International Scholars Journals

International Journal of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development ISSN 3254-5428 Vol. 7 (2), pp. 001-005, February, 2019. Available online at www.internationalscholarsjournals.org © International Scholars Journals

Full Length Research Paper

Constraints to privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services as perceived by extension professionals and farmers

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Accepted 16 December, 2018

This study examined the perception of constraints to privatization and commercialization (P and C) of agricultural extension services by extension professionals and farmers. The study was carried out in Delta State, Nigeria. A sample size of 224 respondents comprising of 134 extension professionals and 90 farmers were involved in the study. Data for the study were collected through the use of structured questionnaire and structured interview schedule. The questionnaire was used for the extension professionals, while the interview schedule was used for the farmers. Data were collected between March and September, 2007. Trained field assistants selected in each location, in addition to the researchers collected the data. Data were analyzed using mean perception scores, standard deviations and t-test. Results show that all the 21 constraints examined by the study were perceived as being important. There was a general agreement between extension professionals and farmers regarding constraints to P and C of agricultural extension services. Differences were observed in only 6 constraints. The study concludes that the constraints identified by this study are serious issues to P and C and should therefore be given adequate consideration by policy makers, stakeholders in extension service delivery and the government of Delta State, Nigeria before final decision is taken on whether or not to privatize and commercialize agricultural extension services in the State.

Key words: constraints, privatization, commercialization, agricultural extension services, Delta State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, the public sector plays a dominant role in the provision of agricultural extension services (Lees, 1990). According to a worldwide survey conducted by the FAO, about 81% of the extension work around the world is carried out through a ministry or department of agriculture (Swanson et al., 1990). Globally, some 600,000 extension workers are engaged in the provision of agricultural information to farmers of which 95% is carried out by public extension (Rivera and Cary, 1997). In Nigeria, agricultural extension services are provided free of charge by the government through the Ministries of Agriculture (MOA) and Special Agricultural Development Schemes (SADS).

The public extension system is now seen as outdated, top-down, paternalistic, inflexible, subject to bureaucratic inefficiencies and therefore unable to cope with the dyna-mic demands of modern agriculture (Rivera et al, 2000). The failure of public sector extension has been attributed to a number of factors including poorly motive-ted staff, a preponderance of non- extension duties, inadequate operational funds, lack of relevant technology, poor plan-ing, centralized management and a general absence of accountability in the public sector (Antholt, 1994) . In general, public extension services have consistently fail-ed to deal with the site-specific needs and problems of farmers (Ahmad, 1999).

As a result of the relatively poor performance record of public sector extension in Nigeria, there is a proposition by the government to privatize and commercialize agri-cultural extension services in the country. The subject of

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Table 1. Population and sample composition for extension professionals

Category of extension Professional	Total no.	No. sampled
Programme manager (PM)	1	1
Extension agents (EAs)	150	75
Block extension agents (BEAs)	25	13
Block extension supervisors (BESs)	25	13
Subject matter specialists (SMSs)	12	6
Zonal extension officers (ZEOs)	3	3
Zonal managers (ZMs)	3	3
Directors of sub-programmes	10	5
Heads of component programmes	29	15
Total	258	134

of privatization and commercialization (P and C) of agricultural extension services in Nigeria has been examined by a number of researchers. Ozor (2002) examined the perceptions of extension professionals on P and C of agricultural extension services in Enugu State Agricultural Development Programme; Dimelu and Madukwe (2001) investigated extension workers' perception of P and C of agricultural extension services in Enugu State, Nigeria. Ngwu (2004) examined farmers' reaction to P and C of agricultural extension services in Ebonyi State Agricultural Development Programme and Ozor et al. (2007) investigated the perceptions of farmers and extension professionals regarding cost-sharing of agricultural technology transfer in Nigeria. These studies focused on respondents' perceptions of P and C of agricultural extension services. A review of these studies suggests that adequate attention has not been given to the study of stakeholders view on the constraints to P and C of agricultural extension services. Hence, the main objective of this study is to examine how extension professionals and farmers in Delta State, Nigeria perceive the constraints to P and C of agricultural extension services.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Delta State, Nigeria. Extension Professionals of the Delta state Agricultural Development Programme (DTADP) and farmers in the State formed the population from which sample was drawn. Extension professionals of the DTADP is composed of 150 extension agents (EAs), 25 block extension agents (BEAs), 25 block extension supervisors (BESs) 12 subject matter specialists (SMSs), 3 zonal extension officers (ZEOs); 3 zonal managers (ZMs); 10 directors of sub-programmes; 29 heads of component programmes and 1 programme manager. For the purpose of the study, the PM and all the ZEOs and ZMs were purposively selected because they are few in number. For the others, 50% proportionate random sample was drawn. This sampling procedure gave a total of 134 extension professionals as shown in Table 1.

For the farmers, a multistage sampling technique was used in selecting respondents. In the first stage, 3 extension blocks were randomly selected from each of the three agricultural zones in the state, giving a total of 9 extension blocks. In the second stage, 2 extension cells were randomly selected from each of the 9 extension blocks, giving a total of 18 extension cells. In the 3 third stages, 5 farmers in contact with extension were randomly selected from the list provided by the extension agent in each of the selected extension cells. This gave a total of 90 farmers. In all, a total of 224 respondents comprising of 134 extension professionals and 90 farmers were involved in the study.

A set of validated questionnaire and structured interview schedule were used for data collection. The questionnaire was used for the extension professionals, while the structured interview schedule was used for the farmers. A focus group discussion was equally conducted for farmers and extension professionals. Content validation of the research instruments was done by a team of experts in agricultural extension system. Data for the study were collected between March and September, 2007. Trained field assistants selected in each location, in addition to the researchers collected the data. A pilot test was conducted as part of instrument validation and to test for reliability of instruments

To obtain a quantitative measure of respondents' perception of constraints to P and C of agricultural extension services, a list of 21 possible constraints was drawn through the review of literature. Responses to the level of importance of these constraints were measured on a 4-point, Likert-type scale with values of very important = 4, important = 3; barely important = 2; and not important = 1. A cut off point of 2.50 was used to determine respondents' perception regarding constraints to P and C. Hence, a mean score of 2.50 depicts an important constraint. t-test analysis was used to determine differences in perceptions of extension professionals and farmers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' perception of constraints to P and C of agricultural extension services

Entries in Table 2 show the mean perception scores and standard deviations of constraints to P and C of agricultural extension services. Results reveal that all the 21 constraints examined in this study were perceived by the respondents as being important. The mean scores for these constraints ranged between 2.66 and 3.46 on a 4-point scale. The constraints and their mean perception scores included: fear of job insecurity among extension staff ($\bar{x}$ = 2.84); lack of farmers' interest in extension programme ($\bar{x}$ = 3.04); high risk and uncertainty in agriculture ($\bar{x}$ = 3.25); insufficiently trained extension per-

Table 2. Mean perception scores and standard deviation of respondents' perception of constraints to P and C of agricultural extension services.

S/N	Constraints	$\bar{x}$	SD
1.	Fear of job insecurity among extension staff	2.84*	1.10
2.	Lack of farmer' interest in Extension programme	3.04*	0.83
3.	High risk and uncertainty in Personnel	3.25*	0.83
4.	Insufficiently trained extension Personnel	2.96*	0.93
5.	Reluctance on the part of Farmers to pay for extension services	3.23*	0.93
6.	Administrative and bureaucratic Bottlenecks in policy implementation	3.04*	0.96
7.	Farmer' poor economic background	3.46*	0.81
8.	Difficulty in attaching monetary value To extension services	2.80*	1.07
9.	High level of subsistence farming	3.27*	0.91
10.	Political instability	2.78*	1.05
11.	Unequal access to far resources	2.80*	1.00
12.	Exploitation by extension service Providers	2.88*	0.98
13.	Unfavourable government policies On P and C programme	3.13*	0.87
14.	Irresponsiveness of extension services Provides to clients' needs	3.24*	0.81
15.	Poor linkages between research and Extension	2.98*	1.02
16.	Inadequate govt. legislation to Backup P and C programme	3.14*	0.93
17.	Inadequate govt. guarantees, Regulations and control over Extension providers excess and abuses	3.18*	0.94
18.	Tendency to focus more attention on Large-scale farmers thereby neglecting The small-scale farmers	3.34*	0.86
19.	Corruption and nepotism among Extension staff	2.66	1.08
20.	Poor capacity building of extension staff	2.78*	1.02
21.	Lack of ready market to sell increased Farm outputs resulting from improved Extension services	3.08*	0.97
	Cut-off point	2.50	

Source: Field Data, 2007.
Key: * = important constraints; = mean perception score; SD = standard deviations

personnel ($\bar{x}$ = 2.96); reluctance on the part of farmers to pay for extension services ($\bar{x}$ = 3.23) administrative and bureaucratic bottlenecks in policy implementation ($\bar{x}$ = 3.04); farmers' poor economic background ($\bar{x}$ = 3.46); difficult in attaching monetary value to extension services ($\bar{x}$ = 2.80); high level of subsistence farming ($\bar{x}$ = 3.27); political instability ($\bar{x}$ = 2.78); amongst others.

These constraints are critical to the success of any P and C programme in agricultural extension. For instance, restructuring in a privatized and commercialized enterprise usually brings about the fear of lay- offs and job losses among staff. Similarly, the difficulty in attaching monetary value to extension services may result in an inappropriate pricing of services rendered. This may drastically affect the whole programme. According to Rivera and Cary (1997), the most obvious shortcoming in extension services privatization and commercialization is the difficulty of collecting user fees and establishing cost-accounting procedures to set charges at appropriate levels. Farmers' poor economic background limits their capacities to pay for extension services. The poor economic background of farmers in Nigeria, usually stemmed from the fact that majority of them are engaged in subsistence farming using crude implements with low capital outlay and low-yielding species of crops and animals which results in low income.

The need to make profit may force private extension service providers to focus more attention on large-scale farmers who are likely to have the resources needed to pay for services. Also, client needs which are not likely to yield profit may be excluded from services to be provided. Delays in bureaucratic procedures usually slow progress in the implementation of government programmes. This is partly derived from the non-preparation of the government for many of the difficulties encountered in programme implementation (Odii, 2001). According to Obadan and Ayodele (1998), one of the crucial components of P and C programme is the creation of an appropriate regulatory framework that would promote contestable markets and protect public interest. An effective and efficient regulatory framework, in the form of rules, regulations, guarantees or policies including competitive policy or mechanism for monitoring and enforcing compliance with rules or policies ensures that owners of privatized enterprises do not trample upon the rights of workers and clients. Furthermore, a guaranteed ready market to sell farm outputs is very essential for the effective operation of a privatized and commercialized agricultural extension service.

Differences in perception of constraints to P and C of agricultural extension services between extension professionals and farmers

The differences in perception of constraints to P and C of agricultural extension services between extension professionals and farmers are presented in Table 3. Results show that there was a general agreement between extension professionals and farmers concerning constraints to

Table 3. Test of difference in perception of constraints to P and C of agricultural extension services between extension professionals and farmers.

S/N	Constraints	Extension professionals $\bar{x}$	SD	Farmers $\bar{x}$	SD	t-value	Remarks
1	Fear of job insecurity among extension staff	2.64	1.14	3.14	0.98	3.40	S
2	Lack of farmers' interest in extension programmes	3.11	0.82	2.93	0.84	-1.57	NS
3.	High risk and uncertainty in agriculture	3.31	0.72	3.16	0.97	-1.32	NS
4.	Insufficiently trained extension personnel	2.91	0.88	3.04	1.01	1.05	NS
5.	Reluctance on the part of farmers to pay for extension services	3.14	0.95	3.37	0.90	-1.85	NS
6.	Administrative and bureaucratic bottlenecks in policy implementation	3.14	0.85	2.90	1.09	1.76	NS
7.	Farmers' poor economic background	3.57	0.77	3.29	0.86	-2.52	S
8.	Difficulty in attaching monetary value to extension services	2.57	1.08	3.16	0.94	4.18	S
9.	High level of subsistence farming	3.32	0.85	3.19	1.00	-1.05	NS
10	Political instability	2.93	0.97	2.56	1.13	-2.65	S
11.	Unequal access to farm resources	2.69	0.99	2.98	0.99	2.15	S
12.	Exploitation by extension service providers	2.80	1.01	3.01	0.93	1.59	NS
13.	Unfavourable govt. policies on privatization and commercialization	3.20	0.80	3.03	0.97	-1.40	NS
14.	Irresponsiveness of extension service providers to clients needs	3.25	0.78	3.22	0.85	-2.21	NS
15.	Poor linkages between research and extension	3.17	1.02	2.69	0.96	-3.53	S
16.	Inadequate govt. legislation to backup privatization and commercialization programme	3.22	0.92	3.02	0.93	-1.53	NS
17.	Inadequate govt. guarantees, regulations and control over extension service providers' excesses and abuses	3.13	0.97	3.26	0.89	0.94	NS
	Tendency to focus more attention on large scale farmers thereby neglecting the small scale farmers	3.26	0.86	3.46	0.85	1.65	NS
19.	Corruption and nepotism among extension staff	2.60	1.10	2.73	1.06	0.86	NS
20.	Poor capacity building of extension staff	2.87	0.99	2.66	1.07	-1.50	NS
21.	Lack of ready market to sell increased output as a result of improved extension services	3.08	0.91	3.09	1.06	0.05	NS

Source: Field Data, 2007

Key: $\bar{x}$ = mean score; SD = standard deviations; S = significant; NS = not significant

P and C. Differences were observed in only 6 constraints, namely: fear of job insecurity among extension staff (t =3.40); farmers' poor economic background (t = -2.52); difficulty in attaching monetary value to extension services (t = 4.18); political instability (t = - 1.65); unequal access to farm resources (t = 2.15); and poor linkages between research and extension (t = - 3.53). This difference can be explained by the fact that extension professionals and farmers had earlier expressed divergent views regarding the constraints in question during the focus group discussion.

Conclusion

The Federal and State Governments in Nigeria are pr-posing the privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services in the country. This is as a result of the relatively poor performance record of the public extension service. A review of studies on the pro-posed P and C programme in Nigeria reveals that adequate study has not been conducted regarding the constraints to effective P and C programme. It is in the light of this, that this study examined the constraints that are crucial to a

successful P and C programme in agricultural extension in Delta State, Nigeria. The study concludes that fear of job insecurity among extension staff, insufficiently trained extension personnel, high level of subsistence farming, inadequate government legislation to backup P and C programme, amongst others were important constraints to effective P and C programme. The study recommends that these constraints should be given consideration by policy-makers and relevant government authority before final decision is taken on whether or not to privatize and commercialize agricultural extension services.

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