

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AS A STRATEGY FOR TRAINING EXTENSION AGENTS FOR SMALL SCALE FARMERS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

In this paper Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as the name implies simply means the 'openness' of the teaching learning process which allows learners (students) to operate with a degree of autonomy, and self-direction despite the 'openness' or 'physical separation' of the teacher and the learner resulting in the lack of eye contact. It offers opportunity to ambitious and gifted but under privileged people who are denied the opportunity of obtaining an education through the usual channels. ODL system has emerged as the most potential mode to reach out to a large number of learners and train them with best quality inputs. In the context of small scale farmers, training is operationalised as teaching so as to be fitted, qualified and proficient. The purpose of training is to impart knowledge and skills to an individual so that he can perform some desirable tasks which result in greater professional competence.

Therefore, this paper aims at discussing the concepts of ODL and training and the following issues and challenges: the training requirements of the small scale farmers; the organization of farmer training programmes; competency development for extension agents to work with farmers suggested strategies for enhancing farmers education and finally policy implications for training of extension agents for farmers through ODL.

Keywords: Open, Distance, Learning, Training, Extension, Agents, Small, Scale, Farmers.

INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) can be seen as a strategy or instrument of development as evidenced in the Nigerian Education, National policy and National Development ideologies. Moreover, most countries of the world have made education the cornerstone of their training for national development. This is informed by the vital role education plays in all spheres of human endeavour whether economic or technological development. Jegede (2000) first opined that this vital role of educating the citizenry include the removal of illiteracy and poverty and development of a culturally and socially tolerant people who exercise ethical and moral considerations in the national and local affairs with a community spirit. Nigeria is not left out in this quest for national development via education.

Agriculture has continued to be the major set for, or the economy. This is reflected by the bulk of the population acquiring their living from it with their growing development of agro-industries in the rural areas, it should be expected that the dependent on the agricultural sector for raw materials and internal markets for its produce will increase more than ever before. This is the rationale for the heavy investment in agriculture and the priority position in the national development plan. In pursuance of this objective, the major challenge is the production of trainee and competent manpower in agricultural extension and /or rural development. The Nigerian small scale farmers who are the focus of the rural development programme are faced with the problem of poverty, disease and ignorance. Part of the difficulty in reaching them and helping them to cope with their problem is that getting persons with the desirable disposition and attitude for rural development of adequate facilities necessary for the training competent staff, in technical agriculture and extension, who in turn will educate farmers in the acquisition and use of new knowledge and skills essential to improved agricultural production and rural environment.

In nearly every part of Nigeria, we always encounter growing restlessness about the criticism or the ability of agricultural extension systems to cope effectively with agricultural development in particular and rural problem in general. This feeling generates a demand for the continued training of agricultural extension and rural development workers. This is so because the success of any organization and/ or programme depends on the extent to which it has articulate and competent professional staff to execute its plan efficiently.

The need to provide substantial, adequate and relevant training to personnel working with the small scale farmers in predominantly non-literate societies is perhaps more important than general staff training and development. Prewett spoke to this point when he asserted that “extension’s capital stock and investment is carried in its personnel. The degree of progress we make as an extension service depends on the recruitment and training of new workers who come into the organization” (Prewett 1998, 43). In Nigeria as in most developing countries of the world with a predominantly agricultural economy, the production of trainee manpower in agriculture remains a major bottleneck to agricultural development. Where some trained staff is available, its development and effective use has been shown to be faulty. The training function is probably the most single critical function in the effective use of human resources to meet today’s pressing manpower needs.

The problem of training extension agents for small scale farmers is inherent in the nature and characteristic of the small farmers themselves, the socio-physiological and attitudinal/behavioural orientation, training level and training needs of those who work with them and the ability and capacity of training institution (ODL) to develop and deliver training programs relevant and appropriate to the needs of the extension agents (EAS) and the small scale farmers (SSF). Effective effort in staff training and development should focus on the modification of these constraints.

THE CONCEPT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AND TRAINING

Open and Distance Learning as the name implies simply means the “Openness” of the teaching learning process which allows students (learners) to operate with the degree of autonomy and self-direction despite the ‘apartness’ or ‘physical separation of the teacher and learner resulting in the lack of eye contact. It offers opportunity to ambitious and gifted but under privileged people who are denied the opportunity of obtaining an education through the usual channels. It takes care of individuals, discontent with their socio-economic strata who try to change the strata in the face of many difficulties (Kanwa 2001, 21). According to Clark 2004, 32), open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a way of providing opportunities that are characteristic by the separation of teacher and learner in time or place or both time and place; It is a learning system that is certified in some way by an instruction or agency; it involves the use of a variety of media, including print and electronic, it is a two-way communication that allows the learners and tutors to interact with the possibility of occasional face-to-face meeting and it involves specialized division of labour in the production and delivery of courses.

Open and Distance Learning is a revolutionary concept and an innovation in education which is in response to growing demands to democratize and liberalize education, which cannot be achieved by the traditional method centred around the classroom (Ozigi 2002, 16 – 17). Distance education or distance learning grew out of the need for a concept wider than correspondence study that could encompass new communications technology for the delivery of education at a distance (Peters 1999, 38). Although the term has become widely accepted, it has inherent problems with regards to its exact meaning and scope. However, every attempt to define distance learning refers to the separation of teacher and student as well as other illuminative perspectives.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM

Open and Distance Learning system have the following merits:

- ODL improves the existing teaching force as well as trains new teacher through other methods complementary to current teacher education practices so that the Universal Basic Education objectives can be achieved/attained on schedule.
- It raises the literacy level of the population incrementally so that the goals of Education for All (ETA) shall be met on schedule.
- It enhances community ownership and participation in the management and provision of education at all levels nation wide especially via Community Resource/Study Centres.
- Overcoming physical distance: ODL can overcome the problem of physical distance for learners in remote locations who are unable or unwilling to physically attend a campus. Also, learners and teacher are geographically separated because teacher in the urban settings (an instruct learners in the rural settings (COL 2000, 24).
- Expanding the limited number of places available: ODL can expand the limited number of places available for – campus – based institutions which are few in number and which have stringent entrance requirements.
- In addition, ODL provide “just in time” training and courses at school or workplace; effectiveness is copying with mass education and also serve as source of generating revenues for institutions.
- Utilized for a variety of learning situation: Fulltime, part-time, under graduate and graduate, certifications and continuing education.

THE CONCEPT OF TRAINING

The concept of training connotes different things to different people in different organizations. In the context of the small scale farmers, training is operationalized as teaching so as to be fitted, qualified and proficient. The purpose of training is to impart knowledge and skills to an individual so that he can perform some desirable tasks. McCormick and Triffin (2003, 81) conceptualized training as “any planned and organized effort that is specifically designed to help individuals develop increasing capabilities” The definition suggests that training is a personnel function which aim to help workers develop their abilities in order to fit properly to the world of work in the performance of their daily activities. It is the process by which an organization seeks, in a planned, coordinated and continuous manner, to develop in all employees, those

understandings, skills and attitudes that will maximize the individual's present and future efficiency on the job and the organizations overall effectiveness (Sigh 1999, 82 – 83).

It includes all the activities aimed at improving the ability of the extension workers to do their work, including the acquisition of information, development of abilities and fostering attitudes which result in greater professional competence.

The significance of the process lies in its influence on staff achievement, motivation and personnel competence on the job. This conceptual operationalization of training emphasizes organization growth and health as well as employee development and welfare. It focuses on three important elements:

1. Improvement of individual knowledge, skills and attitudes,
2. Contribution of training to effectiveness and efficiency on the job
3. Attainment of organizational expectations, goals and objectives.

Lukomski (2001, 28) defines training as job oriented learning which takes place under various forms of sponsorship for various periods of time but oriented towards a specific occupation. It differs from work experience (learning on the job) because it has some type of defined structure. That is, it is scheduled for a certain number of hours during a certain period of time and generally both classroom instruction and workshop are included. Training like most conceptual ideas in modern society, has evolved and developed over time.

In this paper, an attempt is made to address the following issues and challenges that is, to discuss the training of extension agents to work with Nigerian small scale farmers. The training requirement of the small farmers as guiding principals for the operational competencies of the extension workers are enunciated. A modus operandi for the implementation of a policy implication are drawn.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE TRAINING OF SMALL SCALE FARMERS

The following issues are considered crucial for training of small scale farmers as discuss below:

1. Training Requirements of the Small Scale Farmers

The training requirement of the Small Scale Farmers (SSF) is determined by the actual tasks which they perform in the enactment of their production, family welfare and bread-weaning role. The knowledge of the management practices of the crops and livestock which engage the highest proportion of their time is important, so also is the skill, abilities and decision making proficiency essential to their family survival in the farm environment.

The training requirements of Small Scale Farmers should be planned in relation to their crops and animals production needs as well as their level of knowledge and what they see as their most important areas of training. Because farmers training are a little bit different from general skill training, there is greater need for the

plan to be consistent with the farmers needs. Rao (1999, 36) refers to farmers' training as "an intensive learning activity for a group of selected farmers, assisted by competent trainers to understand and practice the skills required in the adoption of technology at a where appropriate facilities exist and at a time and duration considered suitable by farmers". This concept of farmer training articulates the basic requirement for their training. The need for training subsumes a deficit or challenge situation in the knowledge, status and skill level of the practicing farmers as well as the availability of an appropriate applicable information, the use of which will correct the challenging or problem situation.

Training should centre for the needs of both the easy and hard to reach farmers. For the "easy to reach farmers" training needs and requirement should be planned at their levels of cognitive ability while the training of "hard to reach" farmers should begin from first principles, basic essentials of farming and livestock production. Such information as is available for the later group should be broad imparted in small compact modules.

i **Objective of Farmers Training:**

The primary objective of farmer training according to Sohal and Singh (2003, 18) "shall be to attract genuinely interested farmers who are either self motivated or externally stimulated to take art in a training course" The aim shall be to impart new knowledge, teach better skills and bring about more effective performance in the production of food and livestock. A well planned training programme should aim at the encouragement of mutual interaction, acquaintance and exchange of ideas and experience between farmers, extension workers, subject matter specialists and agricultural research scientists. It should also inspire reciprocity of ideas between farmers themselves and enhance their confidence in agricultural research results and extension service assistance.

ii **Typology of Small Scale Farmers Courses:**

The training of farmers can be accomplished using the traditional and contemporary extension teaching methods or designed as organized formal farmers training programmes. In some cases, specialized single commodity training courses may be mounted to meet the demand of a specific group. Also, general courses for young school leavers and prospective farmers may be organized. (see table 1)

Table 1. Traditional and Modern Training Approaches

	Item	Traditional Approach	Modern Approach
1	Unit of focus	Individual	Interdependent work teams, Interpersonal relationships for better group processes and group achievement
2	Content of Training	Technical and administrative skill oriented	Technical, interpersonal and group memberships skill, communication, problems solving, conflict management, helping others etc.
3	Target	Primarily front line employees and supervisors. Top managerial staff usually trained outside the organization	All levels-usually, initial intervention starts with top management
4	Teaching method	Subject matter and teacher oriented	Participant oriented, experiential learning, problem solving and subject matter centred
5	Goals	Acquisition of knowledge and skill	Adaptation and change; application of knowledge and skill to most needed areas.
6	View of Organisation	Discrete	An interdependent system. Systems approach

In general farmers training may be formal or non-formal. Formal training tends to be more institutionalized and of longer duration, usually 1-3

months or even longer. The training of farmers through organized courses is usually an intensive teaching activity which is carefully planned and meticulously implemented with a view to educating the participants systematically and thoroughly about a pre-mediated subjected matter.

The less formal approach uses the contemporary extension teaching methods of: Individual contact; group-method and result demonstration and mass media contact, less formal methods are usually non-institutionalized and include village level training programmes conducted for 1 or 2 days. This can be demonstrations, adaptive trail result discussion, or production oriented training at the village or farm site with emphasis on critical steps in effective crop and animal production. The assumption in this type of extension training approach is that the extension teacher has purposeful and relevant information transfer objective to which favourable voluntary exposure of small scale farmer – learner is assured.

The different types of training are complementary to each other in the determination of training requirements of small scale farmers and the design of the training programmes to meet these needs. A successful training programme depends on:

1. The availability of appropriate and adaptable technology whose economic and other qualities are superior to that presently in use.
2. A desire by small scale farmers acquainted with subject matter specialist (SMSs) research scientists, and others who can be of dependable assistance in the resolution of their farm and home problems.
3. The existence of a large group of farmers who will on their own initiative seek information on farming.
4. The availability of trained, qualified motivated and dedicated extension teachers and SMSS competent in the science of agricultural technology and the art of its transfer to willing farmer learners.
5. The availability of necessary physical facilities and infrastructures – classrooms, demonstration plots and equipments, teaching aids, etc.

In the determination of the training needs of the small scale farmers, the specific work environment of the trainee is of utmost importance.

Also the professional capacity of the training institution (ODL) is important. Because agriculture (farming) is a complex occupation, the small scale farmers require several discrete on concurrent training exposures for effective performance. A variety of these training areas will be discussed briefly.

a. Technological Transfer Training

An important aspect of the farmer training programme is the encouragement of meaningful interaction between the small farmers on one hand and the extension workers and research scientists on the other. In this interaction process, both the farmer and the intervention system need competency in technology determination and technology transfer. A good training programme for skill transfer in a predominantly small scale farmers economy should aim at using the more accommodating and brilliant small farmers as para-professionals in the technology transfer within the small farmer system.. The small group of farmer instructions should be well trained in the art of information transfer to their kins who need it. The use of multi-media learning situations via radio and television recordings has been shown to be very effective in skill development in information transfer.

b. Production Management Training

This is that training which the farmer gets in the art and science of operating a single or combination of enterprises on a farm. It includes both the technical knowledge and skills in the production of crops and livestock as well as mental capability to take correct decisions.

The small scale farmers can be trained in production through ODL formal institutional programmes which emphasize classroom teaching/tutoring and on-the farm practicals. The training activities should include approve practices which will result in increased productivity in the farmers' chosen enterprise, farm business management use of farm inputs and overall efficient farm administration among others.

c. Functional Literacy Training

This, in the context of the small scale farmers, may be described as a means of helping the adult to acquire the reading and writing skills and understand work instruction for better job implementation. Functional literacy is important to small farmer economy because the functional literate person is better able to improve his professional skills and personal status more proficiently than the non-literate person. Therefore, the literates small farmer will be able to apply his knowledge better to the skilled occupation of farming.

It is for the above reason that non-literate SSFs require training in reading and writing skills. The implementation of adult literacy programmes are usually planned as evening classes and participation is often free and voluntary.

In agriculture, functional literacy programmes should be regarded as a supplement to agricultural extension and not a replacement or separate activity. Once the SSFs acquire the basic skills of reading and writing, they are better able to follow and understand extension teaching and participate in future farmer training programmes.

d. Farmer Workshops:

These are training sessions of relatively short duration designed to train farmers in the acquisition of a single skill related to a single farm enterprise. Each workshop is made up of an interested group of farmers numbering 30 – 45

participants, who are relatively similar in knowledge on the subject of workshop. It is often conducted by the extension workers with the expert assistance of subject matter specialists.

2. THE ORGANISATION OF FARMER TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Extension farmer training programmes need the informed and confident support of Government. This administrative support should be evident in a written policy backed by appropriate legislative action. Among several issues to which such a policy statement should address itself are:

1. The purpose of farmer training,
2. statement of intent to train
3. Government functionary to which the training responsibility is specifically assigned
4. the organization, implementation and funding for specific types of training to be undertaken
5. determination of training needs
6. provision for occasional evaluation
7. administrative accountability and reporting to appropriate authority of government.

It is out of such a policy statement that an appropriate organizational frame work for implementing a successful farmer training programme will develop. The programme of training should specify clearly, at least, four areas of activity:

1. training objective
2. planning for training effort
3. implementation of the training programme
4. evaluation and follow-up.

Training Objective

Even though broad training objectives may have been slated for farmer training programmes, precise objectives should be specified for each training session and activity. It is important that participants should have a clear image of their expectations at each training course. The specificity of objectives for each training effort helps in the selection of small farmer participants and evaluation and follow – up after the course.

Planning for Training Effort:

One of the most important determinants of a successful training programme is a meticulously planned course content appropriate and relevant to the training needs of the participating farmers. The course content should be well planned and made known to the participants. The course content should be planned to:

1. impart relevant knowledge on newest production practices to farmers consistent with their requirements as to enhance their ability to secure higher yields in their production efforts,

2. provide direct and clear answers to specific problems and questions which may arise due to complexity of the subject matter being taught;
3. elicit problems from farmer to which the training programme may not have direct and immediate solution, but may require further investigation and research;
4. provide opportunity for dialogue and exchange of experience among farmers and between extension instructional facilitators and research scientists.

Usually, the planning process should be given due consideration to the duration of the course, time and venue of training should be planned for in consultation with the participating farmers.

Implementing the Training Programme:

The immediate post-planning activity in the organization of farmer training programmes is the wide dissemination of programme document to prospective trainees calling for participation. The organizations of a farmer training programme should ensure that the content and sequence of the planned programme is adhered to and where changes become necessary, that participants are informed in advance. There should be frequent demonstration sessions to enable the farmers observed the practiced skills to which they have been exposed during lectures.

The participating small scale farmers should be appropriately recognized (certification) at the end of the training session.

Evaluation and Follow-up:

The information and knowledge transfer in the formal training sessions is only component of the small farmers training programme. The true cost of an effective training programme is the extent to which farmers accurately apply knowledge and skills gained during training to the practical problems and production process on their farms. This calls for evaluation and follow-up.

Evaluation and follow-up can be operationized through personal visits by staff of the training agencies and annual conventions of trainees. The personal visit allows the training staff to assess, first hand, either the deficiency of the training approach or the difficulty of the farmers in applying to their practical problem situation.

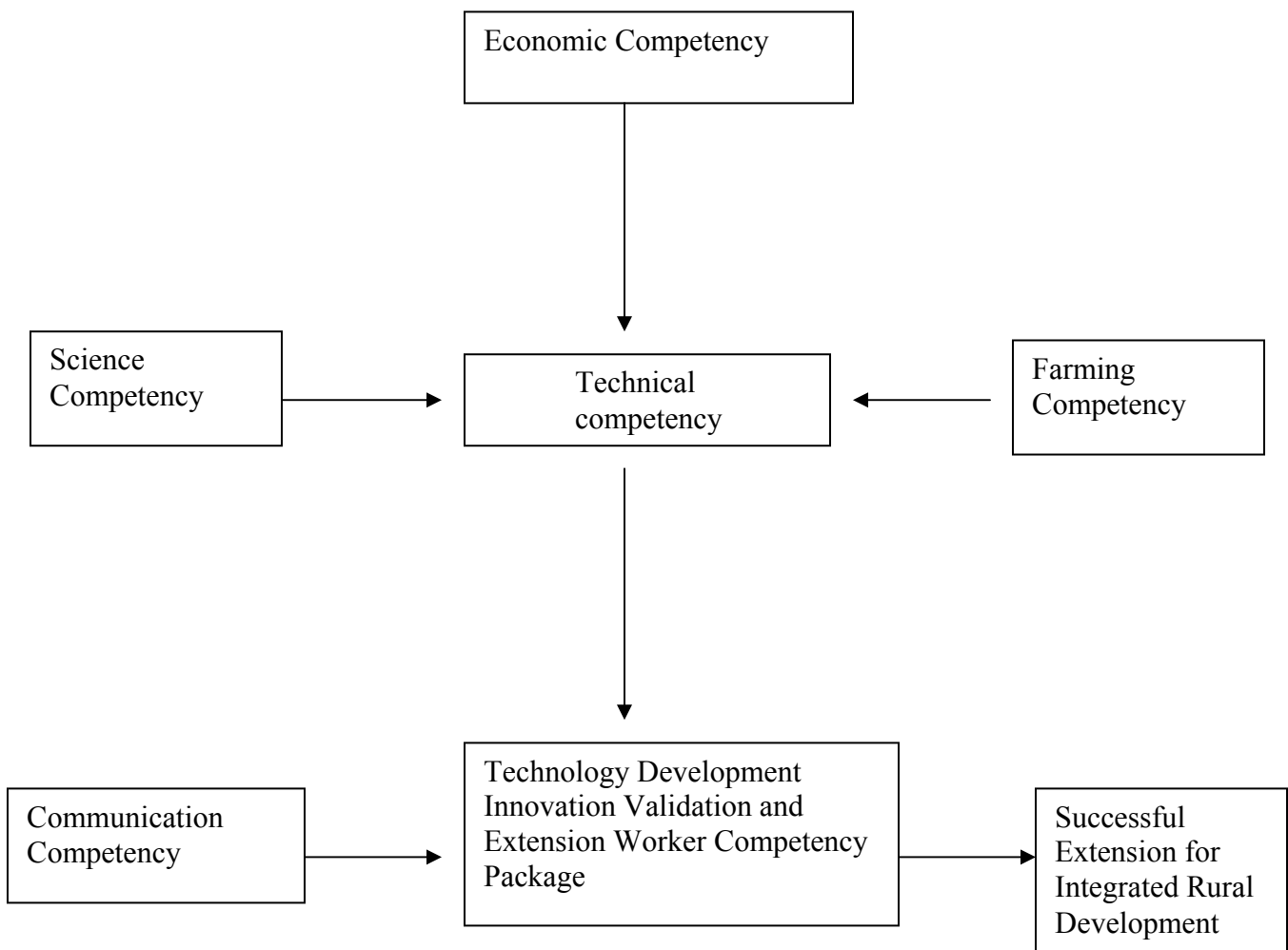
The convening of annual meetings of trainees sustains the training spirit among trainees and helps the trainers to have a feeling of how the small farmers are doing as a group, since their last training exposure.

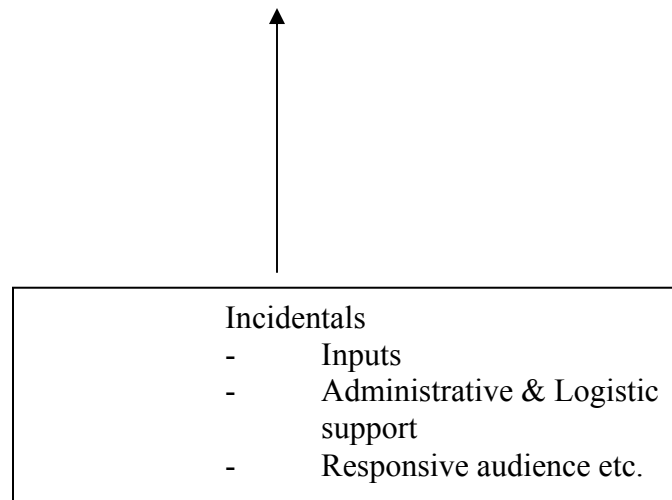
3. COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT FOR EXTENSION WORK WITH SMALL SCALE FARMERS

The job of the extension trainee is educational in nature and it is offered to a voluntary audience. This role suggests the need for a category of staff who have knowledge, skill, understanding and practical application of subject matter in agriculture and rural socio-economics. This competency is essential to his provision of the desired assistance to the rural farmer and his household.

Usually, the information which the small farmer trainer provides is assumed superior to that which the farmer-learner has. In this information transfer effort, the extension teacher's credibility is constantly being tested to validate the innovation. A credible reliable, empathetic and trusting relationship is established with the farmers when the extension on teacher has developed a competency package equal to his educational role. The development of this package presupposes the acquisition of scientific, technical, economic, farming and communication competencies. The components articulating the competency development process is shown in figure I.

Fig. 1: Framework for Competency and Extension Manpower Development in Agriculture





1. **Technical Competency:**

The core of the sub set of the competency model is technical competency. It represents the level of knowledge, understanding and experience which the farmer trainer has relevant to the crops and animal which the small scale farmers produce, the production practices involved, the status of his home and family living and the physical environment in which they live and work. Technical competency training should include knowledge aptitude and psychomotor skill development to actually perform specific tasks in each step of a job.

2. **Scientific Competency:**

The technical competency of the extension teacher requires knowledge of basic science – physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, etc. Agriculture is an applied science and its practice require fundamental scientific knowledge. Finally, a basic understanding of the philosophy of science , the ability to conduct simple replicable experiments and adaptive trials which objectively validate innovations is essential for the optimal development of the extension teachers competency package.

3. **Economic Competency:**

This is the ability to weigh alternative product input and product commercialization strategies to determine whether the adoption of a given technology or mode of behaviour is self sufficient for minimal advantage. Included in the possible production input factors are guaranteed product demand and market price, planting materials, fertilizers and chemicals, credit, etc.

4. **Farming Competency:**

This is the skill and willingness to efficiently perform the range of physical tasks involved in the production of crops and animals. This should not be limited to the extension teacher’s ability to perform, at least, the range of physical tasks within the existing competency of the small scale farmers.

5. Communication Competency:

This is the ability of the extension teacher to synthesize and present information convincingly to the small scale farmers, ensuring its understanding and use. It includes the ability to plan, organize, present and obtain feedback from the small farmer group. The trainer should be able to succinctly use words to secure correct meaning for the audience and should have information that is relevant and applicable to the problems of the small scale farmers.

SUSGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING SMALL SCALE FARMERS EDUCATION IN ODL

- i. Development of technology in agric extension is a result of human ability to harness a central force which flows through creation and conversion to daily needs for shelter, food production, production of transportation etc. as well as such vital development imprint and which studies in agricultural extension related areas now imply, can not be left to small scale farmers along. This is why it is expedient that a body be formed to enhance Agricultural Extension Education (AEE) among small farmers through a carefully articulated and detailed research into the problems with a view to finding solutions in Open and Distance Learning.
- ii. Strategies for enhancing SSFs education should be noted in the soil of people. Obanya (2005, 26) advocated that vocational and adult education should have a bearing on the environment such as teaching agriculture in schools in rural areas. Through such a study, the application of mathematics by way of crop spacing ridges spacing, science by way of effect of moisture, air and heat on germination demonstrated practically can be learnt.
- iii. Educational concessions given or to be given to farmers in areas of education should be designed to increase their access to education, That is, to get more of their number educated. These measures should be in form of free education, special schools for small farmers and lower cut off points where applicable.
- iv. Setting up a national consortium on open schooling pf purpose of coordination in matters of policy issues, priorities, long term national and state needs, establishment of resource centres for development of materials development of human resources for the open learning system, monitoring and evaluation of its performance etc. This can also be applied with special consideration to farmer education programmes.
- v. Incentives and automatic scholarship for literate small scale farmers in open institution or ODL pursuing agricultural extension courses/programmes.
- vi. Policy on Distance Education shall devote considerable emphasis on the issue of farmer education and economic empowerment.

- vii. Commission for Human Rights should encourage farmers to enroll in ODL by undertaking mass literacy campaign for small scale farmers through ODL system. The commission can enforce this by giving financial and moral support in the form of counseling to those able and willing to embark on agricultural extension programmes.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING OF EXTENSION AGENTS FOR SMALL SCALE FARMERS.

The training of extension workers for small scale farmers in Nigeria is a matter of top priority if government programmes on increased food and fibre production, the reactivation of the cash crop industry and integrated rural development are to be achieved. Once a nation decides on the improvement of the small scale farmer welfare and production capacity as a primary strategy for agricultural development, the demand will expand for new skills and increasing numbers of agricultural workers and technicians. It is important for the economy to have a population pool from which this category of skilled workers and proficient farmers can be drawn. It is for this reason that a National policy on Agricultural Education directed specifically at the Nigerian small scale farmer, should be formulated. Such policy should specify the purpose of training and the appropriate institutions to be charged with responsibility for training. A National training programme needs to be worked out with specific implications for the size of the extension staff, training logistics and training implementation mechanisms.

i. Size of the Extension Staff:

The effective coverage of the small farmer population in Nigeria will depend primarily on the physical number size of the extension staff. The recent Food and Agricultural Organisation country survey suggesting an extension worker: Small farmer ratio of 1:2.000 is still very much unattainable given the limited training capacity and available trainable persons. There is a general loss of confidence in the incentive systems available to the agricultural worker both through training opportunities or remuneration and fringe benefits.

Therefore, there is a need first to restore confidence in agricultural professionalism so as to attract young men and women in sufficient numbers to our present training institutions. The size of the extension staff can only be beefed up through a concerted training programme expanded to meet the demand and sufficiently rigorous and through education to inculcate the necessary and sufficient competencies.

2. Training Logistics:

The curriculum of present trainees is based in favour of technical competence to the exclusion of other competencies required of the extension worker. Physical facilities are in short supply, especially library facilities and books, laboratory space and equipments, field training facilities, tractors, sprayers, animal, etc. Finally, the problem of what to teach and how to impact it is yet to be resolved.

This analysis suggests a need to expand logistic support for agricultural manpower development to work with the small scale farmers.

3. Training Implementation Mechanism:

The training of agricultural extension workers for the small scale farmers can be implemented within the frame work of the existing training institutions. The development of the existing training institutions. The development of extension manpower at all levels is happily under the direct control of Federal or State Governments. Consequently, policy modifications can be easily accomplished.

The training of all staff at the pre-service level should take a holistic approach, a general honours degree concept, a specialization deferred to other levels of training where staff are being assigned to narrowly specialized duties requiring specific training. The implementation of an effective extension training programme based on the competency packaged model requires that:

1. trainees who show aptitude or opt for agric extension (farmer trainer) at pre-service training level should be identified and exposed to intensive courses to prepare them for work with the small scale farmers;
2. trainees should have access to learning experiences in varying degrees to competency development at the cognitive, effective and psychomotor domain in ODL. Whatever cannot be learnt at these levels should be complemented through induction, in-service and on-the-job training;
3. the place of practical classes in extension manpower development has always been emphasized, but hardly fully implemented. The acquisition of farming and technical competency skills can only result from frequent practice;
4. the extension worker competency grid requires life long learning. Therefore, as technology changes and now information becomes available, the extension worker must update his competency level consistent with available state of knowledge.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

ODL system has emerged as the most potential mode or strategy to reach out a large number of extension teachers and train them with best quality inputs to work with small scale farmers.

In most countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, the small farmer occupy an important position in the strategy for increasing food production. Heavy investments in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension are among the supporting efforts of governments to improve the welfare of the small farmers and satisfy the food needs of the industrial and commercial urban population. This requires the development of the small scale farmers ability to increase food and fibre per unit areas of land via the

application of improved technology. There is also the need to expand land under cultivation and improve methods of production, management, processing, storage and distribution.

The methods of small farmer production are however not efficient under present levels of knowledge. The farmers must be provided with new knowledge, skills and necessary motivation to produce, using present levels of known agricultural technology if they have to contribute to national development. Most governments of the developing world have coped with this problem through the development of appropriate institutions, organizations and service.

In Nigeria, this has been through teaching, research and extension. Teaching involves itself with manpower development at conventional or Open University, intermediate, technical –vocational and farmer levels. Research has been concerned with the business of fundamental inquiry into the development of appropriate technology. Agric extension has the role of technology transfer and use.

This paper discusses the third order objective of government, that of catering for the needs of SSFs through the training of agricultural extension workers.

In order for the extension workers to assist the SSFs more efficiently they must be well trained in subject matter of agricultural production and have competency in information transfer.

An attempt has been made in this paper to use the competency development grid as a theoretical framework for the design and implementation of a training programme for extension teachers to work with SSFs. The analytical concept suggests the development of scientific, technical, economic, farming and communication competencies into a proficiency package essential for the effective performance of the training and advisory role of the extension workers.

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