

Full Length Research Paper

Effective Agricultural Extension Delivery in Nigeria: The Role of Language and Communication

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Agricultural extension is the transfer of improved technologies to the farmers to enhance all sectors of agricultural production. Information, language and communication are vital ingredients needed for an effective transfer of these technologies that are researched to boost agricultural production. For farmers to utilize such, they must first have access to them in their farming system through appropriate use of language and efficient communication strategies. Hence, for effective extension programmes in Nigeria language and efficient communication skills are vital ingredients through the use of suitable communication models. Agricultural Extension Agents must be fluent in language; both spoken and written to meet up the professional ethics of the discipline. They should also remove all “Blocks” or “Barriers” to communication delivery in their activities or programmes. They should understand that human communication is unique. In that in language, the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols takes place. There are two types of extension communication which form the goal of agricultural extension programmes, namely: informative communication- aimed at increasing the former's knowledge and understanding of a subject matter, and persuasive communication directed towards inducing the farmers to think, feel or act in a manner selected by the extension worker. The former is used usually at the interpersonal level while the latter at group or mass level.

Keywords: Agricultural Extension Agents, Agricultural Extension Programme, Communication and Language

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the significance of agriculture to our national economy, the sector is not producing maximally to meet up with the food and fibre requirement of the country. The most serious problem causing this situation to persist over the years could be attributed largely to the very slow pace of adoption of improved technologies in virtually all aspects of agricultural production in Nigeria. Information, language and communication are essential ingredients needed for effective transfer of technologies that are designed to boost agricultural production. For farmers to benefit from such technologies, they must first have access to them and learn how to effectively utilize them

in their farming systems. This is the function of agricultural extension agencies in Nigeria (Nwachukwu and Odoemelam, 2004).

Agricultural extension means finding ways of making the encounter between the extension worker/agent and the farmer, a human experience during which people learn together to build a future - a future that they themselves have created by their own efforts and where no ready-made solution will be presented (Ilevbaoje, 2004). This essentially indicates that the extension workers must ensure that the transfer technologies to the farmers in the language and manner the farmers can best understand. Hence

effective communication through appropriate use of language is fundamental to the achievement of the cardinal objectives of agricultural extension. It would not be an

over-statement to say that the ability to communicate through efficient use of language skills, determines the success or failure of the extension personnel and their packages (Qgunbameru. 2001). Language is a veritable tool, which makes it possible for the extension agents to share ideas, experience and technologies with their clientele – the farmers.

Language and Agricultural Extension

The word language, as used in this context, is the human non-instinctive system of communicating ideas, practices, technologies, desires and innovations by means of a system of sound and sound symbols (Agbi, 2004). It is the means of human communication and the interaction between the extension personnel or agents and its clientele. In other words language is the veritable instrument, which affords man the means and ability to understand his own fellow beings and motives, actions and expectations of their actions. This is made possible because it provides a system of symbols and rules that facilitate human thinking. As observed by (Ibli, 2004), language is a gift and man's ability to use it well enables him to explore the physical world and the universe of learning.

In any given society members communicate by means of language. Language clearly reflects the physical and social environment of a people. It gives man the ability to organize thought and thus enables him to collect, sought, relate and record ideas. It is therefore a means of communicating human thoughts, ideas, feelings, values and even literature to others (Kechi, 2002). It is a major mark of human identity. Thus, it is by cultural transmission that languages are acquired Language is therefore a social function that permits the individual to become an interacting member of the society. It is vehicle of expression, a means through which literature is expressed. Hence, if language must serve its purpose in instruction, it must be appropriately utilized by the Village Extension Workers (VEWs), who are at the implementation stage of all agricultural extension programmes carried out by the different states through the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs). Interaction is involved between the VEWs and the farmers in all stages.

On the other hand, agricultural extension has often been conceptualized as an education process, which promotes many among farmers. It uses the findings of biological sciences and combines them with the principles of social science to bring about change

in knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices in and out - of school setting. Therefore, agricultural extension is viewed by its partisans as informal education, an out -of school and farm - side system of education, designed to help rural people and farmers to solve their ii problems (Ilevbaoje, 2004). Agricultural Extension is considered as the conscious communication of information to help farmers and other rural people form sound opinions and take good decisions by themselves (hawkins and van den Ban, 1996). This underscores the significance of language and communication in the field of agricultural extension in that; the interaction requires the understanding between the sender of a message (Agricultural Extension Agents) and the receiver (The rural farmers). By helping farmers to improve farming and farm yields, agricultural extension can be a very powerful tool for empowerment and support to community livelihood.

Significance of Language and Communication in agriculture

Language is a veritable instrument for the carriage of people's culture. Language is the most enduring artifact of culture, a people hardly give up their language; a people can always have their history traced through their language. Language is a vital means of communication. The language used in communicating agriculture or science determines, to a large extent, how learners or farmers effectively grasp the concepts of science or agriculture. Where the learner is poor in the language used in communication, very little science can be learnt. This is more so given that agriculture or science is abstract and requires deep thought and thought - processes. Fafunwa (1990) says that if the language used in communicating science to our learners is inaccessible to them, then very little or no science concept development will take place.

A study by Jimoh and Salawu (1998) in Ojo (2002) shows that when students are taught science in their mother tongues they perform better, and better adjust to learning situations, more related, more enterprising and more resourceful in the classroom. This is same with farmers when they are introduced to concept in the language of the immediate environment (vernacular) as opined by Ogunbameru, (2001).

Importance of Communication in Agricultural Extension

Extension communication aims mainly at remedying situations of ignorance and to overcome farming problems occasioned by this ignorance. The

following steps explain the importance of language / communication between the change agent and the clientele or the farmers. These steps include inter alia:

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- a. The farmers production problem is identified and recognized,
- b. The Extension clientele is given some insight into the causes of the problems,
- c. Solutions to the identified problems are worked out together between the Extension workers and farmers, and
- d. Necessary enabling environment and back up is provided for adoption of the solutions.

These steps if effectively identified and taken by the exchange agent and his clientele, will lead to the achievement of the cardinal objectives of agricultural extension and by implication increase in agricultural production.

The cardinal objectives of agricultural extension communication according to Ogunbameru (2001) are.

- i. Provide firm knowledge on which action can be based,
- ii. Persuade the farmers to make a decision to try the new technology,
- iii. Provide the information necessary for actual implementation, and
- iv. Provide information needed by the farmers to access the result of that decision and to confirm the decision.

The overall goal of extension communication is therefore, the acceptance and adoption of improved agricultural technology by farmers through a conducive interaction between them and agricultural extension agents. It is universally accepted that the process of communication is fundamental to extension trainings and information dissemination. Thus, learning processes and the dissemination of innovations or social change cannot be explained without reference to communication and language (Albrecht et al, 1989).

Verbal and non- verbal Communication in Agricultural Extension

No doubt, one of the major factors that place the human race above the animal kingdom is the possession of language. Language makes it possible for us as humans to share ideas and experiences, to have thoughts and make abstractions. (Arokoyo, 2004).

However, symbolic communication is not limited by words. Gestures, facial expressions, physical positions towards others, etc are all forms of non - verbal communication, which can meaningfully be interpreted. Other forms of non-verbal communication

include: eye movements and contact, appropriate posture, mode of dressing (simple and decent in agricultural extension), mood of expression, body language, etc. In agriculture, the- use of pamphlets, pictures, illustrations leaflets, newspapers, etc are considered non-verbal communication style. Many agricultural extension aids are visual, audio or audio-visual, which are used to bring about agricultural communication. Agricultural extension teaching aids are numerous and varied. Examples are: radio, television, drawings, photographs, posters, charts, motion pictures, specimens and so on. All these are means of nonverbal communication (Obinne, undated).

Professional Qualities of Extension Personnel/Agent

Under the current unified extension service in all the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) in Nigeria every extension agent is supposed to be “a jack of all trades and master of all” (Ogunbameru, 2001). In addition to the academic background of the extension agents, they must be of high credibility and act as positive catalysts in helping the farmers to help themselves. To achieve these objectives, the extension agent should possess the ability to communicate fluently with farmers, to teach them sound practical knowledge of farming and how farmers live and the ability to identify with rural farmers. It is very important to be a good communicator both verbally and non-verbally, so to motivate and sustain the immediate interest of farmers, for learning education. Under agricultural extension it is indeed important, imbibing the tenets of democratic principles. The extension personnel should be adequate not only in the official language, but also in the language(s) spoken by the majority of his clientele: for example Hausa, Mumuye, Jukun, Wurkun, Jenjo, etc. so as to be able to disseminate practices, ideas, technologies, innovations, etc to the level the farmers can understand especially being that, majority of our farmers are low in literacy level (adult literacy is said to be less than 4%) (Ayo, 2000).

The ability for effective communication by an extension agent will further strengthen his enthusiasm for the job, create initiatives, develop leadership qualities, and generate confidence and other relevant attributes needed for a successful extension programme.

Elements of Communication Process in Agricultural Extension

Generally, communication models in agricultural extension have between 4-5 principal components: the speaker (Extension Agent), the message (Agricultural technology, innovation or practice), the channel, the listener/receiver (farmer) and feedback (Result-satisfaction or dissatisfaction). The four (4) major agricultural extension communication models as documented by Ogunbameru, (2001) are:

I. Linear or Aristotle model:

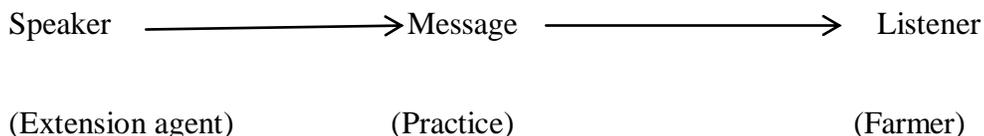


Figure I: Linear model of communication.

Ani (2007) opined that the linear model is the oldest, common and persistent of all the models, otherwise termed as Transfer Of Technology (TOT) model and illustrated in relation to research and extension as:



The major characteristics of this illustrated model according Ani (2007) is that research institute develops a technology, passes it on the extension agent to unravel the scientific jargons and pass them on to farmers

2. The circular model of communication

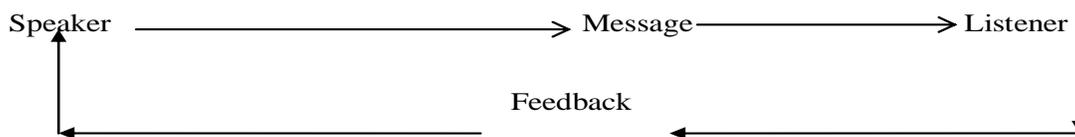


Figure 2: Circular model of communication

3. The process model of communication

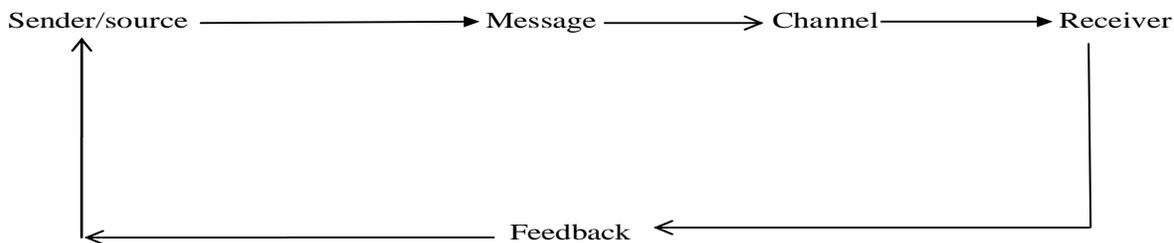


Figure 3: The process model of communication

4. The two - step flow model of communication

For convenience and comprehensiveness, the two step flow model of communication is a process where the message from the source or sender gets to the receiver through an intermediary, that is, a third person. Hence, the two —step flow of communication occurs whereby messages from the source are transmitted through a third party (group leader), opinion leader, gatekeeper etc to the receiver as depicted in the figure below. The first step of the two-step flow of communication is from A to B while the second step is from B to C as shown in the diagram.

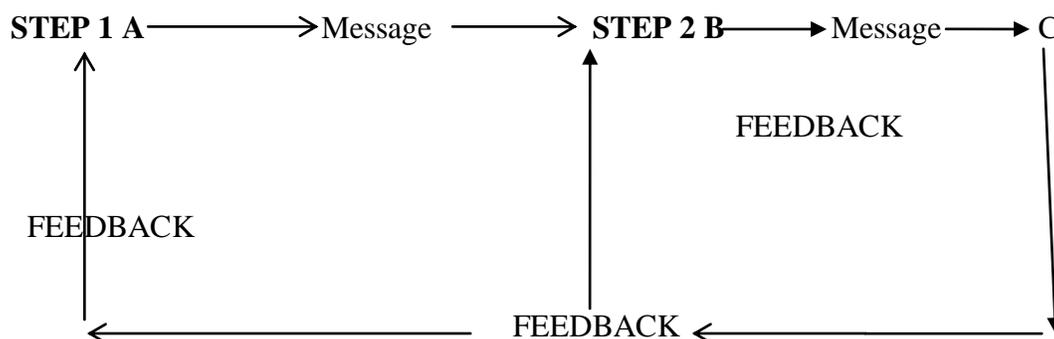


Figure 4: *the two — step flow model of communication*

Feedback occurs in the two-step flow of communication first from the intermediary (B) to the source or sender (A). This is necessary to ascertain that the third part (farmer) understands the message before relaying it to the receiver (C). There is also a feedback from the receiver (C) to the intermediary (B). In some instances, feedback is sent directly from the receiver (C) to the source (A) of the message. The two - step flow of communication can occur in extension service for example, when the subject matter specialist (SMS), (A In the diagram) is the source of improved technology, example, the hybrid maize. Frisian cow or prolific sheep. Instead of SMS (A) introducing the technology directly to farmers (C), he relays it to extension agent (B) who in turn transmits the message to farmers (C). Through a most suitable channel individually or mass methods. The intermediary (B) is regarded as the most important or critical actor in the two-step flow of communication. They must therefore be individuals who are people-centered rather than self-centered. That is, they must have genuine interest of the people they serve and be of proven integrity. Self-centered intermediaries or group leaders may 'hoard' or 'conceal' information for their personal advantage or share the information only with their favourites.

Feedback in agricultural extension communication is necessary for the following important reasons:

I. It assists to measure the level of influence senders (Extension Agents) have on receivers (farmers) of their message;

2. It helps senders to determine proximity or congruence of their message with the receiver's intervention and understanding of the message.
3. It helps to enhance proper communication.
4. Feedback determines the attention, comprehension and acceptance or otherwise of the sender's message by the receivers.

Barriers to Effective Communication in Agricultural Extension

Several farmers have been identified as clogs to effective agricultural extension communication, namely:

1. External distractions, that is, "NOISE", For example the barking of dogs, the bleating of goats, etc.,
2. Ambiguity of message, (message not quite clear due to misuse of words or language),
3. Lack of adequate communication aids or facilities,
4. Technical and socio-economic barriers, such as levels of education, income, number in the family, etc.,
5. Sender's motives and receiver's characteristics,
6. Inappropriate channels of communication,
7. Confused presentation which leads to misunderstanding,

8. physical limitation of the receivers and senders incapacities such as bearing and sight impairment,
9. Prejudice on ground of sex, age, tribe or race, and
10. Wrong assumptions and premature evaluation or judgment.

All the above barriers to effective extension communication can be minimized or eliminated by adhering to the practical guidelines and ensuring adequate participation of the farmers in all stages of extension programme, be it planning, implementation or evaluation.

CONCLUSION

The art of agricultural extension communication process carries with it serious responsibilities. Communicators (Agricultural Extension Agents) therefore have obligations to themselves as well as their target audience (farmers). Human communication is unique because language is involved (Ogwuchi 2004) As technical communicators, agricultural extension personnel must recognize farmers' drives, motivations, interests and frustrations for the success of all agricultural programmes and break barriers to the communication process between them. Agricultural Extension Agents must be morally thoughtful avoid half truth. Out dated or obsolete information and try to re-evaluate their language and behaviour in order to be professionally and ethically competent to deliver extension programmes. Extension agents should start with the farmers according to their immediate needs and level of knowledge of agricultural technology using appropriate communication models to attain effective communication, thereby achieving the objectives of agricultural programmes. Studies by cultural anthropologists and linguists indicates the impact of language on thought, therefore the agricultural extensionist must be fluent and vocal to carry along all their audience in their programmes (Ogwuchi 2004).

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