

Policy and Agricultural Extension Programs: Implication for Improved Agricultural Production in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Nigerian agricultural sector is said to be the supposed highest employer of labour and also gives the country a huge earnings but it presents a mixed result of good and not-too-good scenarios given the expected fortune which is compounded by mirage of challenges, ranging from poor or lack of knowledge and information needed by the rural farmers who are the majority in the agricultural production chain. This problem has therefore raised the need for the integration of Agricultural Extension Programs/Workers for a result driven agricultural production. Given this position, this paper examines the interconnectivity between a holistic policy framework that addresses agricultural extension program and the application of same in the enhancement of agricultural production for improved individual, national earnings, and food security. It also appreciates the fact that Nigeria's agricultural sector presents a formidable environment for improved productivity when the place of policies are systematically developed to cater for the need of the rural farmers who are the core actors in the country's agricultural production process through a workable agricultural extension programs. Data were sourced from the internet, journals, government papers and were subjected to thematic analysis. The paper recommends amongst other things, that; a workable environment should be created by government where the agricultural extension workers can objectively undertake the various extension programs and policies that will impact positively on the rural farmers whose productivity is consequent upon the quality of information and knowledge available to them.

Keywords: Policy, rural farmers, agricultural, extension

Introduction

The fundamental condition for overall social and economic growth of many developing countries is a dynamic agricultural sector brought about by a steady increase in agricultural productivity. Reports on agricultural production and food security showed that food production has to increase substantially to meet the food demand of growing population (Wikipedia, 1995; Amalu, 1998).

Agricultural activities and production is fundamental to the satisfaction of human daily food need and most fundamentally the drive towards employment for the population and for increased earning which is a boast for national income. To meet the stated goals, the need for an improved agricultural production process has become of paramount importance to both the individual and government.

Appreciating the importance of agricultural production to economic development, Ayodele, Obafemi, and Ebong, (2013), aver that, agriculture is the engine that stimulates economic processes when it comes to national development. Historical facts show that before the oil boom in the 1970s, agriculture was the mainstay of Nigeria's economy.

However, the problems confronting agricultural production has been attributed to a number of factors which has become a subject of concerns amongst scholars though with appreciable progress which has opened the research space to the implication of emerging issues such as policy formulation, implementation and innovation functions. Basically, the subject of policy has been raised to primary in the observed problems which has often undermined the expected gains of the agricultural sector.

Policy formulation, implementation and appraisal are fundamental ingredient in the determination of an expected outcome of any human endeavour. Therefore, it is fundamental to note that, the outcome of any human action is a product of the policy formulation and implementation process.

The importance of policy to all aspect of human endeavour cannot be questioned given the valuable roles of policy formulation and implementation which is adjudged the hallmark of organisational success. Importantly, administrative efficiency or inefficiency constitutes the bulwark of actualization of objectives that mid-wifed the formation, establishment and inauguration of every policy framework within government, private or individual phase of human establishment.

However, the determination of who gets what, when and how basically falls within the purview of administrative and policy operation especially when structured to meet the overall goal of service delivery, and in the case of agricultural production, the organisation of policy frameworks that determines the deployment of policies in the field of Agricultural Extension Programs (AEP) whose primary responsibility is the improvement

of agricultural production and by implication achieve food security, archive diversification for the Nigerian economy which is dependent on oil and increase the country's earnings through improved food production.

In the light of the forgoing, it is important to note that the viability of any agricultural program and most fundamentally AEP is subject to the policies and frameworks which guide their operations. Therefore, increased agricultural production is subject to holistic policy framework that is designed to achieve comprehensive result in the agricultural production process. Information is primary to the actualization of every organisational objective, consequently, the need for current and relevant information on agricultural practices by the rural farmers are often dependent on their patronage of the services offered by extension workers, therefore, to a considerable extent, improved agricultural production is subjected to the availability of holistic policies that directs the operations of AEP in Nigeria

The role of AEW in the agricultural process is fundamental to the actualization of the expected gains of agriculture especially when discharged within the parameters of acceptable and recognised best practices, however, this function is subject to the availability of good policy circle and enabling environment which promotes the actualization of food security and profit maximization.

According to Agbam, (2000); Uzuegbunam (2001), traditionally agricultural research system in Nigeria is characterized by a top-down, centralized, monolithic and isolated structures. Linkages, interactions and learning mechanisms among the component actors are notably weak and/or often non-existent. Empirical evidence revealed several linkage gaps and missing links among and between the actors in the system. Institutions, for example, universities and research institutes innovate in isolation and although research were taking place at various national and international organizations, the coordination is dysfunctional, and poorly linked to the productive sector. Besides, farmer innovations were not being included in the knowledge system.

The above present a problematic situation for agricultural production when placed on the sidelines of policy formulation, implementation and reappraisal or innovation in the performance of AE function, evidence abound as presented above as to the continuous failure of the Extension Workers to domesticate government policies in solving the endless problems confronted by the agricultural sector in Nigeria.

Consequent upon the forgoing position, the paper is posed to critically interrogate the link between policy circle (Policy formulation, implementation and innovation) in Nigeria and the functioning of AEW which is fundamental not just for increased food production but also as a veritable tool for improved earnings for all the actors involved in the agricultural production process; explore the impact of policy as primary to the development of agricultural production through the role of AEP; examine the imperatives of a well-structured AEP for improved agricultural production in Nigeria and examine the importance of continued policy reappraisal as a major path to improved agricultural production in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Development of Nigeria's Agricultural Sub-sector will be imperative if meaningful and sustainable national development is envisaged. Agriculture contributes significantly to the Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It provides employment to a large proportion of citizenry, and provides raw materials to some-agro allied industries among other contributions. Nigeria's population is fast growing without a corresponding increase in the growth in agricultural production (Daneji, 2011).

Nigeria like most countries of the world is faced with the challenge of food security occasioned by weak policies that is primary to maximizing the limitless gains inherent in the availability of arable land which is adjudged to possess components that are primary for large scale agricultural production. Rather, the country has over the years focused on crude oil which has made it mono-cultural economy thereby limiting the prospects of improved foreign earnings.

In the context of the forgoing, the need to constructively explore the endless gains of the agricultural sector through policies that will enhance the function of the country's AEW has been subjected to lots of problems ranging from policy inconsistencies, political instability and poor research linkages especially from the research institutions who serves as major factor in the agricultural industry has further extended the problems of enhanced agricultural production in Nigeria.

Given the forgoing, the paper is posed to critically examine the imperative of holistic policy framework as a fundamental tool for agricultural production in Nigeria and logically situate same within the functioning of the AEW for an improved agricultural production in Nigeria.

Methodology

The research employed secondary data for its investigation and analysis. In this method, data already existing were subjected to in-depth re-analysis. With regard to re-analysis, Adetula cited in Shittu (2014, P.85), states that "it is any further analysis of existing data set which presents interpretation, conclusions or knowledge in addition or different from those presented in the first main report". Therefore, the data for this research are

sourced from books, journals, magazines, online articles, journals which of material consequence to the realization of the research objectives.

Conceptual Clarification

Across the world, policy, Agricultural Extension Programs and Workers and agricultural production discourse are a dominate issue amongst agricultural experts and more constructively academics. This is due to the fact that, this issue forms a fundamental subject in human's drive to attain basic requirement of food production, supply and security. Within the forgoing, the fundamentals of any human endeavour to a large extent are a function of the policies that guides and drives such endeavour. Policy is very germane in the actualization of any specific or general objectives, which has made it the first point of call before any action can be pursued.

According to Rumki (2004: P.436)

Policy can be broadly defined as a proposed course of action of an individual, a group, an institution or government, to realise a specific objective or purpose with a given environment. Policy formulation is necessary prior to every action in every form of organisation, private or public. It is the prerequisite for all management. It is the policy which lays down the framework within which the organisational goals are set to be accomplished. The objectives of an organisation which are often vague and general are concretized in the policy goals, which set the administrative rules in motion. Policy is one of the vital tasks of any government.

The above in-depth description of the concept policy opens up the debate as to what constitute the core drive of any organisations administrative machinery for without a clearly defines and detailed policy by an organisation administrative function and process becomes an exercise in futility. The forgoing position is concisely echoed by Appleby cited in Rumki (2004: P.436), "the essence of public administration is policy making".

Policy can be described as the concisely acknowledged rules of conduct that guides administrative decisions and process. It is often seen that the action and direction of the administrative machinery in every organisation is defined by the content of the policy framework.

According to Ambali (2015: P.2):

A policy is a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome(s). The term may apply to government, private sector organisations and groups, and individuals. Thus, policy may include presidential executive orders, corporate policies, as well as parliamentary rules of orders. However, a distinction must be made between policy and law... policy sometimes also refers to the process of making important organisational decisions, including the identification of different alternatives such as programs or spending priorities and choosing among them on the basis of the impact they will have on the organisation.

According to Jenkins cited in Ambali (2015) "a policy is a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the powers of those actors to achieve".

Okoroma (2006) observes that "a policy serves the purpose of ensuring that every official action of an organisation must have a basis or a backing. Terry (1977: 989) considers that "a policy is an overall guide that gives the general limits and direction in which administrative action will take place". According to him, "a policy defines the area in which decisions are to be made but it does not give the decision". A policy brings about a meaningful relationship between business objectives and organisational functions as it discourages deviations from planned courses of action. A policy ensures consistency of action because an organisation is governed by approved principles. A policy does not have to be rigid, as there should be room for adjustment if necessary after its formulation.

Policy can include educational policy, financial or fiscal policy, Religious policy and agricultural policy. These specifics to a large extent guide the underlying issues boarding on the operation of these areas of interest and determine what goes on within and outside these areas. Within the agricultural sector for example, it is the content of the policies formulated that directs the operation of land use and specifically, the place of AEP&W (Agricultural Extension Programs and Workers).

Hoy and Miskel (1978:215) believe that "policies are not only formulated but also programmed, communicated, monitored and evaluated"? The non-rigid nature of policies is confirmed by Lindblom (1959:86) when he describes policy-making as a "process of successive approximation to some desired objectives in which

what is desired itself continues to change under reconsideration". In fact, a good policy is one that can be reviewed as the need may arise. Lindblom believes that a wise policy maker cannot expect all their policies to achieve a one-hundred percent success. Regardless of how good a policy may be, its ability to stand through time and impact on the society may introduce some element of imperfection especially when it does not cater for the long-term satisfaction of the people.

On the other hand, AEP is seen as the information bank for rural famers. The provision of up-to-date knowledge through information dissemination is the primary responsibility of agricultural extension workers. Extension service in agriculture is indispensable and it offers more than just expert assistance in improvement of production and processing, it also enables flow of information and transfer of knowledge and scientific findings to practice. These activities are performed according to rules which regulate establishing of organization, functioning, goals and fields of operation, ways to execute extension activities by the extension agent, their obligations and rights (Dragic, Sreten and Zoran, 2009).

Agricultural extension is the application of scientific research and knowledge to agricultural practices through farmer education. Generally, agricultural extension can be defined as the "delivery of information inputs to farmers (Anderson & Gershon, 2007). The role of extension services is invaluable in teaching farmers how to improve their productivity. Extension is also critical to move research from the lab to the field and to ensure a return on investment in research by translating new knowledge into innovative practices (Davies, Baulcombe, Crute, Dunwell, Gale, Jones, Petty & Toulmin, 2009). The UN High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE, 2003) argue that "national research and extension systems need full attention and investments from governments and the donor community.

According to Kolawole, Motunrayo, Suresh, and Rahman (2015), agricultural extension agencies provide advice, information, and other support services to farmers to enable them to improve the productivity of their crop and animal production and thereby their farm and non-farm incomes.

They are also key actors in implementing governments' rural development policies and programs. However, due to low quality of service provision through ADPs, in the last 25 years, extension services have been provided by a variety of public, commercial, and voluntary agencies with varying objectives. In Nigeria, agricultural extension services have been dominated by Agricultural Development Programs (ADPs) funded through the World Bank loans, based in each of the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory since the mid-1970s (Adebayo and Idowu, 2000 cited in Kolawole et al).

Specifically, agricultural extension service has the objective to assist family holdings or farmers in improvement of the methods and techniques of agricultural production, farm management, and increase of income and of productivity and production quality, increase of standard of living and elevating of social and educational standards in villages. The fundamental objective of agricultural extension program is to help the farm i.e. holding to gain new information and develop new abilities, as well as to apply directly on the farm the latest scientific knowledge (transfer of technology) (Dragic, Sreten and Zoran, 2009).

Agricultural Extension Program in Nigeria

The Nigerian agricultural sector is one of the most underdeveloped sectors of the Nigeria economy owing to the obvious fact that it has failed to meet the lofty expectation of delivering to the central economy its expected returns. This observed problem is tied to various factors chief amongst which is poor extension programs which is expected to make information available to the large population of the country's illiterate rural farmers who are the seat at the core of food production in the country.

In addition to its vast natural and human resources, Nigeria has perhaps, the largest National Agricultural Research and Extension System (NARES) in Sub-Saharan Africa today, made up of: 17 Commodity-based Research Institutes, a specialized National Agricultural Extension Institute, 18 Faculties of Agriculture in regular Federal Universities; 3 specialized Universities of Agriculture and one International Agricultural Research Centre (IARC = IITA) (Arokoyo, 1998), and yet Nigeria is still categorized among the food-deficit or food insecure nations in Africa.

Appreciating the above, Federal Government of Nigeria in its 2008 report observes that "Although agriculture remains a key component of Nigeria's economy, and currently contributes about 40.0% of the GDP and employing about 70.0% of the active population, the sector, the sector has however, significantly underperformed its potential". This has been clearly manifested in the very high food prices nationwide, food insecurity both at the household and national level and malnutrition especially in children.

It is unfortunate that Nigeria's awesome National Agricultural Research and Extension System (NARES), the largest in Sub-Saharan Africa, has not been able to engineer a sustainable agricultural development that would have ensured both National and household food security, improved rural livelihoods and indeed, make Nigeria's agriculture competitive in the world agricultural market today (FGN, 2008).

The problem of food insecurity and decline in foreign earning from the agricultural sector has raised a further interest in the improvement of agricultural extension programs and services which are meant to educate

rural farmers on the application of most recent knowledge which are fundamental for the increase of agricultural produce.

The major challenges of Nigeria's agricultural extension and advisory services have been identified to include: lack of a legislated agricultural extension policy, compounded by policy somersaults in the sector; grossly inadequate and untimely funding; poor leadership and coordination, low private sector participator, a very weak Research-Extension-Farmer-Inputs Linkages system and driven by ineffective top-down, supply-driven, extension approaches (FGN, 2008).

The objective of the Agricultural Extension Program aimed at driving the goal of improved agricultural production in Nigeria includes the following;

- 1) To establish a Federal Department of Agricultural Extension (FDAE) which will oversee, monitor and provide the leadership needed for an efficient and effective agricultural extension and advisory service delivery in Nigeria.
- 2) To review the agricultural extension policies within the subsisting agricultural policies and recommend appropriate policies that will ensure the effective participation of all stakeholders in a stable policy environment and adequate funding for the delivery efficient and effective agricultural extension and advisory services.
- 3) To recommend appropriate Institutional Structures and arrangements for the delivery of effective and efficient multi-plural agricultural extension and advisory services in Nigeria, using the value chain approach.
- 4) To recommend demand-responsive extension systems/approaches and tools that will ensure the delivery of efficient and effective agricultural extension and advisory services for all the multi-actors in the targeted commodity value chains of interest to government.

The historical development of the agricultural extension and advisory services in Nigeria has closely followed that of agriculture and rural development. Thus, variability and inconsistencies have been the major hallmarks since the colonial era to the present and has been principally influenced by the interests and focus of the government in power and/or by the primary funding agencies especially with respect to the externally funded agricultural project interventions.

The first documented but not legislated National Policy on Agriculture was adopted in 1988 at the height of the State-wide ADP Era and was "expected to remain valid for about fifteen years, that is, up to year 2000" (FMARD, 2001). It essentially provided in the main, for "adequate food; supply of agricultural raw materials; creating employment; foreign exchange earnings through exports and market for industrial goods" (FMARD, 2002) but hardly addressed the challenges of agricultural extension.

The 2001 Agricultural policy was perhaps the first to address the issues of public agricultural extension service in Nigeria with particular reference to, the roles and responsibilities of the various tiers of government and the private. The new policy thrust was premised on the fact that "self-sufficiency in food production (as propounded by the 1988 Policy) was too limited in scope. Policy objective must transcend self-sufficiency to cover food security" (FMARD, 2002). In order to achieve the objective of food security, the 2001 Agricultural policy assigned roles and responsibilities to the different tiers of government and the private sector.

Perhaps, the most recent and most authoritative agricultural extension policy pronouncement by government was enunciated in the 2008 by way of the National Food Security Program document which provided for the establishment of "One-stop" Agricultural Extension Services, (FMAWR, 2008) with the aim of comprehensively reaching the rural farmers within a shortest time possible. Accordingly, "the agricultural extension service will be professionalized by the State governments establishing farm support centres as "One-Stop" facilities in each local government in partnership with the private sector to train and teach new farming techniques" Further, the program was designed to train 10,000 highly competent extension workers per year with the objective of "achieving a ratio of at most of 1:350 Extension Agent/Farm family ratio" (FMAWR, 2008) with all this policy properly conceptualized, it is expected that the rural farmers will have access to the basic information and knowledge needed to improve agricultural production in Nigeria.

Agricultural Extension Program in Nigeria: A Tool for Solving Agricultural Production Problems Policy and Agricultural Extension Delivery: Implication for Improved Agricultural Production in Nigeria

An inescapable link exist between policy content and the performance of Agricultural extension function on the one hand, and on the other hand, is a multiline and partnership link between policy, agricultural extension and improved agricultural production across the world. The implication of these connections is hinged on the fact that, all these actors are dependent on each other for effective functioning. Therefore, the place of well articulated policy framework by government for the discharge of agricultural extension function by the extension workers to the rural farmers is fundamental to not just improved agricultural production but for

maximization of profit which is the hallmark of every human endeavours. By extension this relationship will guarantee to the consumer unbroken supply of agricultural produce which is primary for human living.

According to Agwu et al. (2008), viewing the actors in the agricultural research, education, extension and farmers system as equal partners, whose interaction/linkages determine the innovative performance of the economy, demands that the government should re-examine the policies that determine the statutory position, modus-operandi and management style of the actors in the agricultural production chain (Policy makers, Extension Workers, Farmers and the Consumer).

Government is expected enact pragmatic policies that are matched with action to create enabling environment for wider stakeholders participation in the agricultural production chain where the extension workers are expected to provide relevant agricultural information to the rural farmers whose farming activity's success or other is dependent on the quality of information available.

Buttressing the forgoing, Agwu et al, (2008) opine that, public research and extension institutions are projected as the sole source of innovation/knowledge requisite to trigger development in the agricultural sector. Several other relevant macroeconomic and micro level factors such as policy and legislative framework and nature of human capital, physical infrastructure, finance and investment climate and system for facilitating information and knowledge flows were not considered as important. The emerging reforms and changes in knowledge structure of agriculture explicitly indicate that the traditional agricultural research and extension system alone cannot sufficiently address the challenges of the new trends.

The above presents a chain of workable interaction between major actors in the agricultural industry as major dependent of each other. Therefore, for government earnings from the sector to be improved, the enactment of policies that will deliver a clear guide on the discharge of extension function is primary; also, the need to present a readily available extension program to the rural farmers for continued patronage is fundamental to the success of the rural farmers, this chain of interaction will not only deliver an improved agricultural sector but will also ensure the prospects of maximization of benefits across levels of actors.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper has been to establish the imperatives of a holistic policy process by government as the basic and fundamental instrument for the development of agricultural sector of the Nigerian state. It has also been seen that, policy is the brain box of every human goal; the extent and depth of policy formulation process, implementation and appraisal will to a very large extent determine the quality of result that will be obtained from any human endeavour. Therefore, like every other sphere of human endeavour, the agricultural sector is primary to well creation and human satisfaction, thereby creating an urgent need for government to formulate policies that will deliver quality agricultural extension program and function to the rural farmers whose job success is dependent on the knowledge and farm expertise available to them.

It is therefore important to state that, the rural farmer is successful only to the extent of the information available to them. Also, the Agricultural extension worker is only successful to the point of the quality of the policies formulated by government that will determine the content of the agricultural extension programs.

Given the above, the paper recommends that;

- i) the central focus of every human action is dependent upon the depth of the policies formulated by government or its agents, therefore, it is important that government should constantly oversee a policy document that will progressively review and address the agricultural sector and by extension undertake to within a short period access the results obtained from these policies through reappraisals.
- ii) A workable environment should be created by government where the Agricultural extension workers can objectively undertake the various extension programs and policies that will impact positively on the rural farmers whose productivity is consequent upon the quality of information and knowledge available to them.
- iii) though policies are very important, but most compelling is the human actor that should see to the actualization of these policies, therefore, it is recommended that government should address the dwindling fortune of agricultural extension workers by re-establishing their existence as a most valuable link in the agricultural production process and as an unavoidable link between the rural farmer and knowledge transfer process.

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