



Prospects of Involving Grassroots Organizations in Agricultural Extension Program

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The function of extension is to transfer and nurture pool of knowledge within the rural industry. Thus extension embraces all those who contribute knowledge or transfer it to farmers. This paper sought to explore the prospects of involving grassroots organizations in agricultural extension program. Inductive and deductive reasoning through review of relevant literature was used in this paper. In terms of function, grassroots organizations in a community are expected to contribute their quota, be it moral, financial, physical, to the social progress and economic advancement of the community. Grassroots organizations have significant and tremendous roles to play in modern extension operation that is farmer-centred. The promotion of a wide range of organizations at the grassroots level has gone a long way to link both rural and urban people with development activities. The paper concluded that involvement of grassroots organization in extension services no doubt, will enhance social acceptability of extension programs, greater confidence on the part of the rural organizations in extension workers and overall effectiveness in achieving the desired goals of extension service.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The agricultural extension institutions and organizations, operations and practices, systems and approaches are entwined with complex interrelationships within and without the context of extension activities. The demonstration and confirmation of these complex interrelationships is established by [1], when he defined extension as a comprehensive program of services deliberately put in place for expanding, strengthening and empowering capacity of the present and prospective stakeholders. The stakeholders are farmers, farm families and other rural economic operators such as processors, marketers, rural agro-industrialists, farm managers and farm labour force. Other stakeholders are farmers associations and communities that are provided with essential technical entrepreneurial, managerial and communication skills that they need to succeed in farming and farm related occupations. This is possible through participatory stakeholder-ship with researchers, policy makers, extension practitioners, educators, agro-investors and farmers themselves, to put in place a strong program in favour of improved agricultural production and farm investment environment.

It is clear from the above that modern extension that is capable of enhancing sustainable agricultural productivity and improved livelihood of farmers must uphold this comprehensive definition. This must operate on the principle of decentralization where efforts are made to ensure the people (farmers) have liberty to manage their affairs and most importantly become the key operator of extension works rather than the government and its agents. It then means that the top-down approaches to extension works and other rural development programs have no place in farmer-centred extension strategy. Thus, extension policy must legitimately recognize the potentials of local leaders in rural community development and partner with them in the overall effort to provide innovative solutions to the hydra-headed nature of problems in the rural areas. It therefore fall on the ruralites to free themselves from the shackles of underdevelopment with or without government supports [2].

For instance, Nigerian economic statistics reveal a puzzling contrast between rapid economic growth and quite minimal welfare improvements

for much of the population. Annual growth rates that average over 7% in official data during the last decade place Nigeria among the fastest growing economies in the world. This growth has been concentrated particularly in trade and agriculture, which would suggest substantial welfare benefits for many Nigerians. Nevertheless, improvements in social welfare indicators have been much slower than would be expected in the context of this growth. Poverty reduction and job creation have not kept pace with population growth, implying social distress for an increasing number of Nigerians [3]. Self-sustained rural community development is vital to the economic and social progress of any developing nation like Nigeria. Unless the ways and means of massively accelerating development in the rural areas where over 80% of Nigeria's population reside are effectively thought out and efficiently implemented, her national goal of self-sufficiency and control over resources may continue to elude her [4]. The main argument in favour of involving grassroots organizations in development is that communities are deemed to have a better knowledge of the prevailing local conditions (such as who is poor and deserves to be helped, or characteristics of the local micro-environment), and have better ability to enforce rules, monitor behaviour, and verify actions related to interventions [5].

In light of the aforementioned, stakeholders particularly the community based organizations (CBOs) i.e. grassroots organizations, commodity associations (CAs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose members and in fact managers and target beneficiaries are the farmers and community people themselves, have significant and tremendous roles to play in modern extension operation that is farmer-centred. Farmer-centred extension strategy is based on participatory methodology involving all stakeholders, farmers' needs, input services through service providers, and collaboration between government organizations (GOs – research institutions and extension organizations) and NGOs [6]. This collaboration and cooperation between the GOs and NGOs had been seen to foster greater benefits for both rural and agricultural development programs [7,8] hence [2] state that the true success of comprehensive economic and social development programs in Nigeria is primarily dependent upon the extent it contributes to the well-being of those living in rural areas. This is

because majority of Nigeria's population that reside in rural areas, depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. The development that is envisaged is not merely a handout of benefits to people in need, but a process of empowerment where rural communities can acquire mastery over their own destiny through the realization that they, individually and collectively can do something to improve their circumstances. This is refocusing strategy from waiting on government, oil companies or other organizations/donors to solving their own problems themselves.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper was to explore the prospects of involving grassroots organizations in agricultural extension program.

2. METHODOLOGY

Inductive and deductive reasoning through review of relevant literature was adopted in this paper.

2.1 Using Grassroots Organizations for Agricultural Extension Activities

The term CBOs is often used synonymously with 'grassroots organisation'. There doesn't appear to be much clarity about exactly which organisations are embraced by this term. According to the World Bank, CBOs are "distinct in nature and purpose from other NGOs". While national and international organizations are intermediary: "NGOs which are formed to serve others ... CBOs are normally 'membership' organizations made up of a group of individuals who have joined up together to further their own interests (e.g.: women's groups, credit circles, youth clubs, cooperatives and farmer associations)." [9,10]. Such a definition side-steps the issue of whether we should consider organisations such as Amnesty International, trades unions, chambers of commerce and other such membership organisations as CBOs. Yet despite these ambiguities, the term is in practice widely used to refer to (usually) non-urban, organisations of the 'poor', managed (if not controlled) by constituent members.

Community-based organizations are social groups that are found in the community, which differ widely in terms of their sizes, objectives and degree of interaction among members [11].

According to [12], CBOs possess the following characteristics:

- a. they establish offices that are filled with officers through some established procedure, which not infrequently, is by election;
- b. they hold periodic meeting regularly on agreed dates and places;
- c. they establish criteria for individuals to qualify as members;
- d. they have formalized activities through division of labour among members; and they have a constitution that governs their operations.

The promotion of a wide range of organizations at the grassroots level has gone a long way to link both rural and urban people with development activities. There are two main reasons why community-based organizations are important:

- a. they facilitate access for the rural poor to available services and inputs for agriculture development; and
- b. they provide the structure through which people can influence the direction and implementation of development.

Community organizations are formed for the purpose of protecting and promoting common interest of people in the field of politics, economics, agriculture, religion, society, recreation and enjoyment [13]. Some CBOs have constitution but they do not have paid official at local level. However, some of the larger groups have paid staff, to provide continuity for the groups. In terms of function, grassroots organizations in a community are expected to contribute their quota, be it moral, financial, physical, to the social progress and economic advancement of the community. This is based on the belief that there is no government however benevolent, paternalistic or well meaning, which can boast of the capacity to provide all the multifarious needs of all its citizens. This axiom applies not only to advanced nations of the world, but also the less developed ones. This may be due to their peculiar shortage of almost everything one can think of, financial resources, capital, skilled manpower and technical know-how, to mention a few. It is therefore obvious that one of the surest and quickest ways to enhance sustainable agricultural and rural development lies in the active participation and commitment of the people.

According to [11], fifteen criteria could be identified in literature for classifying organizations. They are content, size, duration, rhythm, proximity of members, basis of formation (voluntary etc.) access (open, semi-closed, closed), degree of organization, function, orientation, relation with the inclusive society, relation with other groups, type of social control, type of authority and degree of unity. Based on these criteria and generally speaking, there are twelve (12) types of community-based organizations in Nigeria. They are categorized according to their compositions and functions. They include community development associations (CDAs), cooperative societies, town/village improvement/development unions, occupational/professional associations, age grade groups/association, youth associations, religious organizations, gender groups, indigene clubs/societies, tribal or ethnic group/associations and other local groups.

2.2 Conditions Necessary for Involvement of Grassroots Organizations in Extension Service

One of the basic philosophical objectives of extension is to involve people in its program for democratic purpose. This makes agricultural extension to be democratic in nature. Any agricultural extension program that does not involve people is bound to fail. According to [14] in [15], involvement is the act of including (in the planning, execution and evaluation) local farm-families in the extension program that affects them. The benefits of involvement include:

- a. long term commitment of the people to the program;
- b. good rapport between the extension agents and the rural farm-families;
- c. more accurate decision-making process is possible;
- d. quick legitimization of actions is possible; and
- e. involvement is functional, ethical, educative as well as leading to self-reliance

However, the involvement of people without readiness and willingness to participate is like pegging a round peg in a square hole. On getting the people involved in the program, they should be able to participate actively in the planning, execution and evaluation of the program. Participation is very crucial to program implementation. Involvement and full

participation of the people will lead to proper implementation of the program. Participation in extension program should be the core notion of democratic society. The quality of participation determines the success of any organization/agency as well as its programs [15]. Participation is the act of working with others in making value judgement and determining causes of actions within a social situation and structure. It is the process of combining the knowledge and vision of a man to supplement physical and mental needs of fellow men [14]. Some of the principles that guide participation are:

1. People will be ready to participate fully in a program that affects them if they have been involved in the proposal and formulation of policies relating to the program.
2. The participation of the people in an extension program that affects them depends on;
 - a. the availability of an intelligent and rational leader;
 - b. the extent to which the people have an effective voice or input in determining rules and conditions under which they live and work;
 - c. these principles become operational only when there is common goal or purpose, willingness to serve, and open communication.

Factors affecting participation include; bad past records of agricultural extension agents, environmental factors and decision-making process.

From the foregoing grassroots organizations have the following crucial conditions necessary for their involvement in extension service:

1. **Leadership:** Grassroots organization has leadership structure which consists of local executives either by election or by appointment. They have the position of the chairman, secretary, auditor, financial secretary, public relations officer and social welfare [11]. It is estimated that Nigeria has over 25 million farm families who are supposed to be reached by extension worker. The ratio as at the year 2000, ranged 1:500 in Niger State and 1:5800 in Lagos State with an overall national average of 1:1968 as against the ratio 1:500 recommended by the Food and

Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations [16]. This means that 100,000 extension workers have to be at work in the rural communities. Unfortunately, Nigeria cannot boast of one tenth of this number currently. This dearth of extension workers indicate that many farmers are not reached and therefore not exposed to innovations and technologies in agriculture. Since it will take years to produce the required number of extension workers, and no government can afford to employ the number needed for effective coverage of extension work in rural communities, the only logical solution will be to utilize the services of local leaders to compliment and accomplish the rural development tasks.

2. **Education:** Education is a continuous process of socialization. It could be formal or informal but the essence of education is to condition the behaviour of the people to suit societal norms. Grassroots organizations are concerned with informal education of the rural farmers by conditioning their activities according to group norms, and consensus and promoting practices required for sustainable development in agriculture and natural resources [17]. Thus extension been an out of school educational program should utilize the existing teaching and learning structures in its educational programs directed towards the farming needs of the grassroots organizations as this will enhance involvement of grassroots organization in extension service.
3. **Group dynamics:** Group behaviour is the result of dynamic interaction between individuals in a social situation [18]. Each of the grassroots organization has certain forces and characteristics which influence their activities and attitude towards change program including extension service. The difficulty of one extension agent in reaching and maintaining constant/regular contact with as many as 1,968 individual farm families is what the use of group for agricultural extension service delivery seeks to overcome [19]. Implications of group dynamics in agricultural extension include:
 - The knowledge of the internal and external factors of the group can be utilized to advantage by extension agents
 - The extension agency and field agents should ensure compatibility between the group/societal goal and their own work goals. This ensures success in innovations adoption.
 - The extension agent is in a position to identify individuals in a group and use different styles to carryout his/her tasks on the field.
4. **Resource mobilization and allocation:** Resource mobilization is required to enhance group efforts and is achieved by the existing local executive council of the grassroots organizations. Various grassroots organizations use their local leaders to enforce conformity to the demands of the organization and appropriate sanctions on defaulters. Labour and other resources needed in the execution of development projects are better mobilized through activation of arrangements such as kingship groups, and other social groups which regulate society [20]. According to [21], local organizations are utilized by larger organizations to achieve agricultural and rural development goals through the process of allocation of resources and resolution of conflicts and orienting group efforts. Thus an extension agent should engage the services of local organizations in mobilizing the people for self-help and adult literacy, and safeguarding the security of the neighbourhood where his task lie.
5. **Organizational management:** According to [22], management is the act of handling or controlling something successfully. Also, it is the skilful handling or use of something such as resources. Organizational management involves appropriate procedures for carrying the members of grassroots organization along which include communication and distribution of benefits. Communication has considerable effect in arousing members of local organizations and increasing cohesion and responsiveness towards potential causes of success and failures [21,23]. Considering the force between the leadership of grassroots organization and its members it becomes imperative that extension agency/agent engage these local organizations in carrying out its task. Its implication therefore is that involvement of grassroots organization in extension

services should require good knowledge of the communication procedures and other management practices existing in the organization by the extension workers.

2.3 Factors Limiting the Involvement of Grassroots Organizations in Extension Service

Eze [23] postulates the following as factors militating against the involvement of grassroots organizations in extension service:

1. **Centralized top-down decision making:** It is a strategy based on passing down to rural farmers certain policies and directives from the governing bureaucracy. This type of rural development approach requires force to maintain and sustain it. Under the top-down process, extension programs remain alien to grassroots organizations. This situation results in confusion and lack of participation in the extension programs, and limits overall involvement of grassroots organization in extension service.
2. **Inadequate knowledge of group dynamics:** Group dynamics are forces which influence all activities of the groups within grassroots organizations. Group dynamics depict the dominant characteristics of grassroots organizations which influence the relationship with change programs including agricultural extension service. Inadequate knowledge of group dynamics on the part of extension workers affect desired cooperation of grassroots organizations with extension workers. Thus limiting their involvement in extension services.
3. **Gaps between institutional needs and the actual needs of grassroots organization:** A serious problem which affects implementation of extension programs and overall involvement of local groups in extension service in Nigeria is lack of proper determination of the actual needs of local groups. Very often, implementation of extension programs for rural farmers is based on what the extension agency needs as opposed to the actual needs of the local group [24]. This is attributable to inadequate assessment and need identification of the local organizations.
4. **Inadequate education of leaders and members of grassroots organization:** Education enhances the interest, awareness and participation of grassroots organizations in extension service. Lack of adequate education influence negatively the attitude of grassroots organizations towards effective extension service delivery. Education facilitates positive attitude towards group efforts and exchange of extension information within a social system [25]. Inadequate education in grassroots organization contribute to lack of group discussions, organized labour, confidence and overall involvement in extension service.
5. **Inadequate funding:** Finance is a strong unifying bond in any organization. Inadequate funding results in disunity, lack of group effort and inability to source needed farm inputs in groups [26]. Inadequate funding results from the inability of government and financial institutions to provide credit facilities to grassroots organizations for fear of lack of collaterals or security. Implementation of extension programs involves some financial investments on the parts of grassroots organizations in terms of labour and input acquisition.
6. **Prevailing sociocultural and economic background:** Grassroots organizations against popular assumptions are not static to change or opposed to development programs. Their responses to change programs including extension service depend largely on the prevailing sociocultural background and economic status. Previous studies by [27] and [26,27] blamed the failure of past development efforts in Africa on inadequate determination of the existing social norms, value orientation and economic background of grassroots organization. In a related development, little effort is being made in Nigeria to solve social problems such as respect for age, discrimination against women, traditional religious belief and poor economic background of grassroots organizations. Thus socio-cultural and economic barriers constitute a serious stumbling block in the involvement of grassroots organizations in extension service in Nigeria.
7. **Inadequate training of extension personnel:** Social system depicts the totality of life in the rural sector. Social system involves the social behaviour of the rural groups. An effective extension worker should have adequate knowledge of the

social systems and this is acquired through training in rural sociology and social group orientation. Inadequate knowledge of the social system results in social rejection of the extension worker and overall ineffectiveness in the involvement of grassroots organizations in extension service. The implication therefore, is that the management of extension services such as the Agricultural Development Program (ADP) should organize workshops and orientation training for staff on rural sociology and sponsor selected staff on external training on social science tools.

2.4 Prospects of Involving Grassroots Organization in Extension Service Delivery and Rural Development

Studies have shown that grassroots organizations have been part and parcel of every community in Nigeria [28-31]. This is based on the principle of “self-help”, “self-reliance” and “citizen participation”, which need active participation and cooperation of the people in activities that will make their communities a better place to live. These local groups are involved in such activities as agricultural extension services, crop/livestock production and processing, marketing, commerce, arts and small and medium scale industries, vocational and trade skills, rural transportation and other rural economic activities. The roles played by grassroots organization in extension service delivery include the following:

1. They protect, maintain and promote the interest of their members
2. Education of farmers is the cornerstone of extension work. Grassroots organization help to provide technical, managerial and leadership training to members, which facilitate effective communication of agricultural information to and among members.
3. Grassroots organization are motivators that arouse the interest of members to participate actively in development projects (e.g. cassava production and processing, reforestation project, honey production, meat and table egg production) that would improve the socioeconomic conditions and sustainable livelihoods.
4. Grassroots people including farmers are gradually taking their destiny in their hands

through the principles of “self-reliance on their own initiatives”, self-help in providing solution to their own problems” and “citizens participation in community work”. Grassroots organizations help change the perception and attitude of people from “government provide all” to “the people provide all” with little assistance in terms of advice from extension agents and NGOs.

5. Information generation and utilization is an important hallmark of extension work. Community people including farmers have been taught importance of providing correct and first-hand information by the people themselves through various development activities of grassroots organizations. In other words, farmers are now willing to volunteer useful information that would assist in effective planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of extension programs.
6. Grassroots organization contributes necessary human and financial resources for successful extension activities in the community. Resources such as land, money, and inputs are pulled together to implement development project on large-scale or commercial basis.
7. Grassroots organizations inculcate in their members and entire community the spirit of civil consciousness, which enables them to be service oriented through provision of infrastructural facilities.
8. Grassroots organizations encourage members and the entire community to establish and maintain harmonious relationships with members and change agents. Through these relationships, community-based information are generated and disseminated between and among local people, between the people and extension personnel, other rural development and policy makers.
9. Grassroots organizations cooperate with agricultural extension agents and agencies in propagating government policies and performance/projects relating to agricultural development.
10. Grassroots organizations stimulate and develop local leadership, which are usually the rural power sectors and train them in line with the policy guidelines of the government institutions and NGOs such that the social process is in conformity with development program plans based on the local needs. Agricultural extension agents often use local leaders as contact farmers.

3. CONCLUSION

The positive contributions that grassroots organizations can make and are making at all levels of development include acting as agents or medium of change, most especially in spreading agricultural information, mutual aid and support of members among others. Grassroots organizations have crucial conditions necessary for their involvement in extension service – leadership, structure, educational facilities, group dynamics resource mobilization and organizational management. Involvement of grassroots organization in extension services no doubt, will enhance social acceptability of extension programs, greater confidence on the part of the rural organizations in extension workers and overall effectiveness in achieving the desired goals of extension service.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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