

**FACTORS AFFECTING THE PERFORMANCE OF
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AGENTS IN BORNO STATE
(CASE STUDY OF BOSADP ZONE II)**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The importance of agricultural extension services to the development of agriculture in developing countries are not felt due to some factors confronting the service resulting in low performance of the agents. The poor performance of agricultural extension field workers is the focus of this study. It is aimed at the identification of the factors affecting the performance of agricultural extension agents in Borno State Agricultural Development Programme (BOSADP).

Questionnaires were distributed to the village Extension workers (VEWs) while farmers and Zonal Agricultural Officers (ZAOs) were interviewed in order to obtain adequate information as to the performance of these agents. Sixty VEWs were randomly selected and 12 educated farmers were purposely interviewed to avoid communication barriers.

The findings of this study show that the factors affecting these agents were: lack of incentives and untimely supply of information and inputs as well as mobility problems. These problems were attributed to poor funding of the ADP. Based on the findings it is recommended that there is need to improve the conditions of service for the workers; provision of adequate training programmes and facilities, and provision of transport. Timely and adequate supply of innovation and working inputs to enhance performance. And all of these can only be achieved if there is proper funding of the ADP.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the basic backbone of every nation, be it developed or developing. It is the source of man's most essential needs which are food, shelter and clothing. The development of a nation depends on her level of indoctrination and this often in turn depends on the availability of raw materials from the agricultural sector for its growth. Besides financing other sectors through taxes, savings and payments for land as argued by Abbott and Makeham (1986), agriculture provides employment in its own capacity to the majority directly or indirectly.

Despite the enormous importance of agriculture, little has been done to develop it in the third world countries. Over the years there has been decline in food production with a sharp increase in world population particularly in the developing countries resulting into starvation. The need to increase food production for the increasing population therefore, cannot be over emphasized. This can be done through improved and new farm practices and technology from research findings which need to be in turn disseminated by the agricultural extension services.

According to Obinne (1997) an effective extension system is needed to:

- (i) Facilitate efficient allocation of farm and non-farm resources through better knowledge situation;
- (ii) Necessitate effective decision-making competence and managerial efficiency;
- (iii) Ensure an optimum combination of farm enterprise conducive for dynamic maximization of farm incomes;
- (iv) Provide efficient and useful information and training systems that facilitate a meaningful organization of farm production and distribution; and
- (v) Then transformation of subsistence production to commercial and market oriented production system.

The Training Visit (T and V) system is the primary system of extension used in all the ADPs in Nigeria, hence the DOSADP.

It is not clear if the impacts of the extension services are felt as it should be; therefore, the performance of the extension agents is the focus of this study.

OBJECTIVES

The study examined the factors responsible for the performance of the agricultural extension agents. specific terms:

- (i) To identify the factors affecting the performance of the extension agents and their impact on their effectiveness
- (ii) To identify problems associated with these factors;
- (iii) To offer useful suggestions to combat these problems.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Primary data were collected using raw sets of questionnaires administered on both VEWs and farmers. The questionnaires contained both close and open-ended questions numbering up to 41. The secondary data were obtained through discussions and interviews with zonal agricultural offices (ZAOs) and also BOSADP reports and journals.

The zone has 172 agricultural extension workers Twenty-four Block extension supervisors (BES) Twenty-two Block Extension Agents (BEAS) and 126 village extension Agents (VEAs).

A sample of 60 respondents was randomly selected from the 126 VEAs. Six VEAs were randomly chosen from each of the local government (LGAs) except Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC) and Bama because they are the zonal and general headquarters respectively; instead, 9 each were selected from each of them. Twelve farmers were also interviewed, still as part of the primary data from the various LGAs. Finally, three each from MMC and Bama and two each from Konduga and Dikwa and one farmer each from Jere and Mafa local government areas.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Gender and Performance of VEAS

Eighty five percent of the sampled respondents were male. This indicates that there were more males working as VEAS than the females. Given the fact that the women play important roles in agricultural production (Lele, 1977), the high percentage of male VEAS will not enhance their effective performance. This is because Islam is predominantly the religion of the inhabitants of the areas of study. The implication is that to have limited access (if at all) to the female farmers, due to the unique religious injunctions, especially when the women are in purdah, there is, therefore, need to balance gender in the appointment of VEAs. These female VEAs may be appointed from those who are not Muslims. This, will no doubt, enhance the effective performance of the VEAs.

Education and performance of VEAS

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by their educational qualification. The table shows that about 43.5% of the respondents have OND while only 1.7% had other qualifications (such as trade test, the first school leaving certificate and the JSS certificate). The study further investigated if the respondents had additional qualifications after employment and if such additional qualifications improved their performance as VEAs. Table 2 shows that 60% of the respondents received additional qualification. About 30 (83.33%) indicated that the additional qualification improved their performance as VEAs.

The importance of education in the performance of the VEAs cannot be over emphasized. It exposes the VEAs to new technologies, improves their skills in extension activities and their attitude to their extension duties, under the training and visit extension system.

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification
At the Time of employment.

| Educational Qualification | No. of Respondent | Percentage |
|----------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| WASC/SSCE/HSC/ A level/NCE | 21 | 35.0 |
| OND | 26 | 43.5 |
| HND/B.Sc | 12 | 20.0 |
| Others | 1 | 1.7 |
| Total | 60 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey 1999.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to their Acquisition of Additional Qualification and their Performance.

| (a) Qualification (N=60) | Response | |
|---------------------------------|----------|-------|
| | No | % |
| Additional Qualification | (i) | 60 |
| No Additional Qualification | (ii) | 31.67 |
| No Response | 58 | 8.33 |
| (b) Improved Performance (N=36) | 30 | 83.33 |

Source: Field Survey 1999.

Secondary Occupation and performance of VEAs

The Training and Visit in Extension recommends that village extension agents should not be engaged in any activity other than their extension work. This is aimed at enhancing their performance as other activities may distract them and bring about poor performance in extension duties. In Nigeria, the poor salary of civil servants in general and the VEAs in particular forced them to take to other occupations in order to supplement their incomes. Table 3 shows that 51.7% of the VEAs indicated that they have no other occupation except extension. About 48.3% of them are engaged in other occupations especially agriculture related work, such as crop production and livestock rearing (which constitutes about 30% of the respondents). All of them, however, admitted that these other occupations have adverse effects on their primary duties as VEAs.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Other Occupations

| Other Engagements | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|--------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Trading | 4 | 6.7 |
| Agriculture related work | 18 | 30 |
| Guidance and Counseling | 2 | 3.3 |
| Administration | 5 | 6.3 |
| None | 31 | 51.7 |

Source: Field Survey, 1999.

Provision of Mobility and Performance of VEAs

The VEA is expected to take charge of between 800 to 1,000 farm families under the Training and Visit (Tand V) extension system. Consequently, these farm families have to be properly delineated to enhance their effectiveness in the dissemination of improved agricultural technology. Some of these farm families may be distributed in a relatively large geographic area, thus, requiring that the VEA be provided with some means of mobility. In BOSADP, each VEA is expected to be effective in the performance of his extension duties. Table 4 shows that only 14 (23.33%) of them are mobile. Field observation shows that all those who had no motorcycle complained bitterly that their extension activities were adversely affected by their lack of mobility. Ironically, it was observed that virtually all those who were provided with motorcycles, used them for commercial purposes often. They all alleged that they were not given funds to maintain the motorcycles, and that the motorcycles were in fact sold to them on a hire-purchase basis. Hence a fixed sum was deducted from their salaries monthly. The implication of this is that extension work would not be effective, even with the provision of mobility to the VEAs except the policy on the provision of these motorcycles is changed to favor the VEAs.

Table 4: Distribution Respondents by the provision of mobility and their performance.

| Mobility | Performance Effective | | | | Total | |
|------------|-----------------------|-------|----|-------|-------|--------|
| | Yes | | No | | | |
| | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Mobile | 12 | 20.00 | 2 | 3.33 | 14 | 23.33 |
| Not Mobile | 0.0 | 0.0 | 46 | 76.67 | 46 | 76.67 |
| Total | 12 | 20.00 | 48 | 80.00 | 60 | 100.00 |

Source: Field Survey 1999

Motivation of VEAs and their Performance

An important issue in the effective performance of the VEA is the supply of working materials to VEAS and input to farmers. Working materials for the VEAS include stationery for preparation of reports and audio-visual aids for the effective dissemination of improved agricultural technology to farmers. Lack of these working materials may bring undue frustrations to the VEAs. The availability will on the other hand, enhance the VEA's performance. Table 5 shows that a high percentage of the VEAs were not satisfied with the supply of working materials from their superior authorities.

Another important factor that could enhance performance is the satisfaction of the VEA with their basic salaries and other allowances. All the VEAs in the study expressed very strong dissatisfaction with their conditions of service in terms of their salaries and other allowances. This is understandable because the survey was conducted during the military administration.

Table 5 Distribution of Respondents by their Motivation and Performance

| Motivation Items | Performance Effective | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-----|
| | No | | Yes | | Total | |
| | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| 1. Stationery (N=60) | 55 | 91.67 | 05 | 8.33 | 60 | 100 |
| 2. Audio-Visual aids | 50 | 83.33 | 10 | 16.67 | 60 | 100 |
| 3. Basic salary | 60 | 100 | 00 | 00 | 60 | 100 |
| 4. Accommodation | 58 | 96.67 | 02 | 3.33 | 60 | 100 |
| 5. Other Allowances | 50 | 83.33 | 10 | 3.33 | 60 | 100 |
| 6. Regular promotion | 50 | 83.33 | 10 | 16.67 | 60 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey 1999.

This explains why the VEAs used their official vehicles (motorcycles) for commercial purpose commonly called "achaba". The consequence of this ugly situation is that the VEA would hardly find time for his official duties of visiting farmers to disseminate improved farm technology to them.

The VEAs are expected to reside in their village of jurisdiction. This is to ensure effective performance of their duties. Field observation showed that no VEA was living in the government quarters. All of them were provided with a monthly housing allowance which was a little higher than that of their counterparts in the civil service (which was to serve as a motivation to enhance their performance). Table 5 shows, however, that 96.67% of the VEAs complained that the housing allowance given to them monthly was not adequate to enhance their performance. Field observation also showed that 8% of them actually lived in the nearest town and only visited the village when they so wished. This was especially so with the VEAs who were mobile, since there was a greater demand for their motorcycles (which they used on commercial bases) in the towns.

About 83.33% of the VEAs also felt they have not been receiving regular promotion. This, they alleged, affects their performance. About 60% of them have been promoted in the past 8 years which they consider frustrating.

Problems Associated with Factors that Affect Performance of VEAs

The study investigated the problems that were associated with the factors which affected the performance of the VEAs. Table 6 shows a number of such problems as perceived by the VEAs. About 100% of them felt that the major problem was the lack of motivation of the VEAs by the management of the ADP. Some of the motivational factors which the VEAs listed include absolute lack of stationery and audio-visual aids; poor basic salary and other allowances and lack of promotion. An important problem was observed on the issue of basic salaries and allowances of the VEAs and their promotion. Few of the VEAs had the higher national Diploma, HND. Some of these VEAs are at the last step of salary grade level 8 and they feel that they are now qualified for car loans as obtained in the civil service. The consequence of granting such VEAs car loans is that it will lead to inefficiencies in their job performance. Lele (1977) observed that the performance of the VEA will decrease if the farmers see him as having a higher socio-economic status than themselves.

Table 6: Problems associated with Factors Affecting Performance of VEAS.

| Problem | No | % |
|--|----|--------|
| 1. Supervision by Senior staff (N=60) | 40 | 66.6 |
| 2. Inadequate Funding of ADP zones (N=60) | 30 | 50.00 |
| 3. Inadequate Motivation of VEAS (N=60) | 60 | 100.00 |
| 4. Inadequate fortnightly Training (N=60) | 30 | 50.00 |
| 5. Lack of Teaching aids by VEAS (N=60) | 50 | 83.33 |
| 6. Areas covered by VEA too large (N=60) | 55 | 91.67 |
| 7. Lack of cooperation from Farmers (N=60) | 20 | 33.33 |
| 8. Unfavorable promotion Policy by Management (N=60) | 45 | 75.00 |
| 9. Non-involvement of OFAR trials (N=60) | 20 | 33.33 |

Source: field survey 1999

The problem arising from the large areas covered by each VEA was reported by about 91.67% of the VEAs. All the Area Extension officers (AEOs) and the Zonal Extension Officers (ZEO) from field observation reported a shortage of the VEAs in the zone. The solution, therefore, laid on the recruitment of more VEAs. But the project manager and his deputy when contacted, complained of shortage of funds in the AD, especially at that time when the world Bank funding of the ADPs in the country had stopped in some states or had been epileptic in the release.

The consequence of such shortage of funds, according to them affects the payment of night-out allowances of supervisory staff, funding of zonal headquarters, employment of additional VEOs and other important functions of the ADP.

Relatively few VEOs (33.33%) complained about lack of cooperation from the farmers. According to them, farmers observed with dismay, the shortage or absolute lack of farm inputs, especially fertilizers. The VEOs complained that some "educated" farmers such as retired and serving civil and military officers often frustrated them by questioning the relevance of their extension teaching when the inputs are not available. It should be observed that the VEOs listed all these as problems related to their effective performance as shown in Table 6.

CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions may be drawn from the analysis and discussion of the data above. Firstly, it may be concluded that a number of factors militated against the effective performance of the VEOs. Some of these factors include gender issues, educational level of VEOs, other occupations of VEOs, mobility of VEOs, and their motivation.

Secondly, these factors arise from the under-funding of the ADPs by government at the time of the survey, such under-funding was related to the shortage of VEOs hence the large areas covered by each of them; training of the VEOs and their salaries and other allowances; and the supply of farm inputs to farmers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above conclusions, the following recommendations may enhance the effective performance of the VEOs in the zone: firstly, there should be improved funding of the ADPs, hence the ADP zone as the ADPs in the country today constitute the single largest organization charged with the responsibility of extension services.

The ADPs would then be in a position to employ additional VEOs as need arises and take adequate care of their welfare and that of their supervisory staff. This will lead to improved and more effective performance of the VEOs.

Secondly, the policies in the ADP regarding the welfare of the VEOs need to be changed, especially on the provision of motorcycles to them on hire-purchase bases. This is because the motorcycles are expected to be used only for official duties and the supervisory staff of the VEOs would have no moral justification to question the use of these motorcycles otherwise by the VEOs. Once this is solved, and other VEOs provided with

their own motorcycles, the issue of excessive areas of coverage would be minimized.

Thirdly, there is need for the ADP to provide farm inputs to farmers especially fertilizers. It would be frustrating for the VEOs to disseminate information on improved farm technology without the availability of the same technology to farmers.

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