

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The importance of food at the household level is obvious since it is a basic means of sustenance. Extension services are the different programmes/projects/recommendations, which the extension service make available to their clientele through the use of extension education process. Agricultural extension services encompasses all aspects of agriculture. It includes; the provision of timely information, the linking of farmers with sources of farming inputs and credit facilities and most importantly, the provision of education services to farmers. The mistake people have been making was that of limiting agricultural extension services to helping the farmers to procure their planting inputs and other inputs needed on their farms; but people through hard experiences have come to realize the fact that for any agricultural project or programme to succeed, agricultural extensionists must be fully involved, so as to participate in all its activities from planning to execution.

Modern agricultural extension work in Nigeria today, covers a wide spectrum of services, which include; improvement in production, marketing, storage, processing, fish farming, agro-forestry, input supply and distribution, man-power development, home economics/women in agriculture, irrigation, land management, farm mechanization, erosion control, livestock management, human resources/development, administration/management, programme planning and evaluation, youth development programmes etc (Anaeto, 2003). This becomes an improvement on already known relationship between Research-Extension-Farmer Linkage thus resulting in birth of Research-Extension- Farmer-Input Linkages (REFILS). The truth remains that, even this linkage has not really improved the outlook of extension service hence Anaeto, (2003) mentioned the need for involving extension services in direct input distribution in addition to their educational services.

Food security is a great concern when considering smallholder farmers and rural area development. This is because food and food availability is the basic need of every farmer, for a healthy and active life which in turn will roll-out its negative effects on the functioning life of a farmer thereby giving way for the tackling of other affecting factors. On September 14, 2010, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) published its estimates concerning the number of people suffering from hunger in 2010: 925 million. This figure was below the 1,020 billion in 2009, but it was higher than the number reached before the 2008 global food crisis. The 2010 figure corresponded to 13.5% of the world population, while the 2015 objective (Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number 1) was 8%. The FAO concluded that, we were still far from achieving MDG 1, that is, halving the number of hungry people worldwide by 2015.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The extension service is one of the critical change agents required for the transformation of subsistence farming to a commercial agriculture. This is critically important in promoting household food security, wealth and employment creation, as well as poverty reduction. For a long time the extension services was effective and had good impacts. This was as a result of new technologies being introduced, a well funded extension services, and elaborate set of farmer's incentives such as ready market, subsidized inputs and credits, as well as relatively good infrastructure. In the last two decades, several constraints have hindered proper functioning of agricultural extension system and services which has resulted into declining food supply in Itu Local Government Area.

The primary source of food insecurity in Itu Local Government Area is the inability of people to gain access to food due to wide spread poverty and unemployment, which also inhibits purchasing power and prevent assured access to food supply. Over time more and more people in these economies have shifted from wholly subsistence farming to commercialized agricultural production. Adequate home production of food and/or adequate economic and physical access to food are touted as major means

through which household food security could be guaranteed. However, smallholder farming in Itu local government area which is based on low-input and inefficient traditional farming practices coupled with population pressure on land have impacted negatively on sufficient food production in Itu Local Government Area.

There is a general consensus from research findings and among policy makers that the future of food security and poverty lies with the smallholder farming. Food price being volatile has exerted considerable pressure on food security in Itu Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State, thus much dependency on food supply and vulnerable to high food prices. Many studies have demonstrated the existence of a strong relationship between extension services and food security among households. In a study by Evenson and Mwabu (1998) a positive and significant relationship was found between the farm productivity and agricultural extension services; while this study was important to the researchers, they never addressed food security with regards to agricultural extension services, hence a knowledge gap. It is this gap that this study sought to fill.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a) What are the socioeconomic characteristics of household in the study area?
- b) What is the level of access to extension information by smallholder farmers?
- c) Do smallholder farmers' have access to credit?
- d) What is the farmers' level of adoption of inputs and practices recommended by the extension services?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main objective of the study was on the effectiveness of extension services on smallholder farmers in Itu Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

The Specific Objectives are to;

- a) determine the household socio economic characteristics in Itu Local Government Area;
- b) ascertain the level of access to extension information by smallholder household in Itu Local Government Area;
- c) determine the level of smallholder farmers' accessibility to credit in Itu Local Government Area and
- d) find out the farmers' level of adoption of inputs and practices recommended by the extension services and its effects on food security of smallholder households in Itu Local Government Area.

EFFECTIVENESS OF EXTENSION SERVICES ON SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN ITU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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