

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES AND FARM INPUT SUPPLY LINKAGE IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study was carried out to examine the agricultural extension services and farm input supply linkage in Ogun State, Nigeria. Data was obtained from interviewing sixty farmers randomly in Ifo Local Government Area, Ogun State. All the extension agents for the two block offices in the locality were also interviewed to corroborate the data obtained from farmers. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents were ascertained to have positive influence on agricultural production. Inputs were found out to be supplied mainly by Ogun State Agro-Services Corporation (OGASC) and Ogun State Agricultural Development Programme (OGADEP), but these inputs are not always available at the required time and quantity while the linkage between OGADEP and OGASC was confirmed to be inexistence i.e. OGASC being the commercial arm of OGADEP supplies inputs directly to farmers through the Farm Service Centres (FSCs) and Input Sales Centre at the OGADEP Headquarters. Through these Centres, the farm inputs get to the Block Offices via the Zonal Office, from where the farmers are expected to purchase them. On the other hand, OGADEP supplies information on input needs of farmers to OGASC which assists the latter in making inputs available at the right time and in the right quantity. In addition to this, OGADEP also supply information on input availability to the farmers through the Village Extension Agents (VEAs) who also take recommended practices to these farmers. However, apart from their above mentioned roles, the VEAs are also involved in actual purchase of inputs to the farmers. This deviation from the “professionalism” dictate of the Training and Visit System of Extension Services would have good influence in boosting agricultural production in the study area.

Key words: farm, input, linkage, extension

INTRODUCTION

The Central focus of the Training and Visit System of Extension is to put in place, a professional extension service, organized around the concept of continuous training of field staff and a regularized visit to farmers, thereby impacting into them improved agricultural practices [7] and [10]. The success of Ogun State Agricultural Development Programme (OGADEP) following this pattern of operations has been acclaimed by farmers, government, non-governmental organizations and practitioners [5]. Despite this well acclaimed success, manifestations of this trend in terms of the total hectare carrying these improved

practices in the state are not so glaring. The reasons for this, still need to be investigated. In operationalizing the Training and Visit System of Extension Services, OGADEP has always maintained a close linkage with research institutes such as Institute for Agricultural Research and Training (IAR&T), National Cereal Research Institute (NCRI), International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Universities (Olabisi Onabanjo University and The Federal University of Agriculture) and other governmental agencies such as Ogun State Agro-Services Corporation (OGASC) [8] and [10]. Non-availability of extension messages from research-oriented recommendations is one possibility, but field experiences show that

this is not the case. But rather, there is insufficiency in the supply of inputs required to satisfy wide-spread adoption of these recommendations. It also follows that the link between these organizations in particular among others be examined. Government investment in agricultural extension and rural development is very enormous. The World Bank; Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and other bodies of the United Nations encouraged further investment in the education and training of local farmers in the use of new and improved agricultural innovations. Many studies have shown that extension efforts cannot succeed without an interdependent by play of research and input supply with extension [2] and [11]. Improved agricultural practices usually require more fertilizers, pesticides, tractor hiring service and above all, improved cultivars (seeds, stem cuttings, buds, seedlings, fingerlings, etc.). Extension agents, not only have to be aware of the availability and prices of these inputs but also, where, when and how farmers can obtain them.

OGADEP is linked with the commercial arm of Ogun State Agro-Services Corporation. Many field experiences have shown that this commercial arm do not always have in stock items demanded by farmers, hence, farmers have resolve to patronizing other agencies such as National Seed Service (NSS), Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MANR) and private input supply establishments. However, available literature has emphasized the need for a link between the extension and input supply services [3] and has been silent on the extent of the linkage and the overall benefits to the farmers. Besides, this is an area which this research project intends to focus. Hence, there is a need for a study to be carried out.

The general objective of the study was to examine the agricultural extension services and farm input supply linkage in Ogun State, Nigeria.

In order to achieve the general objective, the following specific objectives were considered: (i) to assess farmers' weaknesses perceived from the preferred input sources.

(ii) to assess farmers' perception of availability of input and input sources.

(iii) to examine the agricultural extension services and farm input supply linkages in the study area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study area was Ifo Local Government Area, Ogun State. It lies within the eastern part of the state and it is bounded to the north by Abeokuta North and South Local Government Areas, to the east by Obafemi-Owode Local Government Area and to the south by Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area and to the west by both Egbado North and South Local Government Areas. The study area with its tropical climate falls within the rain forest region of Nigeria and has a bimodal rainfall pattern which reaches its peak in July and September.

Ifo Local Government consist of several villages, hence, major occupation of inhabitants is predominantly farming – particularly arable farming and to a lesser extent, livestock (poultry, pig, sheep and goat) production. However, inhabitants in the urban areas of the study area engage more in trading, transporting, lumbering and artisanship. Considerable number also earns their living as employees in industries and government parastatals in neighboring towns and cities. The study area, though, not industrially based, can be said to be in nature due despite presence of fairly good road network, electricity, potable water, telecommunication facilities, postal services, health services and so on.

The food crops mostly produced include cassava, maize, vegetables, citrus, plantain, banana, cocoyam and yam while the cash crops found also include kolanut, cocoa and oil palm. The popular natural resource found in the local government is limestone.

OGADEP comprises of four zones, viz: Abeokuta, Ilaro, Ikenne and Ijebu. Abeokuta zone with Kotopo as its head-quarters is administratively divided into six blocks, namely Olorunda and Ilewo (Abeokuta North Local government Area), Opeji and Ilugun (Odeda Local Government Area) and Ifo and

Wasinmi (Ifo Local Government Area). Ifo block consists of Akinsinde, Coker, Egbeda, Ososun, Ajibode, Sojuoolu, Iju and Iyesi cells while Wasinmi block consists of Wasinmi, Obada-Oko, Itori, Owowo, Onigbedu, Ajegunle, Arigbajo and Papalanto cells.

Simple random sampling method was used to select three cells from each of the blocks and the cells so selected include Coker, Akinside and Sojuoolu for Ifo Block and Wasinmi, Obada-Oko and Ajegunle for Wasinmi Block. Ten farmers were then selected from each of these cells from farmers list as obtained from the VEA (Village Extension Agent) of each selected cells. Hence, a total of sixty farmers were interviewed in the study area.

Purposive sampling was also done for the BES (Block Extension Supervisors) and VEAs/BEAs (Village Extension Agents/Block Extension Agents) by getting the list of all the BES, VEAs and BEAs in the study area. Two BES (one for each block) and sixteen VEAs (one for each cell), as well as two BEAs (one for each block), were interviewed. Data collected were subsequently subjected to descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 shows that a larger percentage of the farmers are between the ages of 46 years and above (58.33%), closely followed by those less than the ages of 45 years and below (41.67%). This means that majority of the farmers are in the active age group, and thus they can maximize their productive potential if given the necessary resources in the right quantity and quality as well as at the right time [1]. However, 90 percent of the respondents are married. Thus, implying that they will get family support in the form of family labour to help on their farm [4]. Also, they will be more dedicated to their farm work so that they can support their family better [9]; hence, they are expected to show more enthusiasm to the services rendered by OGASC and OGADEP in a bid to increase their output [6]. Only 10 percent of the farmers in the study area are single and widowed respectively.

Notably, 65% of the respondents had formal education compared with 35% who had no formal education. This is an indication that extension agents' agricultural innovation and information and technologies dissemination would be highly appreciated and perceived by the farmers in the study area and they will be more responsive to the services provided by OGASC [5]. This will in essence help to boost production.

Furthermore, 65% of the farmers engaged solely in crop farming only while 1.7% engaged in livestock and fisheries respectively. Conversely, 31.6% of the farmers engage in mixed farming in which case, they rear mostly goats. It follows that some of the farmers have diversified farming activities and they use proceed from these to augment income from crop production.

Most of the farmers (58.6%) have farms which are between and 2 and 4.9 hectares in size, closely followed are those having farms less than 2 hectares in size (18.97%). Some of the farmers have fairly large farms from 5ha and above and they constituted 22.41% of the farmers in the study area. This indicated that farmers in the study area contribute their own quota to the food supply in the state and hence, the need for extension messages and services of OGASC to reach them continuously.

Table 1. Socio Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable		Percentage
Age (Years)	≤ 45	41.67
	≥46	58.33
Marital Status	Not Married	10
	Married	90
Educational level	No formal education	35
	Primary school education	48.34
	Secondary school education	8.33
	Post-secondary school education	8.33
Type of Farming	Crop only	65
	Livestock only	1.67
	Crop and livestock	31.67
	Fish farming only	1.67
Farm size (Ha)	< 2	18.97
	2 – 4.9	58.62
	≥5	22.41

Source: Own calculation.

Table 2 brought to light that most of the inputs when available are got at the source in the right quantity. However, 65% of the farmers did not get these inputs at the right time needed for production purpose. Hence, the weakness identified is the fact that most of the farmers in the study area could not obtain their input at the source, at the right time, and this will have effect on their farming activities.

Table 2. Distribution of farmers showing weaknesses perceived from the preferred input sources

Weaknesses	Yes	%	No	%
Obtaining inputs at the source?	54	90	6	10
Obtaining inputs in the right quantity?	48	80	12	20
Obtaining inputs at the right time?	21	35	39	65

Source: Own calculation.

Table 3 indicates that nearly all the farmers in the study area patronize both OGADEP and OGASC, but the level of patronage is a bit higher for OGADEP as compared to OGASC farmers. The reason for this is that the farmers are mostly exposed to the Village Extension Agents (VEAs) who work directly with OGADEP, and it is these VEAs who supply information to the farmers with regards to input availability. Hence, we can conclude that these two establishments are the major input sources to farmers in the study area. Apart from these, the remaining farmers obtain their inputs from private traders, National Seed Service (NSS), Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (MAWR) and other sources.

Nearly all the farmers obtain information on input availability from the VEAs attached to their villages. Additionally, 45% of the farmers also get to know from the radio and television while about 20 percent also get additional information from contact farmers. This means that information on input availability is obtained from many sources, but mostly through the VEAs.

Most of the farmers (85 percent) prefer to purchase their farm inputs themselves. They also prefer to combine this with sending the VEAs, who assist in helping them procure

these inputs from their source. This is an additional job which can be seen as an humanitarian gesture on the part of the VEAs, as they are only responsible in telling farmers how, where and when to obtain their inputs. The farmers prefer sending their fellow farmers least.

Table 3. Perception of Availability of Inputs and Input Sources

	Variables	Percentage
<i>Sources Preferred</i>	OGADEP	96.67
	OGASC	61.67
	MAWR	3.33
	NSS	1.67
	Private traders	13.33
	Others	3.33
<i>Sources of Information</i>	Through the VEA	98.34
	From Radio/Television	45
	Through contact farmers	8.33
	From fellow farmers	20
	Others	13.33
<i>Procurement Method</i>	Personal purchase	85
	Sending the VEA	60
	Sending other farmers	11.67
	Others	1.67

Source: Own calculation

Figure 1 shows the linkage between the input supply agency (OGASC) to farmers and the role the extension agents (ZEO, BES and VEA - Zonal Extension Officer, Block Extension Supervisor and Village Extension Agents) of OGADEP are playing with the farmers. OGASC is the sole supplier of inputs to farmers in Ifo Local Government Area. It supplies inputs to farmers directly through the Farm Service Centres (FSC) and Input Sales Centre at OGADEP Headquarters (Commercial arm of OGADEP). This Input Sales Centre also supply indirectly to farmers by distributing inputs to the Zonal Offices, where they are sold to identified farmers and also distributed to the Block Offices. These Block Offices are within easy reach of the farmers for procurement of inputs when needed; this, they do mainly by personal purchase and by sending the VEAs. It should be noted that each of the two FASCs in the study area is located beside each of the Block Offices (Wasinmi and Ifo).

The VEAs on their own part took recommended practices or new innovations to farmers. They also gave feedback on the adoption of these innovations to OGADEP for improvement; this is the major function of the VEAs. The feedback is given through the BES (at block meetings), then through the

ZEO (at fortnightly Training Sessions) and finally the ZEO reports this at the Monthly Technology Review Meeting (MTRMs). In addition, the VEAs provide relevant information on input availability to farmers and also give feedback on this to OGASC through the same channel highlighted above. In essence, the extension agents, while discharging their normal duties, complement the effort of OGASC in the supply of recommended inputs to farmers. They ensure that farmers get first-hand information on input availability through them and are used appropriately through their advice and supervision.

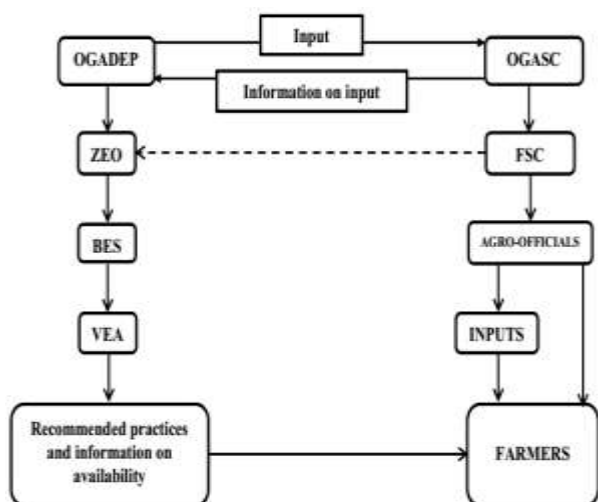


Fig.1. Agricultural Extension Services and Farm Input Supply Linkage
 Source: Own Survey.

CONCLUSIONS

It is pertinent to conclude at this juncture that both the input supply services of OGASC and the extension services of OGADep are indispensable tools to the progress of agricultural development in the study area. However, the participation of the VEAs in supplying inputs to farmers negates the “professionalism” dictate of the TRAINING AND VISIT system of extension services which forbids the extension workers to participate in other activities outside the normal extension services. But with reference to the finding of this study, this has proved a worthwhile deviation.

In order to improve the services of both OGASC and OGADep as agents of

agricultural development in the study area as well as to strengthen the linkage between them with a view to increasing their efficiency, the following suggestions are advocated:

(i) Some of the inputs (especially fertilizer) are not supplied in the right quantity and at the right time to farmers in the study area. In view of this fact, it is essential that the Agro-Services Corporation should ensure prompt and adequate supply of these inputs to the farmers since timeliness of operation is very important in agricultural production.

(ii) A common feature is the inefficiency or near absence of tractor hiring service for land preparation in the study area, the OGASC should try and explore the avenue of making this service available as it would go a long way in improving agricultural production in the study area. In addition, the federal and state governments should provide OGASC with adequate fund to facilitate the maintenance and repair of broken-down farm equipment and machineries.

(iii) Construction of warehouses coupled with mobilization of funds will allow inputs to be purchased in large quantities which can be stored for regular supply as at when needed by the farmers. This will eliminate non-availability of these inputs when the need for them arises.

(iv) Subsidy on inputs, particularly agrochemicals (fertilizers, herbicides, etc.) should be improved upon to make it easier and less costly for the farmers to procure the inputs.

(v) Farmers should be advised on production recommendations involving inputs usage, only when these inputs are available. To ensure this, representative of OGASC should participate more intensively in pre-seasonal, fortnightly and monthly extension planning and training meetings.

(vi) The VEAs should also avoid information overload on the part of the farmers. They should be able to screen and select the most relevant messages for the farmers.

(vii) Feedback on extension agent activities should be stepped up to give more information on farm situations vis-à-vis inputs and extension services that will be needed

most at any particular point in time to boost agricultural production.

(viii) In general, since the additional responsibility of assisting in the procurement of inputs by VEAs have been ascertained to be of great importance, this study suggests that OGADEP should assist supplying improved seeds since these are needed most often by the farmers they actually work with while keeping focus of actual extension activities. OGASC should concentrate more on the supply of agrochemicals, farm machineries and in particular, mechanization services in order to keep the farmers more than hitherto.

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