
Systems Description Of Adult Education Administration Personnel: The Extension Agent

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Introduction

Adult education comprises of activities and experiences that have educational purpose which are directed towards adult persons and the community in which they live. These activities according to Eyibe, (2005), include literacy programme, remediation and retraining programmes. As diverse as these activities are they represent the diverse human interest and as such cannot be handled by one agency. Again the massive campaign nature of most adult education programmes provide the temptation of employing the services of a wide range of personnel who find themselves professionally responsible for adult learners without having had any training directly related to adult education.

As a result of the above, adult education personnel come from different agencies, institutions and professions and they work with adult learners in different capacities. Consequently one person who is considered as a professional adult educator might have an entirely different kind of position than another person who is considered as educator or trainer of adults.

However, no matter how diverse adult education personnels are in terms of diverse agencies and institutions, services provided and different characteristics of clientele targeted, one basic and unique fact is that they all have “adults” as their “learners”. To this end the following workers can be identified as adult education personnel.

1. The extension agent
2. Literacy supervisor
3. Health service worker
4. The social Animator
5. The consultant
6. The adult educator
7. The community development worker
8. Counsellor
9. The manager
10. Administrator

The above identified adult education personnels can be described within a systems analytical framework that will give an adequate illumination with a view of delineating them in respect of their varying features. However, for the purpose of this write up the extension agent will be focused. However, in adult education we are not only concerned with Agricultural Extension but with other forms of Extension services which include veterinary and animal husbandry, home science extension, industry extension and sanitation and health extension. Hence the adult education personnels involved in these typologies are called veterinary/animal husbandry extension worker, home science extension work, industry extension work, and sanitation/health extension worker. The author therefore wishes to adopt

rather more philosophical oriented systems approaches that are proactive to explain the Agricultural extension agent as adult education personnel.

Analytical Framework

The framework adopted here is a five “W^s” approach thoughtfully designed by the author to describe the identified adult education personnels. The four “W” and “H” approach represent the five philosophical questions that underpin the explication of any phenomenon. The five “W^s” are “WHO”, “WHAT”, “WHY”, and “WHERE” and “HOW”.

1. WHO – by way of conceptual definition and understanding who the Extension agent is.
2. WHAT- by way of what he does as adult education activity
3. HOW- by way of how does he provide adult education services
4. WHY- by way of why is he seen as adult education personnel
5. WHERE- by way of the plate-form he provides the services.

The author came out of the conviction that the above approach is systems specific and at the same time systems encompassing. It is not in doubt that the approach will provide the needed description, required of it, of any identified adult education personnel.

The Extension Agent

(A) Who is an Extension Agent?

The extension agent is the vital link between researchers on one hand and rural population on the other. In other words the extension agent is the link between scientific inquiry and practical application. According to Sikhondze (1999) an extension agent is the delivery channel for improved useful and adaptable technology to the end users using defined methods and techniques. To effectuate this, he maintains an intimate relationship which demands much tact and resourcefulness as he works with people whose circumstances are different from his own.

In their own definition, Acakley and Garforth (1985) see an extension agent as an educated, trained professional working with farmers, many of who have little formal education and live a way of life which may be quite different from his. In this respect, an extension agent is seen as change agent who intervenes to bring about change in order to help improve the lives of the farmers and their families.

Considering the above definitions and clarifications, an extension agent in the field of extension services could be described as one who:

- i. Advises- meaning that one person knows and has to communicate his knowledge to someone else.
- ii. Counsels – meaning that at most a group of people meet. The counselors role is to help as a result of his expertise on the subject of discussion.
- iii. Extends- meaning that an innovation or special information is to be made known to the people.

The above then illuminates the exploration of the role of the extension agent, put as a question, what does he do?

(B) What does Extension Agent do (Roles)?

Many authors have attempted to describe the roles of an extension agent. Most authors are so influenced and sometime enshrouded by the intermediary nature of extension

work, and the receiving nature of the extension clientele bequeaths endless roles to an extension agent. As a result, Esenjor (1992) describes the role of an extension agent as an enabler, Facilitator, activist, Advocate, Leader, organizer, Catalyst, leader etc.

In the same vein, Acakley and Garforth (1985) did not stop at classifying in the agents roles broadly into two viz knowledge/communication/innovator and Educator/facilitator/catalyst, but went further to list other many faceted interpretations of the role ascribed to the agent in the extension practice throughout the world as:

Teacher Facilitator Organizer Arbitrative Educator Broker
Administrator Advocate Leader Consultant Enabler Catalyst
Communicator Intermediary Activist Friend Motivator Listener
Provider Stimulator.

The position of this paper therefore is that for only one person to play these roles depends to a great extent on the circumstances one finds himself. More so, most of the nouns (names) listed above as roles of an extension agent are not actually played as roles but they are inert characteristics of an agent observable only in the process of carrying out his role as an extension agent. Consequently the agent must always be aware that the most important thing is to study the situation, analyze the problems and adopt a position which is relevant to solving these particular problems. This is important as extensions service is all about providing solutions (scientifically) to identified community problems.

To this end, therefore, the roles of an extension agent as classified by Sikhondze (1999) are relied on and hereby presented as follows:

1. Role of diffusion of innovation
2. Role of process of adoption
3. Role of technology dissemination

1. Role of diffusion of innovation

In agricultural extension service, the diffusion of an innovation role of the agent takes place through its adoption by individuals and groups. It involves several stages:

- (a) Early adopters- the first few highly innovative farmers or groups.
- (b) Late adopters- the larger number of people influenced by the early adopters
- (c) Laggards- the people who take the longest time to adopting an innovation.

The important role of the extension agent in diffusion of innovation is to ensure that the innovation is adopted as early as possible since technology is not stagnant.

2. Role of process of adoption: Prior to the adoption of innovation, there is a series of stages bearing on the decision. The five stage model include:

- (a) Awareness
- (b) Interest
- (c) Evaluation
- (d) Trial and
- (e) Adoption

The adoption model processes are not followed religiously by all farmers (adopters) because the decision to adopt or reject an innovation may be taken at any of the stages. The role of the extension agent here therefore is to create the necessary awareness and arouse

interest so that farmers could evaluate and try the innovation before deciding to adopt or reject it.

3. **Role of technology dissemination**

Here the extension agent serves as a vehicle to:

- I. Transfer technology for development from source (research) to recipients
- II. Prepare messages in simple languages that can be clearly understood by the recipients
- III. Supervise recipients operation all the time
- IV. Promote education in the form of workshops, seminars, field days, agricultural shows and competitions.
- V. Guide recipients as to the practice varieties in time and space
- VI. Bring or make available to the community experts on specific aspects of development project.
- VII. Work on attitudes and behaviour and encourages peoples participation in activities related to specific development projects.

An example of changes in behaviour of extension project recipients was given by Sikhondze (1999) using farmers. According to him such change in farmer's behaviour should be such that:

- (i) Farmers have a positive disposition toward field officers;
- (ii) Farmers attend meetings to get up to date technology on vegetable production;
- (iii) Farmers are willing to invest some money towards the production of vegetables.

(C) **How does the agent provide Adult Education Services (Methodology)?**

This subsection discusses the methodology the agent uses as a vehicle to reaching the recipients and strategy used to facilitate group or individual involvement in the extension training. The methodology available to the extension agent will be discussed under group approach, individual approach and mass approach.

1. **Group Approach**

This approach is usually applied during the implementation stages of the innovation. Methods of information dissemination used by extension agent for groups include: meetings, demonstration, tours, group discussion, group demonstration and result demonstration, workshops, training, competitions and teaching skills.

A brief explanation of the above will illuminate on their meanings and show its importance in extension work, using farming as focus.

(i) **Meeting**

More often than not frequent meetings between farmers and extension agents facilitate communication and interaction. The relevance of any extension service to the people depends to a large extent on the ability of the extension agent to make these meetings real, efficient and acting more as a facilitator than chairman of such meetings. In doing this the agent facilitates interest and enhances understanding of the subject matter. Using the existing community leaders and village structures, the agent identifies the real target population for a specific development project. This will add direction and purpose to the extension work.

(ii) **Method of Demonstration**

According to Sikhonze (1999) this method is very effective in seed bed preparation and in transplanting of crops. Its main aim is to show and tell farmers how to do some practical works by demonstrating the process of carrying out such activity. In doing this, the agent uses explanation method to clarify issues and questions that may arise.

(iii) **Tours**

Tours are essential method in extension service. It is a tool the agent uses to see things for himself. This eliminates the temptation of issuing orders and instructions from agent's office in cities and reduces issuance of fake reports about a project.

In doing this the agent is guided by field officers who in collaboration with a subject matter specialist eg a horticulturist, compares progress in other areas where successful adoption of improved seed has helped in the development of individual families. Tours give the agent the opportunity to interact with different and larger groups especially when the date and time of such meeting are published and through consultation scheduled to suit the rural people. This is to avoid scheduling such tour dates and time during the market days or farming hours of the rural people.

(iv) **Group Discussion**

Group discussions present an ideal setting for learning and information exchange to occur and to be facilitated. Here problems raised by discussants are dealt with and information passed in respect of matters raised and in this process learning take place. The agent assists farmers to integrate their intentional doing with purposeful thinking. In farming areas what may be discussed include vegetable production, availability of markets, pricing systems and transportation of produce.

(v) **Group Demonstrations and Result Demonstration**

This is a process where a selected technology is demonstrated at the farmer location. Here the extension agent will show a group of people (farmers) how to perform an operation on a given subject. This method is based on the dictum "seeing is believing" and farmers learn better when they see.

(vi) **Workshop**

Here extension system focuses on training farmers in entrepreneurial skills and decision making for them to acquire the ability to discern market trends so that they plan production to coincide with the period of most need.

During the workshop, the extension agent role is to educate vegetable farmers among other topics on:

- (a) Variety of selection
- (b) Seed bed preparation and care
- (c) Recommended time for planting vegetables
- (d) Time and fertilizer requirements
- (e) Pest/disease management

(vii) **Training**

The training of extension agents and farmers should be a continuous exercise between researcher/extension agent and extension agent/farmer interactions. The training sessions should serve the purpose of developing energy between participants. In this process

the researcher trains the extension agents on the new technologies to ensure meaningful content of messages when the technology reaches the farmers.

The training whether basic or advanced training is geared toward facilitating information exchange and as such training must be encouraged throughout the extension production chain so that initial training and learning of new skills are enhanced.

(viii) **Competitions**

Competitions lead to heightened motivation. They are effective abstract tools for activating people in some situation. Competitions can be very effective as an additional incentive in large scale extension work. For a competition to be successful, it should convey an extension message. The extension subject should be incorporated in the competition. The role of the extension service is to make sure that the competition carries an extension message.

(ix) **Teaching Skills**

The successful competition of the technology dissemination and adoption process depends not only on whether a person is willing to accept a recommended practice but also on the skill with which we can carry it out. Teaching of skills require the extension agent to teach the farmer to do contrary to the dictates of the conveyor belt where the extension agent does things for the farmer as Dewey has observed doing is a source for and simulation to thinking. An empirical situation presents difficulty which is an indispensable stimulus to thought. In the process of resolving such difficulties, learning consequently occurs. This type of learning makes a continuing difference in the quality of life of human beings, which is the ultimate objective of the agricultural extension services.

2. **Individual Approach**

(i) Individual farm visits: depending on the complexity of the skill, it can be taught to farmers during individual farm visits by the extension agent. However, individual farm visits are mainly to catch up farmers that might not have grasped the ideas during field days and other group approaches, and to assess whether technology is being implemented after farmers have bought the idea.

(ii) Face to face: this is used during individual visits if the intention is to persuade the researcher to form a favourable attitude towards a new idea.

3. **Mass Approach**

Mass media: this is used if; the intention is to inform the receivers about an innovation. They are suitable for a large group or audience. Mass contacts will involve radio, leaflets and publications. These will function to sensitize the public on the importance of vegetable production in household nutrition and new improved varieties etc.

WHY- by way of why Extension agent is seen as adult educator?

An extension agent engages in an adult educational process aimed at the development of the individual through which process the people are sensitive about the present condition and are helped by the extension workers to improve their conditions of living. This according to Essenor (1992) involves a continuous developmental process designed to make the people aware of their problems and to indicate to them the ways and means by which they can solve such problems.

Similarly, adult education comprises of activities and experiences that have educational purpose which are directed towards adult persons and the community in which they live (Ibeneme, 1999). By extension, activities involving educating the people in solving their problems and inspiring them towards the necessary positive action required for every

day survival are adult education activities. Hence extension education is an aspect of adult education aims at teaching people to raise their standard of living, by their own efforts, using their own resources of manpower and materials, with minimum assistance from governments there by encouraging local leadership and the spirit of self-help (Ezenjor, 1992).

Extension education means adult and informal education. However, in extension services we are concerned with educating the adult farmers and home makers not on letters and alphabets, grammar or language, but in the techniques of raising better crops, raising better animals, better fruits and trees, managing the home in better ways, rearing children scientifically, taking care of the nutrition of the families etc. By this extension education can be classified into the following adult education typologies:

- (a) Agricultural extension
- (b) Veterinary and animal husbandry
- (c) Home science extension
- (d) Industry extension, and
- (e) Sanitation and health extension.

In carefully scrutinizing the notion of extension, we discover that extension does a number of things. We find that extension:

- is oriented towards an objective -helping farmers to improve themselves innovation
- works according to principles - consideration for target audience
- is based on theories -communication
- performs functions -helping adult education and training
- takes various forms - individual communities-group extension
- selects methodological – participant-oriented approaches-practice-oriented
- Uses suitable tools -demonstration objects -posters
- Is practiced with specialist -commodity approach approaches -technical approaches.

WHERE- by way of the platform he provides the services?

Almost every country in the world today has an agricultural extension service of one kind or another. Many of these organizations are not really *extensions* of anything but self-contained advisory services. However, most of them operate according to the basic ideas of *extension work*.

Extension is considered in terms of improving the living standard of rural people, increasing agricultural production and eventually national progress through education by bringing knowledge and help that will enable farmers to produce more, will improve their economic and social welfare, and will provide opportunities for development of rural people's capabilities, leadership, and social life through education.

Extension service is practically an education activity which involves teaching and learning practical ways of solving pertinent life problems. The agents of extension come from higher education institutions, industries and other service oriented institutions whose professionals extend their product and now inventions and strategies to the rural people. It is an interventionist approach that is geared towards providing solutions to negative experiences of the people in their every day life occupations.

Conclusion

Many change agents perform educational duties to specific adult clientele without actually knowing that they are adult educators. This has resulted to non-application of adult education principles and practices in the exhibition of their duties. This paper provides a systemic way of describing the extension agent as an adult educator, his roles, method of carrying out his roles, reasons extension agent is seen as an adult educator and plat-form he performs these roles.

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