

THE ACTIVITIES OF VILLAGE EXTENSION WORKERS AND FARMERS IN JENKWE DEVELOPMENT AREA OF NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study which adopted the survey research design was conducted in Jenkwe Development Area of Nasarawa State with the aim of evaluating the activities of Village Extension Workers (VEWs) and farmers in the area. Structured interview schedule was used to collect data for the study. Random sampling was used to select from the four districts of Jenkwe Development area 96 respondents. Simple statistical tools involving frequency counts and percentage were used to analyze the data. Major results of the study showed that the contact farmers reported varying visits between two to three times in a month; pattern of visits from village extension workers to contact farmers were uniform between the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday while Thursday was recorded low by contact farmers. Causes of irregular visits by (VEWs) to contact farmers should be adequately addressed by extension managers of the study area.

Keywords: *Village Extension Workers, farmers, training, visit*

INTRODUCTION

According to Benor and Baxter (1984), key feature of the training and visit extension of agricultural extension delivery are the regularly scheduled visits to farmers' fields by agricultural extension staff. A village extension worker's (VEW) responsibility is to visit farmers' group of his area of jurisdiction regularly, teach and convince them to accept recommended agricultural production practices. Benor and Baxter (1984) believe that this visit help establish research and extension awareness as well as actual farmers conditions and needs. They, therefore, advised that it is desirable that farmers (contact and non-contact) are fully aware of the day, time, place, and purpose of the VEW's visit. However, frequent contact between the VEW and all farmers in his circle is not possible. Instead, while being responsible to all farmers on each fortnightly visit, the VEW focuses on small selected member of farmers "contact farmers" in each farmer's group, and meets with any other farmers who are willing and interested to attend his visit and seek his advice (Benor and Baxter, 1984).

Training and Visit (T&V) system of extension was introduced in Nasarawa State and Jenkwe Development Area (JDA) in 1986. Before then the extension service was mostly the responsibility of the State Ministry of Agriculture and Local Governments. Over the years, the extension services operated through state bureaucracies were hampered by many problems among which were administrative inefficiency, inadequate funding, and inadequate logistical support, lack of staff motivation and dilution of efforts of field extension staff. The T & V system was believed to be capable of overcoming some of these problems and improve effectiveness of extension delivery to farmers.

The overall objective of the T & V system was to be a professional extension service that was capable of assisting farmers to raise production, increase their incomes, level of living and to provide appropriate support to agricultural development (NAERLS, 1997). Despite the fact that the T & V system has been in operation for 23 years, no study has been conducted to assess the activities of the VEW in Jenkwe Development Area (JDA). This makes the study relevant to determine the effectiveness of the VEW activities in the study area. The specific objective of the study was to describe the activities of VEW with respect to days, frequency, place and reasons of visiting contact farmers in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

Jenkwe Development Area, the site selected for the study, is located south

of the Nasarawa State. It was excised from Obi Local Government Area. The study area is bordered to the South by Keana, to the West by Doma, to the North by Lafia local government areas respectively. It is also bordered by Lafia-north to the north-east. JDA lies between latitudes 70' and 90' North and Longitude 70 and 100 East. The development area is characterized by flood plain complexes of Savannah and mixed leguminous, wooded Savannah mixed with formation of trees, shrubs and grasses - together with oil palms. The study area covers an area of 550 Km² with estimated 70% of people engaged in rain-fed subsistence agriculture (NADP, 2009).

Farmers in Jenkwe Development Area (JDA) are mainly small-scale farmers who grow food crops such as yams, millet, beans, groundnuts, beniseed, cassava, and guinea corn and melon seed. Large proportion of the farmers in Jenkwe Development Area (JDA) keeps livestock such as goats, sheep, pigs, poultry and cattle. Farmers in the study area rely mostly on traditional method of cultivation by hoe and cutlasses and crop protection is mostly carried out by way of subsistence orientation. The study area has a maximum temperature of 81.70F and a minimum temperature of 61.0F. Rainfall varies, in study area, with minimum of 121.73cm in some places to 145cm in others (Ministry of Information, 2001). Jenkwe development Area has two distinct seasons; dry and wet. The dry season spans from November to February while rainy season is from March to October. The months of December, January, and February are cold due to hamattan winds blowing across the study area from the North-East. The administrative set up of Jenkwe Development Area (JDA) is made up of four districts namely: Duduguru, Gidinye, Agwade and Agyaragu Town. The entire four districts were selected for the study because the districts belong to the same ecological zone and the ethnic group that make up the development area have cultural linkages with long records of harmonious co-existence with one another as informed by their historical past. There are 10,000 farm families in Jenkwe Development Area (JDA) who have been living in the four districts for a very long time (NADP, 2007).

A simple random sampling technique was used to select 96 farmers from the four districts as respondents for the study. The sample size for the study was regarded as reasonable due to the need for a detailed work. Furthermore, general area for the study was not excessively large. Data for the study were generated in the months of March, April and May 2009 using structured interview schedule on the activities of the extension workers in the study area. Simple statistical tools involving frequencies counts and percentage were used to analyse the data.

Development of questionnaire was validated by some professionals in the department of Agricultural Economics and Extension of the Nasarawa State University, Shabu-Lafia Campus. The questionnaire was pre-tested at week intervals in each of the districts selected for the study 10 enumerators who understood the local language were used to assist in administering the questionnaire to the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Day of Visits: The results on Table 2 revealed a relatively by uniform pattern of visits by Village Extension Workers (VEW) for the week days particularly Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. This inferred that farmers were unaware of the fixed visit days. The finding was not in consonance with recommendations of Benor and Baxter (1984) who reported that basic extension worker's visits each of his eight groups of farmers on a fixed day once every fortnight. In the same vein, results of the responses by the contact farmers hardly indicated that extra visits were carried out. Similarly, the level of visit reported by contact farmers on Thursday was low while no visit was made on Friday. These irregular visits called for considerable strengthening and improvement.

Frequency of monthly visits: An important finding in regard to frequency of visits in a month reported by the contact farmers was that 88.7% of the contact farmers claimed to be visited twice monthly by VEWs. Also 5.7% of the contact farmers admitted three visits by the VEWs in a month. The fact that up to 94.0% of the contact farmers reported receiving varying levels of visits from the VEWs within the range of between two to three in a month is a prima facie indication of effectiveness of Training and Visit (T & V) extension system in the study area. This finding seemed to be in consonance with the earlier works of Perraton, Jamison and Orivel (1981) in Malawi indicating relatively high coverage of farmers had not been reached by extension service workers. However, the results failed to corroborate the works of Gittrow and Potts (1978) which estimated from the case of a Nigerian Agricultural project that only 3% of the farmers had been reached by extension service workers. For the remaining 6% of the contact farmers that reported less than two visits in a month, low VEWs/farmers ratio, lack of mobility, too large area of coverage or ineffective supervision by their superior officers could be responsible for inability of VEWs to visit as frequently as scheduled.

Place of Visit: The results on table 1 also revealed that 52.7% and 34.6% of the contact farmers were visited in their farms and homes respectively. The T & V system of extension stressed the importance of field visit. Even though home visits by extension workers were not completely ruled out, the proportion of contact farmers that reported being visited at home by contact farmers appeared high and would prove disastrous to the recommended field visits entrenched in T & V system of extension. This finding was not in agreement with the recommendation by Benor and Baxter (1984) that home visits should be avoided while field visits should be held at public places usually, schools, temples, local government offices, and mosques where all farmers would feel comfortable.

Reasons for the Visits: On Table 1 about 94.0% of the visits from the VEWs to contact farmers were to teach them proven (new) farm practices and to encourage them to adopt them. This indicated that contact farmers were aware of the purpose of the visit from the contact farmers which was specifically to teach them proven technologies. The finding failed to support the work of Sutherland (1988) who reported that visits from the VEWs were rarely problem specific but involved general aspects of agriculture. According to Benor and Baxter (1984), visits to contact farmers must be regular, specific and purposeful. However, results of a study by NAERLS (1997) reported that all contact farmers received regular advice on farming from the VEWs. According to NAERLS (1997) the VEWs made about 95.0% of the expected numbers of visits to contact farmers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of the study revealed uniform pattern of visits from the VEWs on the week days of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday respectively. About 94% of the contact farmers admitted receiving between two to three visits in four weeks from the VEWs. High (34%) proportion of contact farmers claimed receiving visits from the VEWs at homes. Also, 94% of contact farmers knew the visits from VEWs were to teach them new production practices; and place of visit was not always on the fields. In line with the foregoing, the followings are recommended:

- a. Awareness on days of visit by the VEWs should be adequately publicized to ensure full farmers participation.
- b. There is need for adequate publicity on contact points in anticipation of the VEWs visit in the language of understanding to draw the attention of the farmers.
- c. Extension managers should check irregular visits by VEWs and take

adequate measures to tackle the sources/causes resulting in such unimpressive tendencies.

- d. Appropriate headquarters/zonal extension supervisors should pay more attention on their extension supervisory activities that will guide and support basic extension staff.

Table 1: Activities of Vews in Jenkwe Development Area

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Day of Visit		
Monday	36	36.74
Tuesday	26	26.53
Wednesday	28	30.61
Thursday	6	6.12
Friday	-	-
Frequency of Visit/Month		
Once	5	5.56
Twice	86	88.68
Thrice	5	5.66
Place of Visit		
At Home	34	34.55
On the Farm	49	52.72
At the Village Square/Market Place	9	9.09
At the Chief's Palace	4	3.64
Reason for Visits		
On Friendly Basis	2	1.82
Inspection of Demonstrations	2	1.82
Teaching new Farm Practices	92	96.36

Source: Field survey, 2009

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