RURAL FISH FARMERS' AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AGENTS' ACTIVITIES IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The need to improve fish farming through enhanced technology necessitated the focus of this study on Fish farmers' awareness and participation in Agricultural extension agents' activities. A structured questionnaire was administered randomly to 60% of the fish farmers who were registered with the Agricultural Development Programme of Oyo State to give a sample size of 205 fish farmers. Descriptive and inferential statistical tests were used to analyze the data. The study showed that fish farmers are well aware of extension agents' activities, such as farm demonstration, training of group leaders and meetings. Chi-square analysis was used to test the significant relationship of awareness and participation. It was discovered that awareness was significantly related to participation. The study recommends that extension agents should effectively make use of all available means of communication to fish farmers for increase in productivity.

Keywords: *Fish farmers, extension agents, communication methods, awareness, linkage*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is among the largest fish consumers in the World with over 1.5 million tons of fish consumed annually. Yet, today, Nigeria has a big hole in her pocket as the country imports over 900,000 metric tons of fish (Davis R., Davis O., Inko-Tariah and Bekibele 2008). It is obvious that aquaculture has the potential to help expand the resources base and reduce the pressure on conventional sources of fish, generating employment, foreign exchange and elevating socio-economic of the farmers. Agricultural extension department is the most important public service institution with the widest range of responsibilities for agricultural and rural development (Oladosu and Okunade 2006). The conduct of agricultural extension work in Nigeria shows that one of the primary responsibilities is to help farmers make efficient use of available resources to meet the nation's food needs. Agricultural extension services

in Nigeria promotes the determination of technical choice for specific agricultural population and area by making use of farm diagnosis, articulated needs of the rural farmers and identified target domains and arousing their interest in their problems. In this regard, agricultural extension provides a vehicle of technology transfer by initiating the development, transfer and diffusion process of innovation (Abalu 1998). According to Falusi 1991 agricultural development is a rural development approach through which the right technology, effective extension services, access to inputs, adequate market and complementary infrastructural facilities essential to improve productivity and boost the standard of living of rural dwellers are provided. The clamors for higher productivity in fish farming can be achieved not only by coming up with improved technology but to properly organize adequate extension services. This is when the impact of improved technology can have desired effects on fish farmers (Agbamu 2000).

One approach to determining desirable extension agent behaviour and performance is to begin with the farmers' point of view (Oladosu 2006). Some useful indications of farmers expectation of extension agents behavior was confirmed by (Boone 1986), who found widespread resentment towards extension agents among farmers because they resent advise from agents who adopt superior attitudes. Many scientists are now convinced that it is no longer desirable to use a transfer of technology approach in which the extension administrators decide on the targets to be realized by the field-level extension agents. (Agbamu, 2000). A more participatory approach is instead preferred, in which farmers decide which changes are desirable and what kinds of support are needed from extension to realise changes (Oladele, 1997).

A participatory approach requires that the extension organisation becomes a learning organization with the ability to discover which changes are desirable in each specific situation. It is easier to adopt a participatory approach or a farmer-led extension system or a farmers' association than in a government environment extension organization (Agbamu 2000). According to (Adu 2005), the first stage towards the adoption of an innovation is to become aware that it exists. Awareness does not just mean that an innovation exists but that it is potentially of practical relevance to the farmers (Adu, 2007). The major role of agricultural extension is to help farmers to make decisions through which they can realize their own goals and to learn from their own experience (Van der Ban and Howkins, 1996).

Despite the efforts of extension agents to alleviate rural poverty and support fish farmers to improve their competencies in different aspects of fish farming and also to be more responsible with environmental and natural resources, there are indications that the efficiency and quality of the support provided by the extension agents have not been fully utilized by fish farmers. The general objective of the research aimed at analyzing fish farmers' awareness and participation in extension agents' linkage activities in a coastal and inland States, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to determine the level of awareness of fish farmers to extension agents' activities and ascertain the level of participation of fish farmers in these activities.

METHODOLOGY

The study population consists of fish farmers in Oyo State that are registered by the Agricultural Development Projects in the state. A simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample size. The existing total number of fish farmers registered was (205), out of this; sixty percent was randomly selected to give a sample size of 117 fish farmers. Data for this study were obtained from sampled fish farmers through scheduled interview. The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using frequency and percentage to show the proportion of responses to some variables and Chi-square was used for testing relationship between awareness and participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fish farmer's awareness of agricultural extension agents' activities: Table 1 shows the awareness and participation rural fish farmers in eash of the agricultural extension agents' activities. All the extension agents' activities recorded high awareness among the fish farmers. Oladoja, Adedokun and Fapojumwo (2008) have also reported high awareness of farmers in demonstration and field trips. While Oladele and Fawole (2007) noted that the reasons for this high awareness could be traced to the high intensity of extension services provided by Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP). The involvement of the Agricultural research institutes in the preparation of extension materials such as radio programmes, bulletins, posters among others.

There is high degree of variation in fish farmers' participation in each of the agricultural extension agents' activities. This confirms the assertion (Oladosu 2006) that extension work in the country has not been participatory. This has the tendency of affecting the ultimate adoption of technologies that extension agents might introduce to fish farmers. Most fish farmers see access to resources, in particular credit and inputs, rather than to technical knowledge as the main constraint on production. Fish farmers' participation in training of group leaders was low this could be because there are few group leaders since it is not meant for all the fish farmers. Fish farmers meetings and researchers' organized seminars and workshops are well participated by fish farmers. This may be attributed to the fact that fish farmers would be free to rub mind with their counterparts. Agbamu (2000) affirmed that it is easier to adopt a participatory approach or a farmer-led extension or a farmers association than in a government extension organization. Also fish farmers would hear directly from the researchers.

The results show significant relationship between the awareness and participation of fish farmers in all the extension agents' activities (table 2). In other words, mostly the awareness of fish farmers in these activities affects their participation. This may be because of the efficiency of the extension agents and their attitude to work which stimulates them.

Table 1: Fish farmer's awareness of extension agents' activities and participation

	Awareness		Participation	
Communication methods	Yes	No	Yes	No
On farm demonstration	114(97.4)	3(2.6)	98(83.8)	19 (16.2)
Training of group leaders	107(91.5)	10 (8.5)	10 (8.5)	107(91.5)
Workshop	98(83.8)	19(11.4)	92(78.6)	25(21.4)
Group Discussions	114(97.4)	3(2.6)	85(72.6)	32(27.4)
Fish farmers Meetings	108(92.3)	9(7.7)	107(91.5)	10(8.5)
Researchers (Seminars, Workshops)	94(80.3)	23(19.7)	101(86.3)	16(13.7)
Diagnostic Research	91(77.8)	26(22.2)	45(38.5)	72(61.5)
On Farm Adaptive Researcher (OFAR)	111(94.8)	6(5.2)	22(18.8)	95(81.2)
Evaluation of Technologies	89(76.1)	28(23.9)	53(45.3)	64(54.7)
Identification of Problems	93(79.5)	24(21.5)	22(18.8)	95(81.2)
Visitation to Research Institute	107(91.5)	11(9.4)	18 (15.4)	99(84.6)
Visitation to OFAR Site	105(89.7)	12(10.3)	71(60.7)	46(39.3)

Table 2: Chi-square analysis of the fish farmers' awareness and participation in extension agents' activities ($P < 0.05$)

Variables	X^2 - value	DF	P	Remark
On farm demonstration	51.72	1	0.000	Sig.
Training of group leaders	33.14	1	0.000	Sig.
Workshop	39.48	1	0.000	Sig.
Group Discussions	54.14	1	0.000	Sig.
Fish farmers Meetings	46.96	1	0.000	Sig.
Researchers (Seminars, Workshops)	15.76	1	0.000	Sig.
Diagnostic Research	21.35	1	0.000	Sig.
On Farm Adaptive Researcher	36.75	1	0.000	Sig.
Evaluation of Technologies	46.00	1	0.000	Sig.
Identification of Problems	35.19	1	0.000	Sig.
Visitation to Research Institute	32.14	1	0.000	Sig.
Visitation to OFAR Site	40.89	1	0.000	Sig.

CONCLUSION

From the result of the study it was observed that the participation of fish farmers in extension agent activities was affected by awareness. It was discovered that the relevance of the extension agents' activities to the fish farmers affected their participation in training group leaders. The study therefore recommends that extension agents should effectively make use of all available means of communication with rural fish farmers so as to ensure that the information about agents' activities goes round and it is well received by all fish farmers for increase production and better standard of living.

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