%) or (ii) "allocated fertilizer and improved planting materials etc; at subsidised rate ( $x = 2.50$ ; regularity = 64.6%). Other forms of participation, as depicted on Table 1, scored less than the mean cut-off point of 2.50. Table 2 reveals that extension officers did not regularly perform any of the 16 listed functions, as all the functions scored below the mean cut-off point of 2.50. However three commonly performed functions were revealed to include: (i) Farmers are given fertilisers, and other improved inputs at subsidised rates ( $x = 2.4$ ); (ii) Farmers are taught how to practicalise already demonstrated innovations, on their plots ( $x = 2.4$ ); (iii) Farmers are advised to provide land for SPAT demonstrations ( $x = 2.4$ ).

**Regularity of Participation of Contact Groups in the T and V system:** Table 3 reveals a low regularity of performance of the nine identified role activities, as no activity accrued a mean score of above or equal to 2.5. Three commonly performed role activities were however revealed to include; (1) Demonstration of innovations on own farms ( $x = 2.4$ ); (2) Provision of land for SPAT demonstration ( $x = 2.3$ ); (3) Provision of information/collection of data for extension agents ( $x = 2.1$ ). Results reveal that contact groups in the AKADEP operated, contact group system of technology development, adaptation and transfer; are involved only in the contractual and consultative modes of farmer



participation. These are the lowest forms of the four modes of former participation with respect to Biggs' (1989) characterization. The AKADEP contact groups mode of participation in the development process, may also be compared to the "passive participation", "information giving" and "consultation" modes of participation of Pretty (1995) and "mobilization" mode of participation of Ghai (1990). These are the lowest levels of practice of the participation principle, and cannot lead to equitable and sustainable development. This is because the initiative and indigenous knowledge systems of the farmers are not taxed and they (farmers) do not regard themselves as partners in development. This trend is responsible for the low level of agricultural and rural development in the State.

The outcome of this research study is in congruence with related research findings worldwide. Biggs (1989) with reference to a nine – nation case study survey of resource poor farmers reported the consultative mode of interaction as the dominant form of linkage between farmers and research/extension. Arokoyo (1998) with reference to the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) in Nigeria and Ghana, dismissed the level of farmers involvement as insignificant because "level of involvement was more of consultation rather than participation and invariably stopped at the diagnostic survey phase of field problem identification". Similar failures associated with utilisation of the consultative linkage approach has been reported by Hagmann (1997). In agreement with the findings above Sutherland (1999) avers that "even most donor funded farmer oriented natural resources research project operate on the interface between consultative and (very rarely) collaborative models. Reflecting on the above scenario and in utter dismay, Mutimba (2002) succinctly avers that "there is a general lack of successful practical examples to back up the much exposed collaborative and collective modes of farmer participation. Reasons have been proffered for the disappointing trends reported above: Sutherland (1999) comments on the difficulty involved in linking formal research with farmer led experimentation at the conceptual level, due to differences in knowledge, interest, status and power; which hinder the development of truly collaborative or equal relationship, not to mention a collegiate one. In a similar vein Mutimba (2002) avers that institutional mandate, inhibits the achievement of full participatory approaches because; as asserted by Baur and Crady (2001) research and development managers are not knowledgeable enough in the social sciences to successfully plan and conduct participatory activities. Hall and Nahdy (1999) finally opine that the advocacy which has driven participatory research methods appear to have relied to a greater extent on coercion rather than rewards.

**Table 1: Distribution on form of participation of farmers with extension and research officials**

S.No	Form of Participation	Regularity of Interaction			Total Attitude Score	Mean	Remarks
		Regularly (3)	Sometimes All (2)	Not At (1)			
1	Merely given Instructions on what to do	58 (73.4)	13 (16.5)	8 (10.1)	208	2.6	Regular
2	Requested to give answers to various questions	33 (41.8)	36 (45.6)	10 (12.7)	181	2.3	Not Regular
3	Given fertilizers, planting materials etc; at subsidized rate	51 (64.6)	16 (20.3)	12 (15.2)	197	2.5	Regular
4	Taken to SPAT plots to watch demonstrations	39 (49.4)	25 (31.7)	15 (18.9)	182	2.3	Not Regular
5	Told to form groups so as to benefit from AKADEP	43 (54.4)	22 (27.9)	14 (17.7)	187	2.4	Not Regular
6	Told to join extension Officers to identify problems and determine solutions	42 (53.2)	26 (32.9)	11 (13.9)	189	2.4	Not Regular
7	Taught how to; form groups, determine problems and source for funds to solve these problems	46 (58.2)	19 (24.1)	14 (17.7)	190	2.4	Not Regular

\* Percentages in Parentheses

Source: Field survey (2000)

**Opabio, I. A. • Forms and regularity of participation of contact groups :**



**Table 2: Frequency distribution on regularity of functions performed by extension agents during meetings and demonstrations with contact groups**

Functions	NEVER (1)		SOMETIMES (2)		REGULARLY (3)		TOTAL SUM OF ATTITUDE SCORE	MEAN X	REMARKS
	F	P	F	P	F	P			
a I merely give instructions to them on what to do	17	50.0	8	23.53	10	26.47	60	1.8	NR
b They give answers to various questions	7	20.58	17	52.94	9	26.47	70	2.1	NR
c They are given fertilizers planting materials etc at subsidized rate	8	23.53	5	14.71	21	61.76	81	2.4	NR
d They are taken to SPAT plot to watch demonstration	10	29.41	9	26.47	13	38.24	67	2.0	NR
e I teach them how to form groups to benefit from AKADEP	4	11.76	14	41.18	16	47.06	80	2.4	NR
f They are invited to join officials to identify problems and determine success of AKADEP programmes	6	17.65	11	32.35	17	50.0	79	2.3	NR
g They are taught how to determine their problem and how to source for funds to solve these problems	6	17.65	9	26.47	19	55.88	81	2.4	NR
h They are advised on the necessity to attend lectures, demonstration given by extension agents	18	52.94	7	20.58	9	26.47	59	1.7	NR
i They are taught how to ask question from extension agents	1	2.94	18	52.94	15	44.12	82	2.4	NR
j They are taught how to demonstrate new methods on their farms	7	20.59	6	17.65	21	61.76	82	2.4	NR
k They are told to provide information, collect data for extension agents	10	29.41	9	26.47	15	44.12	73	2.2	NR
l They help in the choice of contact farmers	8	23.53	20	58.82	6	17.65	66	1.9	NR
m They join in deciding programmes to implement	7	20.59	17	50.0	10	29.41	71	2.1	NR
n They are advised to give extension agents money for advising them	16	47.06	9	26.47	9	26.47	61	1.8	NR
o They are advised to give extension agents food crops from their farms or feed him when he comes to them	18	52.94	13	38.34	3	8.82	53	1.6	NR
p They are advised to provide land for SPAT demonstration.	2	5.88	16	47.06	16	47.08	82	2.4	NR

Source: Field Survey (2000)



**Table 3: Frequency distribution on regularity of participation of contact groups in the T and V systems**

ACTIVITIES	NEVER (0)		SOMETIMES (1)		REGULARLY (2)		TOTAL ATTITUDE SCORE	MEAN (X)	REMARK
	F	P	F	P	F	P			
Attend lectures/demonstrations given by extension agents	29	36.71	28	35.44	22	27.85	151	1.9	NR
Ask questions from extension agents	9	11.39	49	62.03	21	26.58	170	2.2	NR
Demonstrate new methods on your farm	18	22.78	28	29.11	38	48.10	188	2.4	NR
Provide information/collect data for extension agents	25	31.65	20	25.32	34	43.04	167	2.1	NR
Join in choosing Contact farmers	21	26.58	31	39.24	27	34.18	164	2.1	NR
Join in deciding programmes to implement	14	17.72	39	49.37	27	32.91	170	2.2	NR
Give extension agents money for advising you	40	50.63	32	40.51	7	8.86	125	1.6	NR
Give extension agents food crops from farms or feed him when he comes to you	45	56.96	26	32.91	8	10.13	121	1.5	NR
Provide land for SPAT demonstrations	19	24.05	19	24.05	41	51.90	180	2.3	NR

NR = Not Regular

Source: Field Survey (2000)

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** Experience has shown that research becomes more effective when it takes local knowledge into account and actively seek to cooperate with rural dwellers and farmers so as to enhance the relevance, appropriateness and acceptance of technologies, even if adoption is limited by extraneous factors. In essence, effective mechanisms for the joint planning and implementation of tasks related to common goals have to be fully developed so that information on farmers needs will be effectively utilised to assist rural dwellers become prime movers in efforts to improve their socio-economic well being. Due to the general level of poverty of ideas and materials in the rural society, there is a need for rural cooperation through the formation of broad based local groups. Findings from this study however reveal that the contact groups participating in the Akwa Ibom Agricultural Development Programme (AKADEP) operated – training and visit system; are functioning at the rudimentary level of participatory interaction and therefore cannot impact positively on agricultural and rural development in the study area. It is important to ensure that end user participation at every phase of the technology development and dissemination process is real and not just mere cosmetic consultation. It is against this background that the following recommendations become pertinent:

There is a need to bridge the significant social, spatial and conceptual gaps between research/extension and the small farmers' clientele. Effort is therefore required by stakeholders on both sides, to establish common grounds, minimise differences and develop methods for balanced and respectful dialogue. This may not come so easily but will become more stabilized in the process of research and development. In this regard, the challenge for research and extension institutions is to develop capacity and bring about organisational change required to create a conducive environment so as to encourage participatory orientation in government agencies. Institutions should therefore shift from teaching to learning; from hierarchical top-down, to participatory bottom-up approach; and from centralised to decentralised decision making. Of utmost importance is the need to realise that imported ideologies should not be seen as sacrosanct and the advocacy of participation needs to be less prescriptive and less coercive. There is also a need to re-orient researchers and extensionists and instill in them participatory values, as application of mere methodologies will not impress individuals that are unable or unwilling to go through necessary reversals. The process of re-orientation could be aided by exposure to practical skills and methods and facilitation of in-depth understanding of learning processes, to enable the easy adaptation of methodologies to local needs.

It is a truism that outsiders can never fully understand the totality of factors which affect the behaviour of local clientele. In that wise farmers and other local clientele would need to be exposed to how to experiment with techniques and ideas and how to adapt, evaluate and determine the practise most appropriate for their own situation. This can be done through action learning (doing, seeing,



discovery and experimentation) which encourage reflection and can increase farmers' analytical capacities. To facilitate the process of action learning, capacity building would be required in local organisations. This will aid in the enhancement of farmers' organizing capacities and also facilitate sharing of knowledge. Training and conscientisation in these groups would help train local leadership and also break donor syndrome and encourage self-reliance – by ensuring that chosen projects actually reflect community needs.

Extension officers should be re-oriented to act as catalysts and facilitators with a focus on helping communities to achieve self-defined goals. Extension agents would therefore have to learn how to interact closely with social groups and communities, become better listeners and develop a two-way responsive communication between communities and service institutions. This process would require new skills and attitudinal re-orientation, which can be aided by high level quality training and practical field activities. It is also important to note that research agenda should be fuelled by farmers needs. Extension should therefore facilitate and jointly develop research agenda with farmers. The role of research would be to take up issues and questions identified by farmers and extension workers and work from there, taking into consideration available local knowledge.

The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) subsector has a role as an interfacing institution to bridge the gap between farmers and formal (research and extension) systems. They may therefore have to devise ways in which to interweave and integrate the different systems engaged in the innovation development and production process. NGOs should also be involved in the conscientisation of rural clientele to organise themselves for development and develop skills in social organisation. They should also assist rural groups to develop capacities to: mobilise local resources, negotiate with outside entities, initiate beneficial linkage programmes and motivate agents and research for more effective inputs into societies. It must finally be generally noted that social mobilization and local organisational development have potentials far beyond agricultural development and should be well explored for rural transformation and ultimate national development.

#### REFERENCES

- Ashby, J., 1987. "Effect of different types of farmer participation in the management of on-farm trials". *Agricultural Administration and Extension*, 25 : 232 – 252.
- Arokoyo, T. 1998. *Agricultural technology development and dissemination: a case study of the Ghana and Nigeria experiences*. Technical Centre for Agricultural Cooperation (CTA), The Netherlands, 55p.
- Baur, H. and Krady, C. 2001. "Integrating participatory research methods in a public agricultural research organisation". *Agricultural Research and Extension Network (AGREN) Paper*, No. 109. Overseas Development Institute (ODI) London, 11p.
- Biggs, S. D 1989. *Resource – poor farmer participation in research. a synthesis of experiences from nine national agricultural research System*. OFCOR Comparative study paper 3. ISNAR The Hague pp3-9.
- Burkey, S. 1993. *People first: a guide to self-reliant participatory development*. Zed Books London.
- Carney, D. 1996. "Formal farmer organisations in the agricultural-technology system: current roles and future challenges" *ODI Natural Resources Perspectives* No 14. Nov. 4pp.
- Fear, F. A 1978. *Needs assessment in community development*.: resource book of Iowa State Univ. of science and technology; Dept of sociology and anthropology. Ames Iowa sociological Report No 143.
- Floyd, S. 1999. "When is quantitative data collection appropriate in farmer participatory research and development? Who should analyse the data and how?". *AGREN Paper*, No. 92. ODI London.
- Garforth, C. 1993. "Rural people's organizations and agricultural-extension in the upper north of Thailand: who benefits?" *Mimeo*, Univ. of Reading p.7.
- Ghai, D; 1990. "Participatory development: some perspectives from grassroot experiences" (In) A .R Khan and R. Sobhan (eds.) *Trade, Planning and Rural Development*. Macmillan Publishers London, pp79-115.
- Ghuri, A.S.K. 1985. "Selection criteria and regular visits of village extension agents and contact farmers and groups" (In) Patel, Singh and Ghouri (eds.) *Managing Agricultural Extension in Nigeria*. Proceedings of a National Workshop Jan. 22-25. Federal Agricultural Co-ordinating Unit (FACU) Ibadan.
- Hagmann, J., Chuma, E., Murwira, K; and Connolly, M. 1999. "Putting process into practice: operationalising participatory extension". *AGREN Paper*, No. 94. ODI London.



- Mutimba, J. 2000. "Resource-poor farmer participation in formal is easier said than done: the case of Zimbabwe". *East African Journal of Rural Development* 18(1), 40-53.
- Oakley P and D. Marsden 1984. *Approaches to participation in rural development*. ILO. Geneva. 91pp.
- Ogunbameru B. O 1998. "Groups approach to extension delivery" Invited paper. National Extension Workshop. FACU./ Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute (ARMTI) Ilorin June 1-5.
- Pretty J.N 1995. *Regenerating agriculture: policies and practices for sustainability and self-reliance*. Earthscan Publishers Ltd. London
- Salami, R. A. 2000. "Participatory technology development in ecofarming". Invited paper at the first country eco-farming workshop, December 20 –21. Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria.
- Sutherland, A. 1999. "Linkages between farmer oriented and formal research and development approaches". *AGREN Paper*, No. 92. ODI London. 1-7pp.

---

**Akpabio, I. A. •. Forms and regularity of participation of contact groups :**