

Legislated Policy as the Basis for Effective Extension Delivery: Lessons from the United Kingdom

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Abstract

The paper compares the extension policies and programmes of Britain and Nigeria. Extension policy in Nigeria is characterized as stemming from ad hoc arrangements which are compounded by political instability and external locus of control. The United Kingdom in contrast has had focused extension policies supported by legislation, and which derived from the peculiar experience of that country. It is observed that the Agriculture Act of 1944 provided the basis for the success of British agriculture where farmers accounting for only 1.2 percent of the population produce in excess of national demand, while in Nigeria farmers amounting to 70 percent of the population cannot produce enough to meet domestic needs. It is recommended that in view of the positive correlation between legislated extension policy and high performance, a National Summit on Extension (NSE) be urgently convened to fashion out a milieu-sensitive policy document to be presented to the National Assembly for passage into law. Specific policy options suggested include devolution of extension delivery to the third tier of government, cost-sharing funding arrangement between the three tiers of government and the creation of an Agricultural Extension Tax Fund (AETF) from taxes on agro-allied industries to fund extension in the country.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

From ancient times organized societies have tried to increase the yield of farmers by making available to them information on new or improved methods of farming, generated within or imported from without (Bne Saad 1990; Delman, 1991). In modern terms such stimulating intervention into the normal practices of farmers is known as "agricultural extension". The term "extension" developed in England around 1850 when the universities of Oxford and Cambridge began to brainstorm on how they could serve the educational needs of the population living close to them. Thus "university extension" emerged where itinerant teachers went about giving lectures to the urban population in literary and social topics, but by 1890s agricultural topics were included for the rural population (Jones, 1994)

A series of enactments during the late 1890 established country based local government, created a board of Agriculture and promoted agricultural education. The laws also allocated funds for agricultural extension work to be initiated. Extension staff were sourced from agricultural departments which were being created in institutions of

higher education. Funding responsibilities were shared by central and local county authorities (Jones, 1994).

By the time Britain colonized Nigeria the system outlined above applied to Britain. Extension in its formal sense was introduced to Nigeria by the colonial administration. This paper compares the extension programmes and policies of Britain and Nigeria.

2.0 AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN NIGERIA

There was no definite policy and goal statement on agricultural extension during the colonial era of 1861-1950. Extension activities came up out of unstated and uncoordinated plans and ad hoc arrangements between 1951 and 1960 (Osuntogun and Olufokunbi, 1986). This is corroborated by Obinne (1994) who stated that extension in Africa started mostly in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Okwu and Ejembi (2001), the conventional ministry of Agriculture extension system operated by the post colonial national government was located in a division or department of the regional, and later state ministry of agriculture. This system has been characterized as having an unfavourable extension agent- farmer ratio, lack of agents definite pattern of field movement among villages, and lack of definite plan of work and calendar of operations. Furthermore, lack of mobility and poor remuneration resulted in low moral and a high rate of absenteeism.

Alongside the ministry of agriculture system, faculties of agriculture using research findings from the various academic departments of the faculty and extension staff, attempted to improve the agricultural practices of nearby rural communities. Examples include the Okpuje project of University of Nigeria Nsukka and the Zaria Rural Change Project of A.B.U. Zaria (Okwu and Ejembi, 2001).

In the 1970s the Agricultural Development Project Extension System introduced by Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) replaced the ministry of Agriculture Extension System. The ADP system uses the Training and visit extension delivery approach, and was an apt response to the weaknesses of its predecessor given the set of organizational principles on which it is structured. These include (i) professionalism (the village extension agent devotes all his time to agricultural extension. This contrasts with the ministry system where the extension agent took additional roles of statistic taking, tax collection and enforcer of government regulations, these roles often conflicted with his extension function. (ii) Time-bound work schedule, that is, fixed schedule of visits by VEAS (iii) concentration of effort (iv) Regular and continuous training of agents, manageable agent/farmer ratio (v) effective research extension linkage.

In 1990 the Unified Agricultural Extension System (UAES) was introduced by the National Council on Agriculture. This system in practical terms amounts to a modification of the T&V system in that it provides for extension delivery in all sectors such as crops, livestock, fisheries, agro-forestry soil and water conservation practices are carried out by one VEA who is directly in contact with the farmer.

The Federal Government supports extension service in Nigeria through four institutions. These include the Federal Agricultural Coordinating Unit (FACU) now known as Project Coordination Unit (PCU) that coordinates and supervises the implementation of the extension system, Agricultural Projects Monitoring and Evaluation Unit (APMEU) which designs and administers monitoring and Evaluation

formats to the projects to assess the impact of the extension system. There is also the National Agricultural Extension and Liaison Services (NAERLS) with the function of supporting the extension system through the development and production of multimedia materials on innovations, and by undertaking adoption and extension-related on studies. Finally the Agricultural and Rural Management Training institute (ARMTI) provides management training for agricultural personnel.

3.0 AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN BRITAIN

Before 1946 extension (known in Britain as 'advisory services') was carried out by Agricultural advisers employed by country councils with technical backup from agricultural colleges and university department (Garforth, 2004). In 1946, under the Agricultural act of 1944, the government set up the National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAAS) to provide free services to farmers to boost agricultural production through adoption of new technologies. In 1971 NAAS combined other technical services of the ministry of agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) to form the Agricultural Development and Advisory Services (ADAS). For forty years ADAS provided free advisory service for farmers (Needham 1998).

In 1986 ADAS began the transition from providing a free service to recovering an increasing proportion of its cost from clients. Two factors have been responsible for this transition. First, was the impressive performance of UK agriculture in terms of increased production. When the NAAS was established in 1946 when Britain had just emerged from a bitter war it was not conceivable that farmers should be made to bear the cost of extension especially given the extremely urgent need for the nation to increase its agricultural production. By 1986 farmers in the UK were producing far too much, and the cost of extension services was escalating. Farmers were seen as benefiting more from extension than the nation, and so it seemed right that they paid for the service.

Secondly, the government of the day was committed to reducing the scale of government activity. This was the era of privatization of public utilities like telecommunications, water, gas and electricity supply. In the case of agriculture however, government continued to fund the provision of matters relating to public interest such as animal welfare, environmental protection and conservation.

When ADAS was providing free services to farmers, it was an agency of government. By the time it transitioned to a cost recovering agency it was outside of, but still answerable to the ministry. In 1997, government offered ADAS for sale through a tendering process, and sold it through a management team buy-out with venture capital backing. As a private company, ADAS is funded entirely through fees paid by clients (Bunney and Bawcutt, 1991; Harter, 1992; Garforth 2004).

With this historical background to programmes and policies of Nigeria and Britain, the stage is now set for us to compare the programmes and policies of the two countries. However it would be more illuminating to begin with a consideration of the theatre where the extension drama is played out.

4.0 THE BACKGROUND ENVIRONMENT

Extension does not happen in a vacuum the social context within which it takes place determines to a very large extent the character and impact of the service.

4.1 The Rural situation in Britain

Rural policy in Britain is conditioned by a different agricultural and rural situation from that in Nigeria. For instance only 1.2 percent of the population of U.K is engaged in Agriculture (Sandiford-Rossmiller, 1998). Sandiford-Rossmiller further states that out of 172,000 agricultural holdings, only 89,000 are classified as being full-time. So the rural scene is very much non-agricultural, and the pattern of employment has changed drastically.

For the agricultural population, two trends are being observed in their activities (Sandiford-Rossmiller, 1998). First there is what is referred to as farm shops, woodland management, country-side sports (e.g. Hunting, shooting and fishing), and agro-tourism. The other trend toward “pluri-activity”, which refers to income-generating activities that are not farm-based such as factory, shop or office work. The traditional way of life in the rural areas is therefore coming under severe pressure to such an extent that there is a debate on what defines rurality in Britain.

4.2 The Rural situation in Nigeria

In contrast to what obtains in Britain, the rural scenery in Nigeria is almost entirely agricultural. Up to 75% percent of the rural population are farmers and together they produce 80% of the country’s agricultural output. Most of the farm activities in Nigeria are carried out with crude implements like the hoe and cutlass, and on a subsistence level. Poverty is therefore a chief characteristic of the rural population. Rural people in Nigeria contend with hunger, disease and a severe lack of the most basic infrastructure like roads, health care facilities, education electricity and telephones that elsewhere are taken for granted (African Development Bank (ADB), 2003). Some communities are cut off entirely during the rain season. Rather than receiving migrants from the cities like in the UK, the reverse is the case as youth continue to leave the rural areas in search of white collar employment in the cities (Ogujiofor and Okonjo, 2001)

The Non-agricultural sector is poorly developed and in most areas the people have to go to the urban areas to access basic services like agro processing, banking e.t.c. People in the rural areas still hold fast to their cherished traditional beliefs and customs that are sometimes described as unprogressive.

5.0 EXTENSION POLICY & PROGRAMMES IN BRITAIN AND NIGERIA

“Policy” has been defined as “a form of directed action which indicates as clearly as possible what one wants to achieve, how one wants to do it, and how much time will be taken to achieve the set goals” (van den Ban and Hawkins, 1996). A programme on the other hand refers to a set of activities designed to implement a policy. Thus the term “programme” and “policy” are often used concomitantly.

The crucial importance of a well thought out policy to the effectiveness of an extension programme has been well documented. Contado (1997) for instance noted that “countries that have enacted extension policy through legislative action tend to

have well-organized, financially stable extension systems that have sustained effectiveness and cumulative impact.” The Global consultation on Agricultural Extension also recommended, “where possible, agricultural extension policy should be formally enacted through legislative action to provide a stable foundation, an explicit mandate and clear direction for developing and executing programmes” (Swanson 1990). It should be quickly noted here that extension policy is but a subset of the broader agricultural policy or the “agricultural development mix” (Jones, 1986), and it follows that a properly articulated agricultural policy should support a viable extension policy.

The United Kingdom of Britain has been fortunate in having focused agricultural (and extension policies) which were supported by appropriate legislations and which derived from the peculiar experience of that country. Immediately after the World war when there was urgent need to increase agricultural production, the agriculture Act 1944 was promulgated, under which government set up the National Agricultural Advisory Service (ADAS) to provide free services to farmers with the aim of boosting production through the adoption of new technology. The government of UK made the services free because the farmers in a post war situation were too poor to pay for these services, and at the same time it was in the interest of the government to produce more food to support post war reconstruction and return to normalcy.

When the situation changed by 1986 government policy charged accordingly. The government was no longer dealing with a farming population that had been exhausted by a bitter war, a population on whom the nation depended for the increased production of food. This time there was a small population of big-time farmers who was responsible for producing far above the nation’s requirement. For this class of farmers, requiring them to pay for extension services constitutes no burden. To them farming is a business and they have effective linkage with the industrial and financial sectors. They have ready access to markets both domestic and international with strong government support, and credit facilities are available and uncomplicated. Indeed in the U.K policy and programmes serve the interest of both the government and the farmers, and are designed locally.

In contrast extension policy and programmes in Nigeria have always had an external locus. During the colonial times it was the colonial government that designed extension services, and for the benefit of the British economy (Adekunle and Adewale, 1998). The new postcolonial government continued with the structures that they inherited. Later on the direction of extension policy was determined by the World Bank with the adoption of the T&V through the Agricultural Development Project (ADP) system. Today the same World Bank is pushing for privatization of extension services and the government of Nigeria seems to be taking heed.

Nigeria has never had an extension policy that has been promulgated by the legislature (or even a military government) assigning explicit mandate and providing a clear direction for the development and execution of extension programmes. As Osuntogun and Olufokunbi (1986) have aptly put it “Extension activities came out of unstated and uncoordinated plans and multiplicity of related activities. Extension has not been treated on its own merit but as an appendage of agriculture, which in any case is not directed by a clear policy. The only scenario that looked like an extension policy was the adoption of ADP system using T&V approach. But then this was not backed by legislation and was the initiative of the World Bank. Thus when the World

Bank withdrew from funding the programme it lost its vitality and is operating now as a government bureaucracy with the staff only going through the motions.

The government has always expressed an interest in increasing food production and attaining self-sufficiency (Adekunle and Adewale, 1998).

These objectives are expected to be met by peasant farmers who form up to 70% of the population, and who use crude implements for their activities. Government has not fashioned out an extension system that is geared at achieving national goals, and at the same time pursuing the interest and welfare of farmers. The T&V system favoured the richer farmers who could afford to buy the inputs that went with recommended practices (Jiggins, Samantra and Olawoye, 1997). Furthermore, the T&V system overlooked the complex management required in the risk-prone, mixed cropping adopted by most resource-poor farmers, and favoured mono-cropping pattern backed by recommendations from research stations. A home grown agricultural policy would have considered the peculiar situations of the different classes of farmers and would have ensured that resource-poor farmers do not suffer unduly.

The World Bank has its own agenda and is not committed to the interest of any country. It is unfortunate that extension in Nigeria has been left at the mercy of this institution. The nonperformance of extension in Nigeria can be traced to this mistake. The T&V, while the Bank was involved in its financing, seemed to hold some promise, but once it withdrew its sponsorship the whole system crumbled. The reason for this is obvious. First the concept of the ADPs did not originate from the government, and so the government could not "own" it. Once the owners withdrew there was no commitment to see it work, since it was such a foreign idea. However it would have been a different matter if the government adopted it and provided appropriate legal framework to back its implementation. In this way the system would continue and funding guaranteed irrespective of the government in power.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The Agriculture Act of 1944 in Britain and subsequent Law the basis for the success of agriculture in that country. Thus farmers accounting provided for 1.2% of the total population are able to produce more than enough for U.K while in Nigeria a farming population of 70% of the total population cannot meet domestic requirements of food and fibre. There is therefore an urgent need to convene an expert group on agricultural extension involving extension experts, practitioners rural development experts, agricultural economists, rural sociologists, agronomists, and other stakeholders to fashion out a comprehensive policy on agric extension for Nigeria. The following should be part of the policy:

1. Given the multifaceted heterogeneity of Nigeria, the local government should be made to assume a more active role in the design, funding and execution of extension policy.
2. A cost-sharing regimen should be adopted to assign specific funding obligations to the three tiers of government.
3. An Agricultural Extension Tax Fund (AETF) should be established from taxes on agro-allied industries to further provide funding for agricultural extension.

Furthermore, the expert group should commission indigenous knowledge studies in all parts of the country so that the policy will be sensitive to the culture, ecology etc of the people. This document should then be passed into law by the National assembly. This is the only way to revitalize the extension system in Nigeria to meet national aspirations.

The World Bank is currently canvassing for privatization of extension. In Nigeria this cannot happen now. Where privatization has worked, farming is conducted as a business. The reality in Nigeria is that most farmers are resources-poor peasants engaged in subsistence agriculture. Government at all tiers must support them to grow out of the traditional system into technologically sophisticated entrepreneurs who can pay for advisory services.

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