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The impact of the Agricultural Inputs and Services Units (AISU) in Oyo State

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Abstract

The extent to which the objectives of setting up the Agricultural Inputs and Services Units (AISU) in Oyo State have been met, was assessed. The state was divided into six geographical and ecological zones, and within each zone, one AISU was randomly selected for study. Data were collected using pretested structured questionnaire.

Results indicate that there is a need for structural reorganization to allow for greater effectiveness both in coverage, customer demands and satisfaction. The growing demand for services and inputs from the units, point to the increasing popularity of the services rendered. The scope of such services should be expanded to cover storage, harvesting, weed–, pest– and disease-controls. AISU would enjoy better patronage if its staffing position improves. Community participation in the planning and management of the units through Local Management Committee system will also enhance its image.

Introduction

The Nigerian rural sector is the body of the elephant that is often wagged by the active tail. Extrapolating from the 1963 census, Olayide (1979) estimated that the Nigerian rural population would grow from 62.959 million in 1979 to 78.087 million by 1995. He further observed that the rural labour force would grow from 47.219 million in 1979 to 58.565 million in 1995; and that the farmer population which had gradually grown from 12.114 million in 1970 to 13.917 million in 1979 would rise to 15.528 million. These notwithstanding, agriculture which is the main occupation of the rural people, has a characteristic pattern of small farm size, hoe-cutlass technology, low capitalization, low yield and atomistic producers. Olayide, Eweka and Bello-Osagie (1980) reported an estimated 29,808 million farm holdings in Nigeria during the 1973/74 farming year. About 81% of these was between 0.1 – 5.99 hectares, 14% was between 6 and 10 hectares while the

remaining 5% was made up of farms larger than 10 hectares. It therefore follows that a greater proportion of the about 14 million Nigerian farmers cultivate less than 5 hectares of farm land, which are often made up of three or more separate holdings. If Nigerian agriculture must grow and the rural economy improve, there is a need for the farmers to be equipped with technology beyond the hoe-cutlass level.

There are many ways by which the rural sector economy can be improved. By far the best option is that which integrates all principal approaches and directs them around the farmers and farmer organizations. This integrated approach can only work to provide anticipated results if the farmers are adequately equipped with the tools that remove drudgery and enhance their efforts. The provision of machinery and improved planting materials to imrpve the technology level of the farmers through the Agricultural Inputs and Services Unit (AISU) was therefore a very welcome idea.

Tractor hire services were introduced in the former Western and Northern regions of Nigeria in 1961 (Wells, 1969; Islam, 1974). This was followed by the Agricultural Inputs and Services Units (AISU) which had its origin in the "Sprague Report" of 1972. Following the submission of the Sprague Report, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development commissioned a team of experts to develop a National Food Crop Production Plan for Nigeria. One of the recommendations of the team was that the Engineering Division of the Federal department of Agriculture should be converted to the Agricultural Input Services Unit (AISU). With headquarters in Kaduna, the AISU was to have units in each state, and be funded by the Federal Government. The federally-funded AISU was to serve in an advisory capacity to the state-funded AISU wherever a State decides to have her own units. By 1977/78 financial year, the Federal Government approved the establishment of 187 AISU units for the country and carmarked the sum of ₦18.7 million for their construction (FDA, 1978). In pursuance of the policy, for the 1981–85 plan period, agro-service centres and subcentres as well as mechanical workshops were approved for all local government areas that were not within the integrated agricultural development programmes areas. Thus, a sum of ₦105 million was earmarked for the establishment of 285 AISU centres during the plan period (Nigeria, 1981).

The Oyo State Agro-Service Centres were formally established through documentation in Gazette No. 8. Vol. XVI of April 1, 1977 (Satoye, 1982). The objectives of the Agricultural Inputs and Services Units (Agro-Service Centres) were:

(i) Provision of Inputs to farmers at subsidized rates.

(ii) Provision of information on how to use and combine the inputs for maximum profit.
(iii) Increasing land holdings of individual farmers.
(iv) Provision of storage facilities to farmers for easy storage of farm products.
(v) Forecasting demand for farm produce.
(vi) Improving the lots of farmers in Oyo State in particular and of Nigeria in general.

The above objectives could be grouped into three categories viz: tangible, non-tangible and consequential. The tangible objectives are those which relate to easily quantifiable inputs which could improve the farmers' lots. They include the provision of inputs such as chemicals, fertilizers, improved seeds and other planting materials, and the provision of storage facilities. The non-tangible objectives relate to the ancillary services to be provided by the Extension Services Unit of the Agro–Service centres. These include agricultural information flow, data collection and processing, updating and improving the technical know-how of the farmers and farmer organizations. While the tangible and the non-tangible objectives can easily lend themselves to implementation, the consequential objectives can only materialise and depend on farmer clientele reactions to AISU services. For instance, how much a farmer's lot has improved can only depend on the size of the farmer's holdings which in turn is dependent on the farmer's willingness to increase his holdings. Therefore, objectives 3 and 6 are consequential i.e. their success depends on, and are influenced by the other objectives.

This study was designed to investigate the extent to which objecties 1,2,4 and 5 stated above have been met. Specifically, the study focused on:
(i) Organizational structure.
(ii) Actual services rendered.
(iii) Staff policy and staffing position.
(iv) Farmers demand for AISU Services.

Methodology

Sampling Technique

For effective coverage and meaningful comparisons, Oyo State was blocked into six zones based on geographical location and farming patterns of the people. Among, the existing four Agricultural Input and Service Unit Stations in each zone, one was randomly drawn into

the study. The selected centres were at Ife, Wasimi, Ede, Ijeda, Oyan and Oyo.

Collection of data

Data were collected using structured questionnaire which had been pre-tested. A questionnaire each was personally handed to the head of the selected service centre within the first week of May, 1983. Completed questionnaires were collected back from the respondents after three weeks. The data were summarized using simple descriptive statistics.

Results

Organizational Structure and Services Rendered

There were twenty-four A.I.S.U stations, all over the state with most local government areas having their own centres. While Akinyele, Obokun and Oyo local governments had two each, Lagelu, Atakumosa and Ibadan Municipal local governments had none. The whole state was blocked into three zones, and each zonal office coordinated the activities of the agro-service centres within the local government area under its jurisdiction. The three zonal offices were at Osogbo, Oyo and Ilesa, and they were in turn responsible to the state headquarters in Oyo town. Table 1 shows the locations of the various agro-service centres.

At the local grassroot level, each agro-service centre was designed to execute four basic functions:-

(a) Provide mechanization needs of farmers and other farming organizations of the locality. Services to be rendered in this respect include stumping, ploughing, harrowing, ridging, planting and transportation. The section responsible for the operations is called Tractor Hiring Unity (T.H.U).

(b) Provide Inputs other than the mechanization needs of the clientele. The inputs were divided into two categories— fertilizer and other chemicals; and planting materials. The section dealing with fertilizer and other chemicals is called "Fertilizer Procurement and Distribution Unit", while the section dealing with planting materials is called "Seed Services Unit".

(c) Organize, educate and provide farmer information needs so that farmers and other farming organizations within each Agro-

service Centre catchment area could benefit from the scheme. The section that deals with these is called the "Extension Service Unit".

In order to perform the above functions effectively and achieve the objectives of the scheme each unit was manned by experienced agricultural personnel; each centre being headed by an Agricultural Superintendent.

TABLE 1: LOCATIONS OF AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS COVERED BY THE AGRO SERVICE CENTRES (AISU) IN OYO STATE

Location	L. G. A.
Ada	Ifelodun
Akanran	Oluyole
Ede	Ede
Ejigbo	Ejigbo
Eruwa	Ibaarapa
Ife	Oranmiyan
Ifon	Irepodun
Igboho	Irepo
Ijeda	Obokun
Ijebu-Ijesa	Obokun
Ile-Ogbo	Iwo
Ilero	Kajola
Ilesa	Ilesa
Ilora	Oyo
Iroko	Akinyele
Iseyin	Iseyin
Moniya	Akinyele
Ogbomoso	Ogbomoso
Ore via Ila-Orangun	Ila
Osogbo	Osogbo
Oyan	Odo-Otin
Oyo	Oyo
Tede via Saki	Ifedapo
Wasimi	Irewole

Source: Satoye, A. (182) Activities of the Tractor Hiring Units in Oyo State. A Project Report submitted to the Department of Agricultural Science, Adeyemi College, University of Ife, Ondo, Nigeria. 60pp.

The organizational chart of the AISU is as shown in Fig. 1.

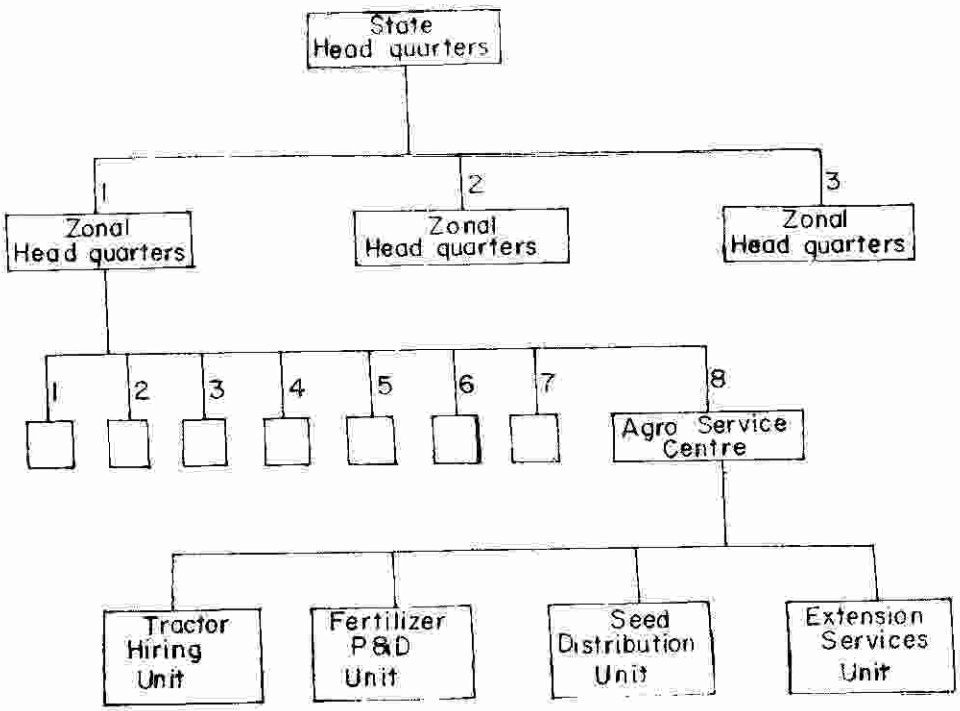

Fig 1: Organizational Structure of Agricultural Input Services Unit (A.I.S.U.) of Oyo State as at June 1983

A basic ingredient of the structure of the organization is that of unity of command and accountability among the unit heads. Centre coordinators were responsible to the zonal officers who in turn were responsible to the state officer in charge (Project Manager).

The Staffing Policy and Personnel Situation

The state headquarter was expected to be headed by a highly experienced agricultural personnel of a calibre not less than Principal Agricultural Officer. Similarly, the zonal offices were expected to be headed by Senior Agricultural Officers or Agricultural Superintendents of equivalent experience.

At the local government level, each agro-service centre was to be headed by a Higher Agricultural Superintendent; and under him, there were to be two Agricultural Superintendents– one for the Tractor Hiring Unit and the other, for the other three sub units of the centre (Fertilizer Procurement and Distribution Unit, the Seed Distribution Unit and the Agricultural Extension Unit). In addition, there were also four Agricultural Assistant position, one for each of the four units. The staff needs of the centres as provided for in the policy and the actual personnel situation at the centres during the 1982/83 farming season, are presented in Table 2.

Some of the striking features of the staffing position are as follows:

(a) Available staff expressed as percentage of estimated staff needs varied from 30–40% with an average of 36.7%.

(b) Provision was made for only one tractor mechanic in each zone. Thus, three tractor mechanics were expected to serve the twenty-four agro-service centres in the state.

(c) Non-availability of Agricultural Assistants at Oyan and Ife, even though this calibre of staff should form the corner stones for the achievements of the centres.

TABLE 2: STAFF SITUATION ANALYSIS OF VARIOUS AGRO-SERVICE CENTRES (AISU) IN OYO STATE AS AT JUNE 1983

Establishment Position	No. Proposed	Actual No. in Post					
		Ife	Ede	Wasimi	Oyo	Oyan	Ijeda
Higher Agric. Superintendent	1	–	–	–	–	–	–
Agric Superintendent	2	1	1	–	1	–	1
Agric Assistant	4 (1 for each unit area	–	2	1	2	–	1
Tractor Mechanic	1 per zone*	–	–	–	–	–	–
Tractor driver	3	2	2	1	2	3	2
Typist	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Recorder/Field Overseer	2	–	2	–	–	–	–
Clerical Officer	2	–	1	–	1	1	1
Clerical Assistant	2	1	1	1	–	1	1
Watchmen	2 (day & night)	2	1	1	1	1	1
Messenger	1	–	–	1	–	–	–
Total	21	7	11	6	8	7	8
Percentage of total requirement	100	33	52	29	38	33	38

*There are three zones in the State.

Clientele Demand for and AISU's Supply of Inputs and Services

The Tractor Hiring Unit

The specific functions of the unit include:
(i) boosting food production level among the farmers;
(ii) introducing the farmers to modern techniques of farming;
(iii) removing farming harzards and above all;
(iv) familiarizing the farmers with the government.

In achieving the above objectives, the unit was to provide services in the following areas:-

Stumping, harrowing, ploughing, ridging, transportation and storage. Services such as harvesting, bush clearing, irrigation, and surveying were not listed. The operations rendered were offered at uniform subsidized rates. The rates as at 1978/79 to 1982/83 farming seasons are as presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3:COSTS OF SOME SERVICES RENDERED BY VARIOUS AGRO-SERVICE CENTRES (AISU) FROM 1978/79 TO 1982/83 FARMING SEASONS

Services	Rate per ha.
Stumping	200.00
Ploughing	20.00
Harrowing	10.00
Ridging	20.00
Planting (grains)	10.00
Transportation	2.00*

* per hour

Table 4 shows the total number of applications (verbal and written) for tractor services received by each centre and the total number of services rendered during 1979 through 1981 farming seasons.

TABLE 4:DEMAND FOR AND SUPPLY OF TRACTOR SERVCIES AT VARIOUS AGRO SERVICE CENTRES OF OYO STATE FROM 1979 TO 1981 FARMING SEASONS

Year	Demand and Supply of Service	Agro-Service Centres						
		Ife	Ede	Wasimi	Oyo	Oyan	Ijeda	Total
1979	Demand for Services	69	49	21	189	89	62	479
	Supply of Service	62	49	21	180	87	62	461
	% of demand met	89.86	100	100	95.24	97.75	100	96.24
1980	Demand for Service	118	136	74	204	134	180	846
	Supply for Service	83	120	72	192	122	87	676
	% of demand met	70.34	88.24	97.30	94.12	91.05	48.33	79.91
1981	Demand for Supply	169	150	179	249	123	187	1057
	Supply for Service	96	95	123	111	103	81	609
	% of demand met	56.81	63.33	68.72	44.58	83.74	43.32	57.62

A careful study of Table 4 indicates that demand for service increased over the period while the supply of service declined. Requests for operations within the unit were mainly for ploughing, harrowing and transportation. There were few requests for planting and ridging operations. The inverse relationship between demand for tractor services and its supply was probed further. Reasons advanced for the declining performance were:

(i) Non-availability of spare parts for the tractors and implements in government stores. (Supply of the spare-parts come from government stores in the Agricultural Engineering section of the Ministry of Agriculture).

(ii) No authority to purchase spare-parts from local stores/shops (if available).

Fertilizer Procurement and Distribution Unit and the Seed Distribution Unit

Table 5 shows the requests for fertilizer and improved planting materials at the various centres. The demands for the materials increased consistently and markedly but trailled behind the supply. Further investigations revealed that fertilizers and other chemicals were often purchased by the Central Stores of the Ministry of Agriculture who made late and inadequate allocations to the unit. The supply of seeds and other planting materials came from the National Seeds Company and the Seed Multiplication Unit of the MANR.

TABLE 5: REQUESTS FOR AND SUPPLY OF FERTILIZERS AND IMPROVED SEEDS DURING 1979–1981 FARMING SEASON AT VARIOUS AGRO SERVICE CENTRES IN OYO STATE

		1979		1980		1981	
Unit	Agro service Centre						
Fertilizer & Chemicals	Ife	482	350.0	728	420.0	1613	562.0
	Ede	216	78.9	417	136.0	621	412.0
	Wasimi	119	85.6	345	144.3	568	85.4
	Ijeda	157	35.6	382	46.3	608	57.6
	Oyo	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Oyan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Seed Service	Ife	128	4 70	92	6.03	96	4.50
	Ede	80	4.71	56	2.05	98	3.75
	Wasimi	94	4.4	72	3.34	84	10.30
	Ijeda	47	1.76	63	2.03	85	2.60
	Oyo	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Oyan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Figures are quoted in tonnes.

Extension Service Unit and Channels of Information Flow

The extension service unit of the agro-service centre was headed by an Agricultural Assistant. The specific objectives of A.I.S.U. which fall within the schedules of this unit were:

(i) Provision of information on how to use and combine agricultural inputs for maximum profit.
(ii) Forecasting product demand for farm products.

In achieving these two objectives, the units were to:

(a) engage in information dissemination to farmers and farmer organizations:
(b) teach farmers on how to use materials supplied by the centre;
(c) 'sell' the programmes of the centre to the clientele;
(d) identify farmers' problems;
(e) collect agricultural statistical data.

The methods and channels through which these objectives were achieved were investigated. Table 6 shows the results.

TABLE 6 :METHODS OF FARMER CONTACT AND NO. OF FARMERS SERVED BY VARIOUS AGRO SERVICE CENTRES IN OYO STATE

Agro Service Centre	*Methods of farmer Contact Used*				*Number of farmers served*
	Personal visit	*Radio*	*Television*	*Handout*	
Ife	Y	Y	X	X	1918
Ede	Y	X	X	X	923
Wasimi	Y	X	X	X	869
Ijeda	Y	X	X	X	769
Oyo	Y	X	X	X	n.a.
Oyan	Y	X	X	X	n.a.

Y = Yes

X = No

n.a. = Not avilable

As shown in the table, all the centres used personal visits method in getting to the clientele. Ife Service Centre used radio in addition to the personal visit.

There were neither records nor newsletters/bulletions to show that data collection and information flow objectives of this section were vigorously pursued.

Discussion

Organizational Structure

The increase in the number of participating farmers and farmer organizations in the activities of the Agricultural Inputs and Services Unit, points to the growing popularity of the scheme. However, the obvious lag between the demand for the services and inputs and the supply of the same to meet the growing and expanding needs, calls for concern. The present organizational structure which allows for only three zonal offices located in Oyo, Ilesa and Osogbo all within short distance around the north eastern part of the state, needs to be reviewed. In particular, Osogbo is sufficiently close to Ilesa that both should not be zonal offices. To allow for faster actions, there is a need for more discharge and delivery points spatially located within the entire state. Similarly, there is a need for more sub-centres in each local government area. Locating a sub-centre to serve farmers within a given radius (say 6—10 kilometres) would have been a better arrangement than the present where there is just one service centre which is often located in one corner of the local government area. Similarly, the present arrangement where one tractor mechanic is located at the zonal office to serve eight agro-service centres appears a defective arrangement. It is little wonder that virtually all the tractors and implements in the agro-service centres studied were non-functional as at the time of the study If the repair and maintenance operations of all the tractors and implements in the centres were to be performed on time, there is definitely, a need for more tractor mechanics in the establishment. For ease of supervision and coordination, a tractor mechanic to one agro-service centre appears idea. But if this cannot be met, one mechanic to two centres might be suggested.

The subsumption of the extension unit to the Fertilizer Procurement and Distribution Unit affected its calibre of staff and accountability. With an agricultural assistant as the head, and the large number of small scale farmers to be served in each local government area covered by each centre, the achievement of the unit may be very low.

With the present organizational structure, a staff of better experience and exposure should have been assigned to head the unit. Besides, the staff size of the unit appeared too small to effectively cope with the objectives of the unit.

Although the AISU was set up to serve the needs of farmers, there apppeared to be no formal interaction between the organization and the farmers it served. Formal interaction may improve the clientele information level of the problems and aspirations of the unit and besides, increase the satisfaction of both the unit and the farmers it serves.

Demand for and Supply of Services

Investigations revealed that services and inputs supplied by the agro-service centres were heavily subsidized. The exact amount of subsidy was not ascertained, but such subsidy would have gone a long way to motivate and help the farmers. The encouragement has caused an increase in the number of farmer participants and the range of their service-needs. Therefore the unit needs to review its activities to accommodate the new emerging needs. Among such needs are surveying, clearing, harvesting, large scale pests and diseases control, and partial processing of farm produce.

Objective four which sought to provide storage facilities for farm products seemed neglected. The ultimate anticipated increase in farmers' holdings and outputs may never materialise if farm products are sold at give-away prices or get destroyed due to lack of storage facilities. The unit therefore needs to link up with the National Grains Board in the provision of modern storage facilities. Provision of maize cribs for storage of maize cobs which the unit currently encourages should be an alternative/to the central storage facility which the unit should provide.

Recommendations

The AISU was established to serve the needs of all small scale farmers in Oyo state. In order that the needs of the clientele be adquately met, the organizational set-up of the unit must be such that predisposes it to effectively perform the functions. In this wise, a better spatial placement of the distribution and discharge points (zonal offices) would enable it perform better. Four zonal offices– located in the north,

south, east and west of the state and an headquarters are advised. Besides, the following recommendations are also made:

1. Agro-service centres should be located such that every centre serves farmers within every 8–10 kilometre radius. Apart from limiting the number of farmers that can be served by each centre, it will reduce the distance of fallow trips of the machines and implements.
2. There should be one tractor mechanic per centre or at worst one to two centres. This arrangement allows for greater effectiveness and efficiency.
3. The Extension Unit should be separated from the Fertilizer Procurement and Distribution Unit and expanded in order to achieve the units' objectives.
4. The AISU should pursue the objective of providing storage facilities centrally apart from encouraging individual storage facilities.
5. In order to foster better understanding, there should be greater AISU-farmer interaction. This should be effected through the establishment of Local Management Committee (LMC) at each Local Government Council level. Membership should be drawn from the clientele, community, agricultural entrepreneurs and the AISU. Central Management Committee which should be at the State level should draw membership from the LMC.
6. AISU should interact better, for greater understanding and recognition of the needs of the unit, with other governmental agencies from whom it gets its supplies.

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