

BOTTOM-UP AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES DELIVERY IN NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS: AN ASSESSMENT OF DELTA STATE

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Abstract: Local Government Councils (LGCs) in Nigeria is the closest level of formal government to the grassroots. They have the same organizational structure and are expected to implement the assigned roles stipulated in the new Nigerian Agricultural Policy (NAP) which adopts Community-Driven Development (CDD) approach. The study therefore assessed the extent of implementation of field activities and the perceived competency/skills possessed and required by the extension personnel of LGCs in Delta State. Constraints to effective role performance of LGCs were also assessed. The purpose was to evaluate the conformity of the LGCs to the paradigm shift. Simple random sampling technique was used to select six (6) Local Government Councils from the 25 LGCs in Delta State and all the 65 technical staff of the Agricultural and Rural Development (ARD) departments of the LGCs constituted the sample. Structured questionnaire was used for data collection and were analyzed. Results show that only 44.52% of the established staff positions were filled. Majority of the personnel were males (71.74%), with 6-10 years working experience (60.87%) and Higher National Diploma (HND) and above (67.39%). Most of the extension delivery activities relevant to the new roles of LGCs were not implemented. The respondents perceived themselves to have low competence in CDD, technical and communication tasks hence indicated strong need for skills to adequately deliver extension services. Educational level of staff had a significant but negative relationship with their competency ($r = -0.433$; $p = 0.003$). Some constraints to effective role performance of LGCs were insufficient fund allocation to agriculture (Mean=2.82), lack of interest in agriculture of some

LGC chairmen (Mean=2.63) and poor technical knowledge of staff (Mean=2.59). It was concluded that LGCs were not well equipped with competent personnel to deliver effective extension services due to poor funding six years into the new NAP. Adequate staffing, funding and capacity building through collaboration between Federal, Delta State and Local governments and with international partners are recommended.

Keywords: Agricultural-policy, community-driven development (CDD), Local-government, personnel, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural development in Nigeria over the years has down played the roles Local Government Councils (LGCs) could play as the closest to the grassroots who are mostly farmers as revealed in the previous Agricultural Policy for Nigeria [1]. Some of the challenges to agriculture and rural development as well as agricultural extension delivery include inconsistency in agricultural policies, centralization of decision making, poor input supply and distribution system, low Extension Agent: Farm Family ratio, low morale of staff, poor funding and logistics support [2], [3]. The World Bank assisted Training and Visit (T&V) extension and other approaches implemented over the years were criticized as top-down, rigid, costly and rendered the extension system ineffective particularly as it relates to beneficiaries' participation in programme, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation [4],[5],[6],[7],[8]. These and other problems culminated in low productivity and low level of development in the agricultural sector and thus

necessitated the review of the 1988 Agricultural Policy for Nigeria.

The new agricultural policy makes rural development and extension services the responsibility of the three tiers of government (Federal, States and LGCs). With this enormous roles have been assigned to LGCs which were hitherto passive in the pre-review era. Agriculture being in the concurrent legislation list implies that the three tiers are expected to implement the policies stipulated for development purposes. The new Agricultural Policy [9], contains new policy strategies that emphasize among others, rationalizing the roles of the three tiers of government and the private sector and reorganizing the institutional framework for government intervention. As spelt out, extension services will be supported by the Federal government while the State government will be responsible for the provision of virile and effective extension service, training and manpower development. The roles of Local Government Councils include; (a) Community sensitization and mobilization; (b) Funding of community-based extension interventions; (c) Extension delivery at the grassroots; (d) Staffing in adequate quantity and quality at both block and cell levels; (e) Participation in Research-Extension-Farmer-Input-Linkage system (REFILS) activities; (f) Participatory development of community action plan to part of state action plan; (g) Provision of rural infrastructure; (h) Funding of contract research; (i) Capacity building of farmers; (j) Joint monitoring and evaluation of projects.

These roles could be categorized into two: (i) management administrative roles such as funding, staffing and provision of infrastructures and (ii) technical roles which translate to field level activities. These roles are translated into various activities aimed at achieving the goals. These activities are supposed to be the meeting points with the beneficiaries and are to be facilitated at the community level by extension personnel who should be competent/possess relevant skills to effectively perform them. The adoption of participatory methodology embedded in the CDD approach which is a departure from the top-down approach suggests that the personnel will require skills/competences for the new challenges.

Extension approaches and strategies are adopted to address dominant problems [10]. The prevailing dominant problems in Nigeria like centralization of decision making, exclusion of beneficiaries, high cost, ineffective and inefficient system, shortage of personnel and funds, necessitated the adoption of participatory extension methodologies using CDD principles in programme implementation. According to [11], the five pillars of CDD are local government, transparency, accountability, inclusion and

empowerment. The approach is to ensure beneficiary participation, cost effectiveness, decentralization, appropriateness, desired impact and sustainable development; a re-direction of programmes in line with global best practices to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A local government is the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting the needs and executive duties in matters concerning people in their domain [12] and [13]. The LGCs could be likened to the County administrative set up of the United States of America and 'Peoples' Communes' of the people's Republic of China. Decentralized or bottom-up approach to development should be anchored by the LGCs being the closest to the people at the grassroots. Community empowerment through provision of information, inclusion, participation, linkages, funding and capacity building require that competent personnel with requisite knowledge and skills for effective facilitation of the process are in place. Learning is thus ensured, priority needs such as technologies and information are addressed through implementation of extension activities to make interventions sustainable.

To effectively perform the enormous roles assigned to LGCs, adequate management and administrative support via staffing of field level personnel is a desideratum. The personnel should be adequately motivated and assisted to acquire basic skills and competency to effectively perform their assigned roles and responsibilities. The technical/field level roles are implemented through the extension activities, which according to [10] are tools, methods or techniques through which farmers are reached. Their implementation and the competency/skills possessed in these activities are crucial to subsequent delivery to the beneficiaries.

Local Government Councils (LGCs) in Delta State like other LGCs in the federation have currently been saddled with roles of extension services delivery, a departure from what it used to be. These roles demand some level of competence on the part of the technical/field level personnel to impact on the beneficiaries. The delivery of extension service will be through the activities they conduct for farmers to participate and be empowered for sustainable development individually, nationally and consequently globally. If there are skills and knowledge gaps on the part of farmers and extension personnel, they must be filled. Other issues to address are constraints to optimum performance which could be related to LG (structure, modus operandi, administration, funding etc), personal characteristics (age, education, working experience) or the macro environment (policy, ecology, terrain). Based on this background, the general objective of the study was to

assess the role performance and competency of the technical personnel of Agriculture Department of the Local Government Councils (LGCs) in Delta State. The specific objectives were to: (a) Examine the staffing situation of the agricultural departments of the Local Government Councils in Delta state, Nigeria; (b) Describe the personal characteristics of the Local Government Agriculture and Rural Development personnel; (c) Identify activities implemented by the extension personnel; (d) Examine the competency and areas of skills and knowledge needs of the respondents in extension delivery activities; (e) Identify the constraints to the effective LGCs role performance in agricultural extension delivery.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between respondents' characteristics and their competency in agricultural activities. **Ho:** There is no significant relationship between respondents' characteristics and their training needs.

The theoretical framework for the study was based on the concept of organizing as the process of establishing formal relationships among people and resources in order to reach specific goals and objectives [14] and [15]. The steps in organizing are determination of tasks to be accomplished, subdividing major tasks into individual activities, assigning specific activities to individuals, providing necessary resources and designing the organizational relationships needed. Attainment of goals and objectives could be through effective performance of activities by indicating resource utilization for which activities, when, where and how to minimize weaknesses such as duplication, idle resources. The components are work, people, relationships and condition of work. The sequential phases in organizing are to (i) identify all activities necessary to accomplish organizational objectives (ii) divide activities into homogeneous subgroups, (iii) assign adequate authority (iv) ensure effective coordination of units/departments and personnel. Effectiveness of personnel will depend on their understanding and competencies as well as problems encountered which could be staff, institution and macro-economy related.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Delta State in the southern part of Nigeria. It covers an area of 17011km² with a population of 4,099,391 people. Delta State is made up of three senatorial zones which are Delta North, Delta Central and Delta South. The State is made up of 25 local government areas. Six (6) Local Government Councils (2 Local Government Councils per zone) were randomly selected out of the 25 Local Government Councils. These are Udu, Uvwie, Ika South, Oshimili North,

Ughelli North and Sapele. All the 65 (6 Heads of Department and 59 other staff) technical staff of the agricultural department of the sampled local government councils constituted the respondents for the study. A well structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean score and correlation.

Regularity of conduct of activities was measured on a 3-point Likert Scale. Not regular= 1, occasional= 2, very regular= 3.

Competency of personnel in extension delivery was measured on a 3-point Likert Scale. Not competent= 1, competent= 2, very competent= 3. A total of 29 items were considered. Minimum score=29, maximum=87.

Skills/knowledge needs was measured on a 3-point Likert Scale. Not needed= 1, needed= 2, highly needed= 3. A total of 29 items were considered. Minimum=29, maximum=87

Constraint to effective role performance of LGCs was measured on a 3-point Likert Scale. Not serious = 1, serious = 2, very serious = 3.

The cutoff point=2 and mean scores ≥ 2 indicate; regular or competent or skill needed or serious constraint as the case may be.

Descriptive statistics: frequency, percentages and means were used to present the data. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Staff Situation in Agriculture and Rural Development Department of Local Government Councils (LGCs)

Results in Table 1 show that all the staff positions except the Head of Department (HOD) fell short of the expected number of staff across the Local Government Councils. More short falls were recorded for lower position. This is an indication of heavier top occasioned by non recruitment of staff on regular basis. In all, only 65 staff of the 146 required (44.5%) were in place. Also, the expected coverage might not be achieved.

Personal characteristics of the respondents

Table 2 shows that about half of the respondents were between 36- 40years of age (47.83%). Majority were males (71.74%), had between 6-10 years working experience (60.87%) and HND/B.Sc holders and above (67.37%). This is contrary to the findings of [16] where majority of the LGC staff in Benue State, Nigeria had less than Ordinary National Diploma (OND).

Table 1: Staff Situation in Agriculture and Rural Development Department of Local Government Councils (LGCs).

Staff Level	Local Government Councils												Total Sample		
	Sapele		Udu		Oshimili North		Ika South		Uwvie		Ughelli North				
	Ta.	Ac	Ta.	Ac	Ta.	Ac.	Ta.	Act	Ta.	Ac.	Ta.	Ac	Ta.	A	%
Chief Agric Officer (HOD)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	6	100
Principal Agric Officer	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	13	12	92.3
Senior Agric Oofficer	2	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	5	2	10	6	25	16	44.0
Agric Officer I	2	1	3	1	2	2	2	1	4	2	3	1	16	8	50.0
Higher Agric Supritendent	2	1	3	1	2	1	2	-	3	2	4	2	16	7	43.8
Agric. Supritendent	2	-	2	1	2	-	2	-	4	2	3	1	15	4	26.7
Agric. Assistant	3	-	5	-	5	-	5	-	8	4	4	-	22	4	18.2
Agric Field Overseer	4	2	4	-	4	2	4	1	4	2	4	1	24	8	33.3
Agric. Assist	3	-	5	-	5	-	5	-	8	4	4	-	22	4	18.2
TOTAL	18	9	25	9	20	10	20	7	32	17	31	14	146	65	44.5

Ta.=Targeted number, Ac.=Actual number of staff in place

Table 2: Personal Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	%
<i>Age</i>		
<30	4	6.15
30-40	32	49.23
41-50	14	21.54
51-60	15	23.07
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	18	28.26
Male	46	71.74
<i>Education</i>		
SSCE	6	8.70
NCE/OND	16	23.91
HND/BSc.	28	43.48
Post Graduate	16	23.91
<i>Working Experience</i>		
5 and Below	16	23.91
6 – 10	40	60.87
11 -15	6	8.70
15 and Above	4	6.52

Source: Field Survey, 2010.

Table 3: Activities implemented by Local Government Councils

Activities	Mean	SD
Community Mobilization	2.54	.737
Group Formation and registration	1.95	.712
Farmers' Training	2.02	.881
Input Distribution	1.91	.220
Farm Visits	1.56	.898
Direct Production of Crops	1.85	.407
Processing Activities	1.02	.915
Organizing Demonstrations	1.93	.554
Direct Fisheries production	1.42	.593
Direct Production of Livestock	1.04	.610
Direct Storage	1.28	.727
Loan disbursement	1.87	.634
Home Economics	1.08	.383

Source: Field Survey, 2010

Activities implemented by local government councils

Table 3 shows the regularity of implementation of the activities LG staff were engaged in. The results shows that the activities mostly conducted were community mobilization (mean=2.54) and farmers' trainings (mean=2.02) which were just above the cut off. The table further shows the engagement of staff in direct production of agricultural commodities, input distribution and loan disbursement which are non extension functions but not on regular basis. The community mobilization and group formation activities implemented implies that LGCs were implementing CDD related activities although not on regularly. This is in compliance with the stated role of Local Government Councils [9].

Perceived Competency and training needs of staff in activities relevant to CDD

Table 4 shows the mean scores of the competency and skill need of the respondents in relevant activities to the new roles of LGCs in extension delivery. The table shows that staff were only marginally competent in community mobilization (mean=2.03) and had low competencies in other activities (mean below the cut off point ≤ 2). The table however shows high skill need by staff in the entire core CDD, technical/information (e.g crop, livestock, fisheries,

nutrition, gender, and environment), communication/linkages and general activities in which they were not competent. This implies that Local Government Councils agriculture department personnel cannot effectively perform their extension services delivery hence the strong need indicated in order to have firm grip of what is expected of them as stipulated roles of Local Government Councils [9].

Constraints to Effective Role Performance of Local Government Councils as Perceived by Extension personnel

Table 5 shows that among the most serious constraints to effectiveness of extension services delivery by LGCs were insufficient funds to agriculture (Mean = 2.82), non-payment of field allowances (Mean = 2.60) and poor technical knowledge of staff (Mean=2.59), instability of LG Administration (Mean = 2.57) and poor staff motivation (Mean=2.54). [16], in the pre-review era, identified lack of funds, motivation of staff, staff immobility, ad hoc nature of the work programme, inadequate training opportunities, weak contact between staff and farmers and the weak linkage between with research and extension workers' multiple roles. The situation after more than 6years to the new agricultural policy (FGN, 2004) remains almost the same.

Table 4: Mean Scores of Perceived Competency and Skill Needs of Respondents on Activities Relevant to CDD

Activities	Perception of competency		Skill/Knowledge needs	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Core CDD-related/Social Capital development activities</i>				
Community entry	1.63	.617	2.98*	.714
Development of local leadership	1.38	.525	2.94*	.722
Linkages with stakeholders	1.61	.678	2.83*	.634
Community Mobilization	2.03	.772	2.92*	.541
Group formation	1.51	.956	2.97*	.721
Facilitation of group meetings	1.32	.508	2.95*	.656
Needs assessment Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools	1.31	.678	3.00*	.632
Community action planning/ preparation of local Development Plan	1.27	.539	3.00*	.545
Monitoring and Evaluation of sub projects	1.10	.339	2.86*	.443
<i>Technical Information/ Community Action</i>				
Conflict resolution	1.10	.369	2.18*	.449
Engagement of service providers	1.07	.245	2.83*	.327
Environment and Safeguard issues	1.66	.956	2.87*	.756
Gender and Vulnerable groups concerns	1.61	.817	2.77*	.761
Conduct of Farmers Training	1.61	.678	2.49*	.681
Processing Activities	1.51	.956	2.28*	.756
Fisheries technologies	1.32	.508	2.84*	.647
Production of Crops technologies	1.31	.678	1.27*	.630
Production of Livestock technologies	1.10	.339	2.76*	.493
Nutrition	1.10	.369	2.84*	.428
Home Economics/Income Generation Activities	1.07	.669	2.78*	.389
Hygiene	1.91	.956	2.71*	.745
<i>Extension Methods and Communication skills</i>				
Conduct Demonstrations	1.27	.339	2.87*	.545
Use of Extension Methods	1.66	.856	2.71*	.719
Interpersonal skills	1.85	.917	2.76*	.753
Linkages with stakeholders	1.23	.968	2.67*	.733
Use of ICTs	1.61	.678	2.49*	.678
Advocacy	1.51	.856	2.68*	.758
<i>General</i>				
Report writing	1.27	.339	2.87*	.591
Budgeting	1.10	.339	2.83*	.476

Source: Field Survey, 2010

* Mean \geq 2.00=Competent/ Skill needed

Table 5: Constraints to Effective Role Performance of LGCs

Constraints	Mean	SD
Insufficient funds allocation to agriculture	2.82*	.812
Poor technical knowledge of staff	2.59*	.805
Chairman uninterested	2.63*	.907
Non-payment of Field Allowances	2.60*	.971
Poor staff motivation	2.54*	.092
Instability of LG Administration	2.57*	.568
Staff immobility	2.52*	.841
Workers Multiple Roles	2.17*	.476
Insufficient number of field staff	2.51*	.698

*Serious (Mean \geq 2.00) Source: Field Survey, 2010

Table 6: Relationship between respondents' characteristics and perceived competency

Variables/Characteristics	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Prob. Level
Age	0.053	0.724 NS
Gender	0.041	0.788 NS
Education	-0.433*	0.003 S
Working Experience	-0.284	0.056 NS

*Significant at $P \leq 0.05$ Source: Field Survey, 2010

Table 7: Relationship between Respondents Characteristics and Skills Needed for Agricultural Extension Delivery

Characteristics	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Prob. Level
Age	0.198	0.187 NS
Gender	0.178	0.237 NS
Education	-0.010	0.947 NS
Working Experience	0.084	0.578 NS

* Significant at $P \leq 0.05$ Source: Field Survey, 2010

Relationship between Respondents' Characteristics and Competency in agricultural Extension Delivery

The results in Table 5 show that only educational level of staff had a significant but negative relationship with their competency in activities geared towards assisting farmers. The correlation value is negative ($r = -0.433$; $p=0.003$). This means that the local government agriculture staff with less educational qualification were more competent in the delivery of agricultural extension activities than those with higher educational qualification. This could be due to the fact that the less educated ones carry out the skeletal field work that could be said to be going on. The negative r -value for education and working experience could imply redundancy among LGC personnel as they move upward and probably in-service trainings were not enjoyed thus reducing skills possessed consequently the competence of the personnel.

Relationship between Respondents' Characteristics and Skills Needed in Delivery of Agricultural Extension Activities

The results in Table 6 show that no personal characteristic of staff was significant at 5% level. This could be due to the fact that high needs were expressed irrespective of local government council, cadre and personality. The positive r -values indicate that males who were older, less educated and longer years of working experience needed more skills. This might be a sign of redundancy in the system.

CONCLUSIONS

(a) There were inadequate personnel to implement activities relevant to roles assigned to LGCs of Delta State, Nigeria (b) Most of the relevant extension delivery activities were not implemented by the personnel who perceived that they had low competences and expressed high need for skills or knowledge; (c) The less educated staff with less working experience were more competent/possessed more skills to deliver extension activities.

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made: (a) Adequate staffing of LGCs with well trained technical/field staff to implement agricultural and rural development activities in line with the new roles which emphasizes CDD approach; (b) Appropriate capacity building programmes should be regularly mounted to update and re-orientate extension personnel in LGCs to upgrade their technical and professional skills using competent and experienced local and international experts/ practitioners in relevant areas; (c) Agriculture should be given priority through adequate fund allocation by the LGCs and motivation of staff for better performance. (d) Federal government

should coordinate and supervise the policy implementation of other levels of government Delta State LGCs inclusive as part of the extension support roles assigned to it.

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