Role of the Three Tiers of Government in the Transformation of Nigerian Agricultural Extension System

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Abstract
The vision in the transformation strategy is to achieve a hunger-free Nigeria through an agricultural sector that drives income growth, accelerates achievement of food and nutritional security, generates employment and transforms Nigeria into a leading player in global food markets to grow wealth for millions of farmers. In order to achieve this vision, it is imperative to clearly define the role of the three tiers of government. The study therefore sought to ascertain the role of the three tiers of government in the transformation of Nigerian agricultural extension system. Inductive and deductive reasoning through review of relevant literature was used in this philosophical paper. The major role of federal government is to reorganize the institutional framework to facilitate smooth and integrated development of agricultural potentials through the provision of a general policy framework for the guidance of all stakeholders. The state government should ensure a virile and effective agricultural extension delivery service while the local government authority is expected to mobilize farmers for accelerated agricultural and rural development through cooperative organizations and local institutions. The paper concluded that the federal, state and local government should jointly and adequately finance agricultural extension system for effective transformation of agricultural sector.

Key words: Role, government, transformation and agricultural extension.

Introduction
In the past, agriculture was the mainstay of Nigerian economy, a period when the sector was taken as a matter of importance, just as the nation was blessed with abundant natural resources. However, the situation has changed since the advent of oil boom era in the early seventies, which has made the country to shift her attention away from agriculture. Consequently, it is now becoming increasingly difficult to get food on the table of the common man (Torimiro, 2006). According to Fritschel (2003), globalization of the world’s food system represents both an opportunity for small scale farmers. Without immediate assistance from public research and extension, small- scale farmers will be increasingly marginalized by globalization and will soon lose access to even their traditional domestic market hence constituting poverty.
As observed by Akinnagbe and Ajayi (2010), today’s understanding of extension goes beyond technology transfer to facilitation; beyond training to learning and includes assisting farmers to form groups, dealing with marketing issues and partnering with a broad range of service providers and other agencies. According to Arockoy, (1998), in addition to its vast natural and human resources, Nigeria has perhaps, the largest National Agricultural Research and Extension System (NARES) in Sub-Saharan Africa today, made up of 17 commodity-based research institutes, a specialized national agricultural extension institutes, 18 faculties of agriculture in regular federal universities, three specialized universities of agriculture and one international agricultural research centre and yet Nigeria is still categorized among the food-deficit or food insecure nations in Africa.

The most pertinent question today therefore is: why has Nigeria’s awesome NARES not been able to engineer a sustainable agricultural development that would have ensured national and household food security, improved rural livelihoods and indeed make Nigeria’s agriculture competitive in the world agricultural market today. According to Arockoy, (2009), several reasons that have been adduced for this rather serious situation include: (i) a dominant, ineffective, and inefficient public agricultural extension service that is characterized by a top-down, supply-driven extension system compounded by serious structural, organizational and management challenges; (ii) unfriendly policy environment, compounded by policy somersaults and poor incentives provided for the private sector thus, triggering reduced investors’ confidence; (iii) grossly inadequate, irregular and untimely release of funds to the agricultural and rural development sector amidst incentives and worse for agricultural extension and advisory services, (iv) NARES has been plagued by a weak, dysfunctional and uncoordinated Research-Extension-Farmer-Inputs Linkage System (REFILS); and (v) the disparity among the tiers of government in running quality-based-agricultural programmes.

In order to transformed the Nigerian agricultural extension system and put in place a responsive and market-oriented extension system aimed at making agriculture work for Nigerians especially rural farmers such that it becomes not just a development programme but also an income generating commercial activity, the role of the three tiers of government (the federal government, the State governments, and the Local government authorities) must be clearly understood.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to ascertain the role of the three tiers of government in the transformation of Nigerian agricultural extension system

**Methodology**

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

**Role of federal government in the transformation of Nigerian agricultural extension system**

The role of the federal government in transforming agricultural extension system in Nigeria should include but not limited to: (i) formulation and implementation of national agricultural extension policy; (ii) maintaining stability in agricultural extension policies and programs; (iii) reorganizing the institutional framework for government intervention in the sector to facilitate smooth and integrated development of agricultural potentials; (iv) increasing agricultural
production through increased budgetary allocation and promotion of necessary developmental, supportive and service oriented activities to enhance production and marketing opportunities; (v) collaboration with states and local governments for effective agricultural extension delivery; and (vi) develop close co-operation among extension agencies and in formal research institute inputs, credits and marketing to provide farmers with efficient services.

According to Swanson in Contado (1997), the importance of agricultural extension policy was recognized by FAO’s Global Consultation on Agricultural Extension (GCAE). It recommended that; “all national governments should develop and periodically review their agricultural extension policy. This policy should include the goals of agricultural extension, the responsible agencies and personnel, the clientele to be served, the broad programmatic areas to be addressed and other relevant guidelines” As observed by Koyenikan (2008), the FAO in cooperation with the donor community, should engage in policy dialogue with national governments to stress the importance of agricultural extension in national agricultural development and the need to have an explicit, formally enacted, agricultural extension policy” In view of this, the federal government of Nigeria is responsibility for policy formulation, promulgation of regulations and initiation of programmes in agricultural sector. Among other important issues, the policy will address the critical issues of the roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders (the various tiers of government, the private sector, including the farmers’ associations, NGOs and CBOs), funding, institutional arrangements, and gender mainstreaming among others.

Role of states government in the transformation of Nigerian agricultural extension system

The following are the roles of state governments in the transformation of agricultural extension services in Nigeria: (i) organising the activities of agricultural extension at the state level; (ii) relaying information and supplies necessary for carrying out agricultural extension work from the federal government to the local government; (iii) financing of agricultural extension services; (iv) training and manpower development; (v) ensuring a variable agricultural extension delivery service (i.e. allowing for multi-purpose service providers); (vi) promotion of appropriate institution for administering credit to small holders farmers; (vii) ensuring access to land for all those wishing to engage in farming; (viii) control of animal and plant pests and diseases; (ix) ownership, management and control of forest estate held in trust for local communities; (x) maintenance of buffer stocks of agricultural commodities; (xi) investment in rural infrastructure, including rural roads and water supply in collaboration with federal and local governments and (xii) promotion of primary production of all items of agricultural produce through the provision of a virile and effective extension service.

The ADPs remain the best option for extension and advisory services provision at the grassroots and the states will be expected to key into the extension transformation agenda through the revitalization and strengthening of their ADPS with adequate staffing (to attain a minimum ratio of one extension agent to 800-1000 farm families) and improved infrastructures and facilities, facilitated by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

A robust manpower development and training programme for personnel of both the public and private extension services is critical for the success of not only the extension transformation agenda but for the entire agricultural transformation agenda of the Nigeria government. The capacity building program must be demand-driven and comprise of both on-site and off – site extension communication, technical, leadership and managerial courses.
Role of local government authorities in the transformation of Nigerian agricultural extension system

The local government authorities will be expected to take over progressively the responsibilities of the state government with respect to: (i) provision of an effective extension service; (ii) mobilization of farmers for accelerated agricultural and rural development through cooperative organizations, local institutions and communities (basically an essential extension duty); (iii) Provision of rural infrastructure to complement federal and state governments' efforts; (iv) management of irrigation areas of dams; (v) Provision of land for new entrants into farming in accordance with the provision of the Land-Use-Act and (vi) coordination of data collection at primary levels.

In terms of agricultural extension and advisory service provision, farmer-to-farmer extension has become an important mechanism for most of Africa’s smallholder farmers, especially in the face of dwindling funding to extension service for recruitment and capacity building. It is important to institutionalize, strengthen, and take the farmer field school (FFS) approach that has already been initiated in Nigeria to the next level in order to meet the current serious challenges of inadequate staffing and funding of the extension services in Nigeria.

Decentralization of extension to lower tiers of government as stated in Nigeria’s Agricultural Policy is necessary for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of extension programmes at the local level. If LGs take responsibility for extension as the closest to the grass root, farmers’ needs could be better met because the staff will be localized, conversant with the needs and would be able to facilitate extension activities more effectively. Every activity should reflect local needs (Koyenikan, 2008).

Roles common to the three tiers of government in transforming agricultural extension system in Nigeria

Some roles are common to the three tiers of government in Nigeria in transforming agricultural extension system. They include: (i) funding; (ii) organization and supervision of agricultural extension activities (at their various levels); (iii) provision of infrastructure for extension work and workers; and (iv) support of agricultural extension agents. For effective transformation of agricultural extension system in Nigeria, the federal, states and local government should jointly and adequately finance agricultural extension and rural infrastructure development. The organisation and supervision of agricultural extension activities should not be left with only the state ADPs alone. Effective monitoring and evaluation at all levels should be put in place and implemented.

As pointed out by Obiora and Emodi (2013), Nigeria should learn from the experience of the United States of America as a Federal polity and legislate an agricultural extension policy which guarantees cooperation, collaboration and financial support by the three tiers of government – federal, state and local government (county in the case of the USA) to the extension service. In the USA, the federal government contributes 43 percent, states 39 percent and counties 18 percent to the financing of the Cooperative Extension Service under the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. In Nigeria, tripartite funding of extension by all the three tiers of government should be encouraged; the sharing formula could be in the order in which the federation account is allocated. Other options could include the establishment of a dedicated tax fund to finance agricultural extension in Nigeria.
Conclusion

It is imperative that the three tiers of government should be concerned with extension programmes and rural development and also have a clear understanding of the nature, scope and methods of operation of extension services. The end-users or recipients of such services should also be mobilized and given conducive atmosphere to receive such services. The performance of the above stated duties is necessary not only for a good agricultural extension system but also for the improvement of the national economy. The federal, state and local government should jointly finance agricultural extension system for effective transformation of agricultural sector in Nigeria.

References


