

Roles of Village-Level Extension Workers Re-Examined

E. A. LAOGUN

*Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology
Obafemi Awolowo University
Ile-Ife*

Abstract

This paper reviewed the basic philosophy of extension, examined researched conducted on the roles of extension field workers. The findings from those studies revealed that extension workers in both developing and developed countries perceived and performed their roles differently. It was also found that extension field workers performed roles other than educational functions, most especially in Nigeria. Therefore, suggestions and recommendations were made for the improvement in the performance of educational functions as well as other three functions being performed by extension field workers in developing country viz regulatory, service and administrative functions.

Introduction

From the time agricultural extension became institutionalized in Nigeria up till the present time, the preparation of the extension workers has been oriented towards the beliefs and philosophy of the Western countries from which Nigeria inherited the system. Hence, emphasis in Nigeria has been towards the educational and service roles of extension workers.

The question that however arises is whether our experience of the actual role performance of extension workers and the role expectation of the clients are congruent with their job preparation and orientation. The purpose of this study therefore, is to provide an answer to the question: "Can developing countries in general and Nigeria in particular, in light of the prevailing circumstances, define the roles of extension workers as mainly educational"? To address this question, the objectives of this study are:

- (1) to review studies that are pertinent to the philosophy of extension workers and their role perception and performance.
- (2) to determine the educational functions and other related functions.
- (3) to determine the relationship between the role functions perceived and role functions performed.
- (4) based on items 1, 2 and 3 to present a realistic view of what the role orientation of village-level extension workers should be in Nigeria.

Philosophy and Roles of Village Level Extension Workers.

Extension philosophy is based on individual and social needs. It is the promotion of progress for rural people and for the nation. Extension educators work with people to help them develop themselves and achieve superior personal well being.

The philosophy which extension assumed from the beginning is that people must be reached where they are, that is, at their present educational background and level of interest

and understanding. It is also assumed that the aims and objectives are not to be fixed and not to be made unchangeable. They must be modified on the basis of individual needs. In addition, it is the basic philosophy of extension education to teach people "how" to think, not "what" to think. (Kelsey and Hearne 1963).

The philosophy of extension centres around the individual and his needs. It is therefore, the function of the extension worker to teach people based on its philosophy to determine their own needs and the solution of their own problems; to help them acquire knowledge and to inspire them to action. In other words the philosophy is that the extension worker teaches people to help themselves, not to do things for people.

Furthermore, the philosophy which supports the above functions or role of an extension worker which is purely educational is that "the extension worker teaches people to help themselves, not do things for people. The worker can best serve people by helping them to recognise their own potentials in the learning, to desire to grow, to reach out in order to improve present status. The extension worker who accomplishes this for his "people" not for the "subject-matter" (Kelsey and Hearne 1963).

If the philosophy of extension is based on individual social and economic needs, these needs are satisfied with the extension worker working with people to help themselves. It is therefore basic to teach people how to think in order to effect change in attitudes, knowledge and skills. The person who helps to effect changes in an individual is an educator. His role is purely educational. It could then be concluded from this philosophy that the role of a Village-level extension worker is purely educational in principle and practice.

In his perceptive reflections on extension process, Mosher (1971) said that extension is working with rural people. These activities are called 'teaching activities' which are as follows; Demonstration, farm visits, meetings, local participation in programme planning, training programmes. The extension field worker performs most of his educational role by the use of demonstration, visits, meetings, exhibition, audio-visual etc. as his methods.

In summary, the primary philosophy behind extension is purely educational, and as such the extension village worker is expected to perform his role as such. Extension service involves changes in the behaviour of rural people, presumably resulting in improved agricultural production, better living and a strengthening of the national economy. But basic to any behavioural change are changes in attitude, skill and knowledge. These three educational functions are role expectations of an extension field worker.

Several studies have been done on role perception and expectation of extension field level workers in countries such as United States of America, Britain, Nigeria and India. The concept of role of an extension field worker as being purely educational provides a basis for re-examining the functions of extension organisation.

Jones (1970) in his study found that the agent performed several roles which he categorized into four areas of responsibility:

1. planning and evaluating extension programme.
2. organizing and promoting local activities.
3. providing instructional and educational information.
4. organizing young farmers' clubs and cooperative societies.

The majority of Alaskan people most closely associated with the Extension service saw the role of extension as:

- (1) disseminating information and teaching skills in the fields of agriculture and home economics, and

(2) aiding in the development of youth.

The two functions as found by Buswell (1959) in his Alaska study are purely educational. But, in developing countries most of the roles performed by extension workers are service activities can be tied to the educational programme of extension taking care to give these activities a demonstrative character (method of teaching) and to obtain as much as possible the farmer's participation, so that the farmers can learn through the actions performed by extension workers.

Akinbode (1971) in his study of Roles of the Divisional Extension Field Workers in Western Nigeria found that the roles perceived were not different from those performed by the extension workers. He listed in his study thirty role activities perceived by the extension agents. The first twelve role activities which were ranked highest are core of educational activities perceived by the officers. Seven out of the twelve role activities perceived by the extension workers in Western Nigeria were categorised as purely educational, while the remaining five role activities were administrative - plus - service functions.

In India, Kherde and Sahay (1979) in their study of the roles of village level workers found and ranked the following roles in descending order of importance:

- (1) Educational
- (2) Organizational
- (3) Service
- (4) Planning
- (5) Supply
- (6) Works
- (7) Supervisory and
- (8) Office work

The findings of kherde and Sahay (1979) in India were consistent with Akinbode's (1971) results. But Akinbode (1971) concluded in his study that there were a greater discrepancy between the roles performed ad perceived by the officers on the one hand, and those desired by the farmers on the other hand, than between the two role dimension on which the extension workers were probed.

Many researchers measured the role performance, perception and expectation of extension workers based on sel-rating, rating by supervisors and the amount of time which the agents devote to a list of activities over a period.

Materials and Method

The data presented in this study are derived from June to August of 1986 survey of Chief Agricultural Superintendent Officers and village level extension workers in all the then 24 local government areas of Oyo State. A list of extension agents was obtained from the State Ministry of Agriculture. Out of about 205 village extension workers operating in the State, 152 of them representing 74 percent were interviewed. The interview covered, among other things, nineteen officially identified and selected roles of village level extension workers.

The selected role functions of village extension workers were measured with the help of a five-point Likert rating scale which ranged from 1 to 5, an average score of above 4.5 3.5-4.5, 2.5-3.5, 1.5-2.5, and less than 1.5 indicated the degree of agreement on the statements "Strongly agree" " undecided" "disagree" and "strongly disagree" respectively. The mean scores were calculated, descriptive statistics involving rank order correlation were used in the data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Role functions perceived

As it appears in table I, it can be concluded that the village level extension workers perceived highly their roles in order of importance as Advisory, knowledge seeking and

educational.

The five roles which the village level extension workers perceived very highly in rank order, were:

1. Advising farmers on loans - where to get the loans and what type of loans
2. Knowing new ideas in agriculture,
3. Informing farmers on fertilizer, pesticides and herbicides application.
4. Advising farmers on agriculture problems in their farms and homes and offices.
5. Seeking research findings from research institutes and faculties of agriculture.

In all the nineteen roles so selected the village level extension workers perceived with greater feeling of their roles which ranges from a low mean of 3.02 to a high mean of 4.68.

Roles Actually Performed by the Village Extension Workers

The means for the nineteen selected roles that are actually performed by the village extension workers as shown in table II, ranged from a low of 2.69 to a high of 3.97.

This indicated that the village level extension workers are not seriously performing the roles as the way they themselves perceived them.

TABLE I: MEAN SCORES AND RANK ORDER OF ROLES AS PERCEIVED BY VILLAGE LEVEL EXTENSION WORKERS

	Role functions Perceived	Mean Score	Perception	Rank
1.	Serving in the role of teacher of agriculture	4.37		8
2.	Knowing new ideas in agriculture	4.67		2
3.	Seeking research findings from research institutes and faculties of agriculture	4.58		5
4.	Communicating research findings and new ideas to farmers	4.42		7
5.	Communicating problems back to researchers for possible solutions	4.45		6
6.	Organizing farmers' co-operative Societies	4.00		13
7.	Conducting field day for farmers	3.48		17
8.	Conducting field demonstrations	3.54		16
9.	Organising and conducting farmers co-operative meetings	4.17		11
10.	Selecting and training of local leaders	3.02		19
11.	Locating and training voluntary leaders.	3.05		18
12.	Conducting and organizing school programmes	4.26		9
13.	Organizing young farmers' clubs	4.18		10
14.	Visiting farmers' homes and farms to solve farm related problems	3.62		15
15.	Finding sources of inputs	4.02		12
16.	Organizing action programmes for community improvement e.g. sinking wells, building roads and bridges	3.98		14
17.	Advising farmers on agriculture problems in their farms and homes (and in your office)	4.59		4
18.	Advising farmers on loans — where to get the loans and what type of loans	4.68		1
19.	Informing farmers on fertilizer pesticides and herbicides applications	4.61		3

The important role functions performed by the village level extension workers, in rank order were:

1. Informing farmers on fertilizer, pesticides and herbicides applications.
2. Communicating research findings and new ideas to farmers.

3. Organizing action programmes for community improvement e.g. sinking wells, building and bridges.
 4. Advising farmers on loans — where to get the loans and what type of loans
 5. Advising farmers on agriculture problems in their farms and homes and your office.
- As stated above the village level extension workers performed their role functions in the area of the study as advisory and educational.

The reason for this order of importance was that the village extension workers performed their educational roles as their most important roles. Furthermore, as their job involved visiting the farms both at home and on their farmers to advise them on their production problems. These role perception and role performance analysis of the village extension workers confirmed the perception of the Extension agents in the studies carried out by Jones (1970), Akinbode (1971) and Kherde and Sahay (1979) who ranked their educational roles to be more important than their administrative and service roles.

Table II: MEAN SCORES AND RANK ORDERS OF ROLES PERFORMED BY VILLAGE LEVEL EXTENSION WORKERS

Roles Performed		Performed Roles Mean Scores	Rank
1.	Serving in the role of teacher of agriculture	3.00	13
2.	Knowing new ideas in agriculture	3.17	12
3.	Seeking research findings from research institutes and faculties of agriculture	2.97	14
4.	Communicating research findings and new ideas to farmers	3.91	2
5.	Communicating problems back to the researchers for possible solutions	2.69	19
6.	Organizing farmers' co-operative societies	3.36	11
7.	Conducting field day for farmers	3.41	8
8.	Conducting field demonstrations	3.38	10
9.	Organizing and conducting farmers' cooperative meetings	3.41	8
10.	Selecting and training of local leaders	2.79	18
11.	Locating and Training voluntary leaders	2.80	17
12.	Conducting and organizing school programmes	2.88	16
13.	Organising young farmers' clubs	2.91	15
14.	Visiting farmers' homes and farms to solve farm related problems	3.47	7
15.	Finding sources of inputs	3.66	6
16.	Organizing action programmes for Community improvement e.g. sinking wells, building roads and bridges	3.82	3
17.	Advising farmers on agriculture problems in their farms and homes and homes and in your office	3.69	5
18.	Advising farmers on loans— where to get the loans and what type of loans	3.74	4
19.	Informing farmers on fertilizer, pesticides and herbicides application	3.97	1

Table III: RANK CORRELATION BETWEEN ROLE FUNCTIONS PERCEIVED AND ROLE FUNCTIONS PERFORMED BY VILLAGE EXTENSION WORKERS

ROLES	ROLES FUNCTIONS PERCEIVED	ROLE FUNCTION PERFORMED		MEAN
	RANKS	D	D ²	
1.	Serving in the role of teacher of agriculture	8	13	-5 25
2.	Knowing new ideas in agriculture	2	12	-10 100
3.	Seeking research findings from research institutes and faculties of agriculture	5	14	-9 81
4.	Communicating research findings and new ideas to farmers	7	25	2 5
5.	Communicating problems back to the researchers for possible solutions	6	-13	169
6.	Organizing farmers' co-operative societies	13	11	2 4
7.	Conducting field day for farmers	17	8	9 81
8.	Conducting field demonstrations	16	10	6 36
9.	Organizing and conducting farmers' cooperative meetings	11	9	8 3
10.	Selecting and training of local leaders	19	18	1 1
11.	Locating and Training voluntary leaders	18	17	1 1
12.	Conducting and organizing school programmes	9	49	16 -7
13.	Organising young farmers' clubs	10	15	-5 25
14.	Visiting farmers' homes and farms to solve farm related problems	8	64	15 7
15.	Finding sources of inputs	12	6	6 36
16.	Organizing action programmes for Community improvement e.g. sinking wells, building roads and bridges	14	3	11 121
17.	Advising farmers on agriculture problems in their farms and homes and in your office	4	5	-1 1
18.	Advising farmers on loans - where to get the loans and what type of loans	1	9	4
19.	Informing farmers on fertilizer, pesticides and herbicides application	3	2	1

6(841)
 $R = 1 - \frac{19(19^2 - 1)}{1 - 5046} = 0.26$
 $= 1 - .74$
 6840

Table III represents the rank ordering of role perception and role performance scores and the differentials between these scores. The lowest differential score of 1 indicates that there was no discrepancy in the perception and the performance of the particular role activity, while the highest differential score of 169 shows a high degree of incongruity in the perception and the performance of the particular role activity. Thus, rank score differentials serve as pointers to existing congruency between role perception and actual role performance.

There are no discrepancies in the perception and performance ranking scores for (1) Selecting and training of local leaders and (2) Locating and Training voluntary leaders. These two roles were consistently the lowest of the three lowest ranking scores. But there are discrepancies between these aforementioned ranking scores and the other lowest ranking scores for (3) advising farmers on agriculture problems in their farms and homes.

Therefore, "selecting and training of local leaders" and "locating and training voluntary leaders" were perceived as important roles and equally performed by the village extension workers, while advising farmers on agriculture problems in their farms and homes was perceived as an unimportant role equally performed by the village extension workers.

Conclusions

The above findings have two major implications for agricultural extension agency and village extension workers. First, supply of inputs and administrative activities which largely occupy the village level extension workers' working hours may largely account for low impact of extension services in Nigeria. Major reasons for this may be lack of orientation, lack of induction training and the lack of other resources for carrying out their roles. Therefore in order to allow village level extension workers perform their roles extension workers must be provided with adequate resources, transportation and training.

Secondly, if educational roles are not fully performed by village extension workers as revealed in this study, the whole concepts and philosophy of extension education especially in developing countries particularly in Nigeria need to be re-examined.

Finally, setting priorities in terms of farmers' needs, wants and production problems should be the basis for determining educational roles of the village level extension workers if administrative service and educational functions cannot be separated.

Further studies could focus on the training concepts if the training of a village extension worker adequately prepares him to meet his educational roles. And by examining the basic philosophy of extension with other factors will definitely influence the village level extension worker's educational role performance.

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