

Assessment of extension service delivery of Rivers State Agricultural Development Programme as perceived by farmers in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the extension service delivery of Rivers State Agricultural Development Programme (RISADEP) as perceived by farmers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Specifically, it identified the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents in the study area, identified the extension services in crop production delivered by RISADEP in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area and assessed the general performance of the extension agents of RISADEP in the area of crop production. Sample for the study were selected with the use of random sampling technique. Data were collected with the aid of structured interview schedule and analysed using descriptive statistical tools namely: frequency counts, mean and percentages. The findings from the study revealed that the general job performance of the extension agents as perceived by majority (68.8%) of the respondents is poor. A general overhauling of the ADP in the study area was recommended which can be facilitated through appropriate training of the extension agents to enable them acquire relevant and useful skills that will better equip them to discharge their duties more effectively. Also, regular visit to farmers as at when due should be done by extension agents and the ADP should endeavour to provide necessary logistics that will enable the extension agents discharge their duties more effectively.

Key words: assessment, extension service, RISADEP and farmers

INTRODUCTION

The need to increase food production has been a global challenge especially in developing countries. The Government, Non governmental organizations as well as individuals are not left out in facing this challenge. The Agricultural sector has the primary responsibility of ensuring food security in the country. The Government in the bid to actualize this dream has established various agricultural development schemes. Some of these establishments came under the ministry of Agriculture and natural resources while some were established as

independent bodies. The Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) was established as a result of the need to boost Agricultural production in order to meet the rising demand for food (Jibowo, 2005). He went further to explain that due to the fact that Agricultural production and extension services were too inadequate to meet domestic expectations, the Nigeria government and World Bank went into agreement which resulted into the introduction of ADP in Nigeria, in 1975. Its basic objectives are to increase food

production and raise the income of farmers, especially the small scale farmers.

Rivers State Agricultural Development Programme (RISADEP) was introduced on the 17th of February 1987 (Sydney 2004) and in accordance with the mode of operation of ADP has eight (8) operational divisions of which Extension service space(deals on the extension service delivery) is one of them. The mandates of this division are to deliver extension services to the farmers effectively and timely assistance to farmers in purchasing high quality improved planting materials, agro-chemicals etc .This division has three (3) major objectives which are to:

- Educate farm families, assist them and also provide feedback to the management.
- Operate the extension service based on SPAT, Training and Visit (T&V) method of extension teaching capable of motivating small scale farmers
- Train their staff by improving their skills and knowledge.

The RISADEP in trying to achieve these objectives has adopted different approaches. With all these approaches and technologies put in place, one expects that the problem of inadequate food production must have been reduced to the barest minimum but unfortunately the reverse seems to be the case. One may rightly wonder where the problem lies - Is the ADP effectively performing her duty or is the problem with the end users of these innovations? It is against this background that this study assessed the Extension service delivery (crop production activities) of Rivers State ADP (RISADEP) as perceived by farmers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of River State. Specifically this study will address the following:

- identify the socio-economic characteristics of farmers in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State
- identify the extension services in crop production delivered by Rivers State ADP in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

- assess the job performance of the extension agents of RISADEP in the area of crop production as perceived by respondents in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The study covers 260 sq.km with a total population of 464,789 according to 2006 population census. Out of the three blocks in the study area (Atali, Choba and Oginigba), Atali block was purposively chosen for this study based on the fact that extension service division of Rivers State ADP concentrated their effort on this block due to financial and logistic constraints. Out of a total number of 206 farmers in this block who have benefited from Rivers State ADP service delivery, 61 were randomly chosen. Data were collected using structured interview scheduled. Descriptive statistics namely; frequency counts, percentage, mean, and ranking were used to analyse data, collected.

RESULTS

Socio Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers. The result shows that majority of the respondents (36.1%) were between the ages of 50-59, 57.4% were male and 70.5% were married. As regards level of education, it was shown that about 39.3% of the respondents have 'O' level certificate and all the respondents were Christians. Majority (59.0%) of the farmers maintained a household size of between 6-10 persons. It was further shown that the major source of livelihood in the study area is farming activities. Only 8.2% consented to non farming activities as their major activities while 91.1% indicated farming as their major source of livelihood. Cassava, yam and vegetable were the most cultivated crops by the respondents (37.7%). The Table 1 also shows that majority (70.5%) of the respondents were married and as such faced with responsibilities of taking care of their families.

Table 1: Socio economic characteristics of respondents

Item	Frequency	Percentages
Household Size		
1-5	12	19.7%
6-10	36	59.0%
11-15	13	21.3%
Major Sources of livelihood		
Farming activities		
Non farming activities	56	91.8%
Crops Produced	5	8.2%
Cassava, yam and vegetable		
Vegetable, cassava and maize	23	37.7%
Plantain/banana, yam and cassava	15	24.6%
Maize, cocoyam and cassava	16	26.2%
Age Distribution	7	11.5%
20-29		
30-39	-	-
40-49	-	-
50-59	18	29.5%
60-69	22	36.1%
70-79	13	21.3%
80-89	8	13.1%
Sex Distribution	-	-
Male		
Female	35	57.4%
Marital Status	26	42.6%
Single		
Married	-	-
Widow	43	70.5%
Widower	12	19.7%
Divorced	6	9.8%
Highest Formal Educational Qualification	-	-
No formal Education		
First School Leaving Certificate	4	6.6%
'O' level Certificate	22	36.1%
First degree	24	39.3%
Others	11	18.0%
Religion	-	-
Christianity		
Islam	61	100%
Buddhism	-	-

Source : Field survey, 2011

Extension Services delivered by RISADEP Extension Service Division in Crop Production

The extension services delivered by RISADEP are shown in Table 2. From the Table, 86.9% of the respondents indicated that RISADEP extension service division have assisted them in obtaining financial loan from the government. Promotion of awareness of innovations ranked second

with a percentage of 75.4 while using T&V method of teaching ranked 3rd with a percentage of 62.3. None of the farmers consented that RISADEP has assisted them with grant procurement from government and in provision of feedback from research institute.

Table 2: Extension Services Delivered by RISADEP Extension Service Division in Crop Production

Extension service delivered by RISADEP	Frequency(f)	Percentage (%)	Ranks
Assistance in financial loan procurement from the government	53	86.9	1
Establishment of SPAT	6	9.8	4
Promotion of Awareness of innovations.	46	75.4	2
Using of T & V method of teaching.	38	62.3	3
Assistance in purchasing of improving planting materials from commercial farmers.	4	6.6	5
Assistance in identification of problems in the farm.	3	4.9	6
Assistance in grants procurement from government.	—	—	—
Provision of feedback from research institute.	—	—	—

Source: Field Survey Data, 2011

Job Performance of RISADEP Extension agents in Crop production as perceived by farmers in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers state.

Table 3 shows the job performance of RISADEP extension agents in crop production as perceived by farmers. From the Table farmers agreed that the extension agents listen to them and attend to their problems whenever they visit, this has the highest mean of 3.05 which is significant. The Table further revealed that farmers agreed that Extension agents teach in the way they understand ($M = 2.66$), extension agents are not partial when dealing with farmers in their area ($M = 2.50$), extension agents talk to farmers in their area with respect ($M = 2.93$) and that extension agents have visited them in their farms ($M = 2.60$). The result further show that farmers disagreed with the statements that extension agents direct them to commercial farmers on time to purchase improved planting material ($M = 1.98$), extension agents are always on time to teach ($M = 2.15$), extension agents visit at every scheduled time ($M = 1.53$), extension agents are friendly to them

whenever they visit ($M = 1.95$), extension agents have visited them in their houses ($M = 2.21$) and extension agents are always in a hurry to go whenever they visit farmers in their area ($M = 2.07$).

General rating of the job performance of RISADEP extension agents in crop production by farmers

Table 4 shows the general rating of job performance of RISADEP extension agents in crop production, which ranges from excellent, very good, good, moderate to poor. The result shows that no respondent indicated that the job performance of RISADEP extension agents were neither excellent nor very good, 3.3% of the respondents rated their job performance to be good, 27.9% rated their job performance to be moderate while majority (68.8%) rated their job performance to be poor.

This result reveals that the general job performance of extension agents in crop production in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of River State is far much less than what is expected from them.

Table 3. Job Performance of RISADEP Extension agents in Crop production as perceived by farmers in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State

JOB PERFORMANCE	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL	MEAN	REMARK
Extension agent listens to me and attends to my problems whenever they visit.	16(26.2)	32(52.5)	13(21.3)	-	186	3.05	A
Extension agents teach in a way in understand	4(6.6)	41(67.2)	7(11.5)	9(14.8)	162	2.66	A
Extension agents directs me to commercial farmers on time to purchase improve planting materials	2(3.3)	12(19.7)	30(49.2)	17(27.9)	121	1.98	D
Extension agents are always on time to teach.	-	11(18.0)	46(75.4)	4(6.6)	129	2.15	D
Extension agents visit at every scheduled time.	-	2(3.3)	28(46)	31(50.8)	93	1.53	D
Extension agents are not partial when dealing with farmers in my area.	1(1.6)	32(52.5)	27(44.3)	1(1.6)	155	2.50	A
Extension agents talks to farmers in my area with respect.	3(4.9)	51(83.6)	7(11.5)	-	179	2.93	A
Extension agents are friendly to me whenever they visit my area	-	29(47.5)	32(52.5)	-	119	1.95	D
Extension agents have visited me in my farm	2(3.3)	31(50.8)	27(44.3)	1(1.6)	156	2.60	A
Extension agents have visited me in my house	-	16(26.2)	42(68.9)	3(5.0)	135	2.21	D
Extension agents are always in a hurry to go whenever they visit my area.	-	12(19.7)	41(67.2)	8(13.1)	126	2.07	D

Source: Field Survey Data, 2011

N/B: Mid point = Indicates 2.5, mean scores < 2.50 suggests Disagreement = D, mean scores \geq 2.50 suggests Agreement = A

Table 4. General rating of the job performance of RISADEP extension agents in crop production by farmers.

General Rating	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Ranks
Excellent	-	-	-
Moderate	-	-	-
Good	2	3.3	3
Moderate	17	27.9	2
Poor	42	68.8	1
Total	61	100	

Source Field Survey Data, 2011

DISCUSSION

From the age distribution of the farmers, it was revealed that majority of the farmers were adults, who have experience in farming and are not within the dependency ratio in the society hence, can be depended upon by members of their families and the society in general for increase in food production. The sex distribution of the farmers as presented in Table 1 shows that there were more males than female farmers. This could imply that men are more active in farming activities than women in the studied area. This might be as a result of the fact that women are being occupied with domestic activities.

The result also shows that majority of the respondents were married and as such faced with responsibilities of taking care of their families. This could serve as a strong motivating force for farmers to embrace the extension services delivered by RISADEP extension service division as a means of increasing their productivities as well as their general income level to enable them take care of their families more effectively. More than half of the respondents were shown to have at least a senior secondary school certificate. This implies that majority of the respondents could not be said to be illiterates as they could read and write but at the same time need more enlightenment to enable them understand and utilize the information they receive effectively.

It is not surprising that all the farmers were found to be Christians, as Obio/Akpor LGA is a Christian dominated area. This can serve as a unifying factor amongst the farmers as there will be less discrimination in terms of faith among them. The household size was relatively high implying that

majority of the farmers have moderately enough farm hands to carry out farming activities. Majority of the farmers consented to farming as their major source of livelihood. This confirms the result of the 2006 census which put Nigeria's total population at 140,003,542 with rural dwellers forming over 50 percent of the total population and the major sustainable livelihood activities carried out by this populace are agricultural-related (Asiabaka, 2002; Akpabio, 2005 and Ifeanyi-obi, 2011). This fact was also ascertained by some authors who identified agriculture as the major sustainable livelihood activity of the rural people (Ekong, 2010 and Mgbada, 2010). In the same vein, Ozor, *et al.*, 2011 in his study found out that 71 percent of households in Southern Nigeria have farming as their major occupation. According to the result of this study, cassava, yam and vegetable were the most cultivated crops by the respondents. This confirms the results of some authors (Nweke, 1996; Enete, 2003) who have identified these crops to be cherished foods among people in the study area.

The farmers indicated that RISADEP extension service division have assisted them in obtaining financial loan from the government. As part of government agenda to boost agriculture in the society, they provide financial loan for farmers and one way they do this is through agencies such as ADP who are closer to the farmers and can easily carryout investigation to ensure that the farmers can repay the loan given to them. This result is in line with Ekong (2010) who indicated that the lending agency requires a certain amount of information about the

borrower to ascertain his ability to repay the loan. This is effectively achievable if they are close to the borrower. Also, one of the major aims of ADP is to increase food production and raise the income level of farmers especially small scale farmers, one of the ways they achieve this is by using T & V method of teaching to educate the farmers on how to improve their productivity thereby increasing their income.

The general rating of job performance of RISADEP extension agents in crop production shows that the extension service delivery in the area is still poor. This has been a militating factor towards the achievement of the MDG of food security. The extension service of the ADP despite all intervention and enhancement programme put in place to revive it has not yet experienced appreciable improvement.

This study therefore concludes that the job performance of the Extension Agents of Rivers State ADP in Obio/Akpor LGA was poor. It recommends overhauling of the ADP in Obio/Akpor LGA. Specifically, appropriate training should be given to the extension agents to enable them acquire skills that will better equip them to discharge their duties more effectively. Also, regular visit to farmers as at when due should be done by extension agents and the ADP should endeavour to provide necessary logistics that will enable the extension agents discharge their duties more effectively.

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