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COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION STAFF TRAINING IN THE THREE GEOPOLITICAL ZONES OF SOUTHERN NIGERIA.

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Abstract: Comparative evaluation of agricultural extension staff training was carried out in the three geopolitical zones of Southern Nigeria. The study focused to: describe the demographic characteristics of the extension staff, evaluate the extension trainings received by agricultural extension staff, and ascertain the major constraints to extension staff training in the area of study. Descriptive survey was used to observe the population of the extension staff of Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) in the three southern geopolitical zones. Purposive sampling method was used to select 3 States (1 from each geo-political zone), 6ADP zones (2ADP zones from each geo-political zone), 12ADP Blocks and 4ADP Cells (i.e. 4ADP Blocks and 4ADP Cells from each geo-political zone). Also, a simple random sampling technique was used to select 60 extension staff (5 from each cell of the 12ADP Cells). Data for the study were collected through the administration of questionnaire designed in a Likert rating scales which gave a criterion mean of 3.00 for rational decision. Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive statistics (percentage, arithmetic mean and weighted mean) and inferential statistics - the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test the hypotheses for significance at probability level of 0.05%. The result showed that majority (68%) of the extension staff across the three geopolitical zones were middle adult (46 years old) men with basic educational qualification (60% B.Sc.). It showed in the cumulative point of view that the EAs in the South-West geopolitical zone received trainings more regularly (CM = 3.10) than the South-East (CM = 2.56) and South-South (CM = 2.45) geopolitical zones. It also indicated that apart from: Involvement in Field Trip/Excursion (GM = 3.18); Attending Farmers' Field School (FFS); and Training in entrepreneurial skills with equal grand mean (GM = 3.03) that were almost regular in the three geopolitical zones, the rest training variables were generally not regular except in the South-West zone. The result showed in ranking order that: Poor funding of Agricultural Extension (GM = 4.50); Lack of public/private extension partnership for training synergy (GM = 4.43); Poor implementation of extension policies and poor monitoring or regulation of extension policies with equal grand mean (GM = 4.30); Inadequate social learning (ICT) facilities (GM = 4.23); Not linking extension agency with the University for Staff training corroboration (GM = 4.12); and Absence of young people as EAs (GM = 3.98) were among the top ten constraints to extension staff training across the three geopolitical zones in Southern Nigeria. The study therefore recommended among others that: Young digital compliant extension professionals yearning for innovations should be encouraged and employed into extension industry in Southern Nigeria for greater productivity; A unified extension package involving the State Ministries of Agriculture, non-governmental agro agencies, extension professionals and the beneficiary farmers to be developed for these zones, to encourage uniformity in extension

training welfare across the States; and Fund should be made available nationally and internationally for agricultural extension to function according to its genetic and generic purposes in Southern Nigeria.

Keywords: Comparative, Evaluation, Agricultural Extension, Staff Training, Geopolitical Zones.

Introduction

Agricultural extension as the pedestal to agricultural improvement throughout the world is not in distrust and cannot be neglected. According to Odinwa, Isife and Nlerum (2019), a sustained agricultural extension practice has been seen as a panacea to all agricultural and technological problems of the developed nations of the world like America, Europe, Israel and Germany among other nations and will do same to any developing country that embraces it. Agricultural extension has remained one of the principal movers in the development of agriculture and perpetually in rural development (Nwafor, Odinwa & Olatunji, 2021). It was maintained that total eradication of agricultural development problems can be achieved through extension service approach if the role of extension is properly conceived and effectively administered. Asiabaka (2002) attempted to look at extension from modern perspective and thus, explained it from the aim, which extension seek to accomplish; which is to teach both the rural and urban clientele how to determine their problems and be able to rise to such problems using their own resources.

Three important dimensions of extension were further stated as including:; educational component, which involves changing the behaviour complex and attitude of the people, economic dimension, which involves; increased income of the clientele, increased crop yield, better financial management, better methods of food preservation, and social dimension, which also includes; improved health of the clientele, leadership development, better grooming, development co-operation, increased zeal for development. It was summarized that the clientele of extension are not only farmers, rather other members of the citizenry who will benefit from the extension service hence, extension education.

The beauty of agricultural extension rest on the laps of the operators of the extension services – the extension staff, especially the Extension Agents (EAs). Extension Agents, also called the 'Change Agents' are seen as facilitators and motivators of agricultural and community improvement programmes. They are to agricultural development what pastors are to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ileji (2010) described an extension agent as a knowledgeable, practically skilled and proficient worker in agriculture who has been trained and is involved in disseminating information to farmers and assisting them to practice innovations from research institutions whereas Abdelhakam (2005) asserts that extension agent is the main alignment from which agricultural development process expands. It was further stated that an extension agent is an individual who is trained in different areas of agriculture with responsibility of investigating the problems of farmers, through research institutes and bringing back the solutions to the farmers for implementation.

The demand to meet up these essential tasks of extension agents is enormous and also demands that extension staff be regularly trained and equipped with the necessary professional extension skills, in order to remain effective and efficient in their life touching services to humanity. Studies of agricultural development process have proved that education/training is one of the crucial variables for achieving economic growth and human progress. Extension is regarded as one of such wide educational inputs designed for farmers to help themselves (Jones & Garforth, 1997).

Therefore, regular and continuous training become the principal means of updating and upgrading the professional skills of Extension Agents and the Block Extension Supervisors (BES's) in under developed countries and under conditions where availability of field staff with adequate academic background is limited, is the Forth-Nightly Training Session (FNTS). At Fourth Nightly Training (FNT), EAs and Block Extension Supervisors'

review farmers` reactions to previous recommendations, EAs are taught specific recommended practices that will be taught to farmers during the coming two weeks, details field problems or conditions that need to be taken into account in these recommendations or which are to be passed on to research for investigation, discuss, and learn from each other's experience. Benor *et al*, (1987), In: Nwafor, Odinwa and Olatunji (2021) recommended that such training should involve approximately equal time in teaching and in practical work. The regular monthly workshop is the main venue of in-service training for Subject Matter Specialists (SMSs) and of regular contact between extension and research workers. The main purpose of the two-day workshop is to build up the technical skills of SMSs regularly in the field of their specialization, so they can meet effectively the actual technological needs of farmers. The Monthly Technical Review Meetings (MTRM) affords researchers and SMSs the opportunity of discussing and formulating relevant production recommendations for subsequent transfer to Village Extension Workers (VEWs or EAs) and Agricultural Extension Officers (AEOs or BEs) by SMSs at the next two forth nightly training sessions (Nwafor, Odinwa & Olatunji, 2021). It was maintained that the senior extension and research staff usually attend seasonal zonal meetings and reported that regular in-service training for staff is required apart from the regular FNTs and MTRMs. Any significant deviation from these regular training sessions will weaken the T&V system. It is a short cut in providing SMSs with adequate academic background in their respective subject matter areas through university education until the country has gotten adequate number of such readymade SMSs.

The Farmers' Field School (FFS) experience and other group approaches to supporting innovation highlight the need for appropriate knowledge and skills among those who facilitate these processes. Staff who were brought up in the technology transfer tradition may need re-orientation towards a more participatory, interactive approach so that they can engage confidently in the co-production of knowledge with farmers and focus on the process of problem solving, learning and innovation.

In a nutshell, it is clear that current and anticipated challenges facing food production systems will create new demands for education, training and advisory services, and linking these services to applied research will help to ensure that providers have access to up to date knowledge. However 20th century models dominated by public sector funding and delivery are no longer appropriate. Creating space for civil society and the private sector, with regulation and targeted public investment to overcome market failures should be the main focus of state activity in the 21st century. We have sufficient experience from the past 100 years to design systems that will support the supply of these services, while taking full advantage of rapid developments in ICT technology and infrastructure (Van, Mele & Wanvoeke, 2010). The vitality of pioneering work in the non-government not-for profit sector continues to provide lessons and inspiration for the development of producer-focused support for innovation.

Rivera (2001) indicated that some reforms are specific to the agricultural sector and within the management mandate of Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), whereas others are general reforms that affect the extension delivery system indirectly. It was postulated that The Ministry of Food and Agriculture adopted a modified Training and Visit System for extension management in 1992. This was referred to as the Unified Extension System (UES) whereby all technical subjects were coordinated by the most senior technical officer reporting to a regional and national director for extension. The main characteristics of this method are the scheduled1) training of staff and 2) visits to farmers. This differed slightly from the classic T&V because of the focus on farmer group activities

instead of individual farmers, and reduction in the regularity of training to once a month or in certain cases, once every two months. Agricultural Extension Agents (AEAs) are responsible for delivering all types of extension messages to farmers, and Subject Matter Specialists (SMSs) support them. Farmers, Extension Agents and SMSs are in close working relationship with the Research Extension Liaison Committees (RELC) established at zonal levels. The RELC reviews the research and extension programmes and assesses their relevance to agricultural development in zone. However, extension was seen as part of rural development as demonstrated by some international approaches and the main outcomes of this reform has been:

i. the rationalization of the public extension system removing the previous duplication of extension activities by each of the individual departments of MOFA; and

ii. farmer empowerment through knowledge.

MOFA staff were no longer involved in procurement and sale of inputs to farmers. The implementation of the UES was facilitated by the World Bank financed National Agricultural Extension Project (NAEP), implemented from 1992-2000. This system adopted a single line of command structure. All the extension agents reported to the National Director of Agricultural Extension Services through their various Regional Agricultural Extension Officers. The UES system is predicated on the notion that farmers adopt new technologies when given the knowledge. Consequently the Unified Agricultural Extension Service (UAES) in Nigeria became more focused and determined. It was maintained that the latest attempt to link research with extension through the establishment of Research Extension Farmers Input Linkage System (REFILS) is a technique of building the extension services more focused and objective oriented in Nigeria, given that the world itself is dynamic, it is hoped that efforts will continue to be made to strengthen agricultural extension services until the country arrives at the "single unsurpassed extension system".

Unamma (2004) described the Unified Agricultural Extension Service **(**UAES) as the organization of the Federal and State Ministries responsible for agricultural extension organized in such a way that duplicating activities' of the various departments comprising livestock, fisheries, agro-forestry, on- farm activities and related resources are transferred to one extension service body which is Agricultural Development Programme (ADPs). The author maintained that unification of extension services means that the non-crop-based technologies were introduced to the same farmers who had received appropriate messages on crop-based ones. This implies that there is need to ensure that the new non-crop-based messages are synchronized with the crop-based technologies so as not to confuse the farmer.

Contextually, UAES is the bringing together of all extension activities into a single line of command to be implemented by the ADPs. It was maintained that at the establishment period of UAES, all State of the Federation was mandated to merge all extension services as a matter of urgency to boost food production. The specific objectives of UAES include uniform professional operation, training and retraining of extension agents and farmers, a uniform organizational structure, timing of agricultural programmes and projects, agricultural activities complying to field and farmer orientation, executing agricultural projects with definite purpose, to provide an effective linkages among the farmers, extension, research and input agencies, provision of fund for the implementation of the UAES programme, and dissemination of improved agricultural innovations to farmers (Unamma, 2004). The author asserted that these basic objectives of UAES were to motivate farmers into adopting proven farming technologies with a view to achieving significant increase in food production and

marketing in addition to raising standard of living of the rural farmers. The agricultural sector itself requires a significant transformation such that crop yields and incomes are greatly increased. Such transformation cannot be achieved without functional and active extension staff who are loaded with the up to date principles and technologies.

The assessment of Unified Agricultural Extension Systems in the past twenty-five years revealed that the effectiveness of UAES has been on a downward track. This is as a result of decline in the number of extension workers and other field staff which has contributed to poor delivery of extension services. Factors responsible for the poor quality of extension delivery includes: Inadequate training and insufficient equipment for communication component, which have also brought about a gap between the extension agents and the farmers.

Irrespective of all the efforts made to achieve the objectives of UAES by government and non governmental agencies as well as the knowledge of the factors militating against its progress, the declining problem of Nigerian agriculture has remained unchanged. It is disappointing that Nigeria is still inactive and unable to produce adequate agricultural commodities to feed her population especially in some States in Southern Nigeria (Nwafor, Odinwa & Olatunji, 2021). Why is the outcome of extension services different among the States that are operating the same extension objectives in improving agricultural productivity in Nigeria? Are there still functional extension staff, who are motivated through training and welfare incentives in State ADPs in Southern Nigeria? It was the hunt to answer these questions that orchestrated the study.

Therefore, the study was focused to achieve three specific objectives, which include to:

i. describe the demographic characteristics of the extension staff in the area of study,

ii. evaluate the extension trainings received by agricultural extension staff in the area, and

iii. ascertain the major constraints to extension staff training in the area of study.

Two hypotheses stated in null form were also framed to further direct the study.

Ho_1. Extension trainings received by agricultural extension staff do not significantly differ among the three geo-political zones in southern Nigeria.

Ho_2. The major constraints to extension staff trainings do not differ significantly among the three geo-political zones in southern Nigeria.

Methodology

Southern Nigeria, which comprises the South-South, South-East and the South-West geo-political zones was the site for this study. It is made up of eighteen States characterized with low lands that climb into hills and plateaus in the central point of the country. The southeast are naturally self-possessed with hills and valleys. The climate also differs from the south-south and south-west as tropical zones due to their location close to the equator (Kankara & Darma, 2016). The vast land in the Southern geo-political zones is rich for agriculture, industrial and commercial activities. All the States operate the Unified Agricultural Extension System (UAES) through the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP).

Descriptive survey was used to observe the population of the extension staff(s) of Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) in the three southern geopolitical zones, for possible policy generation and training intervention in the areas. Purposive sampling method was used to select 3 States (1 from each geo-political zone), 6ADP zones (2ADP zones from each geo-political zone), 12ADP Blocks (4ADP Blocks from each geo-political zone) and 12ADP Cells (4ADP Cells from each geo-political zone). Also, a simple random sampling technique,

which removes bias by giving all persons an adequate opportunity to be chosen according to Moore and MacCabe (2006), was used to select 60 extension staff (5 from each cell of the 12ADP Cells).

Data for the study were collected through the administration of questionnaire designed in an open ended format and in a 5 point Likert rating scales which gave a criterion mean of 3.00 for rational decision. Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive statistics (percentage, arithmetic mean and weighted mean) and inferential statistics such as the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test the hypotheses for significance at probability level of 0.05.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of the ADP Extension Staff/Agents in the Three Geopolitical Zones of Southern Nigeria

The demographic characteristics of the extension staff/agents (Table 1) showed that about (68%) of the extension staff were male while (32%) were female. This implies that there are more male extension staff(s) in extension vocation than the female in the three geopolitical zones of Southern Nigeria, an indication of gender insensitivity of extension work in the study area, which Odinwa and Nlerum (2015) closely observed that any sector of agriculture that African women did not constitute 60-70% of the workforce is less productive.

The result showed a mean age of the extension staff in the three geopolitical zones to be 46 years old and with (90%) marital status, a signal that majority of extension staff in these zones are middle adults which has no favourable promise for extension services in the area.

It revealed the educational qualification of extension staff as at the time of employment that majority (60%) of them possessed Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) while 40% had Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and its equivalent as at the time of employment. These qualifications are appropriate for EAs if they are given all the necessary motivation, logistics, mobility, trainings etc., to function. This supports Unamma *et al*. (2004) who opined that professionalism in Unified Agricultural Extension Services entails the ability of the extension worker at all levels to be knowledgeable enough, so as to identify production constraints of farmers and develop appropriate solutions through regular training and contact with research institutions.

Concerning the regularity of the EAs' timely contact with the farmers, the findings indicated that EAs meeting with the farmers occurs mostly fortnightly (56.67%) and followed by monthly contact (35%). This type of contact with farmers is irregular and points to the imbalance extension agent ratio to farmer in Nigeria and the consequential food shortage in Southern Nigeria. This finding was in line with Abdelhakam (2005) who maintained that it is only frequent and regular extension contacts with the farmers that has positive effects on the adoption of technologies by farmers.

In terms of EAs' linkage with Research Stations, Subject Matter Specialist (SMS) and other input agencies, it revealed on the average that EAs have monthly link (35%) with Research Stations, Subject Matter Specialist (SMS) and other input agencies, especially in Southwest (65%) and Southeast (40%) respectively, while the EAs in South-South zone (65%) mostly has it once in a year. This epileptic contact of EAs with Research Stations as pinpointed by the finding is not healthy for any nation that is driving for food security. This finding did not support the views of Nwafor, Odinwa and Olatunji (2021) who reported that 'The Monthly Technical Review Meetings (MTRM)' affords researchers and SMSs the opportunity of discussing and formulating relevant production recommendations for subsequent transfer to Village

Extension Workers (VEWs or EAs) and Agricultural Extension Officers (AEOs).

Finally, the result showed that majority of the EAs in the three geopolitical zones engage in extra curriculum jobs (56.67%) as against (43.33%) that is concentrating on the job. This finding is possible emanating from the pitiable remuneration and poor motivation of the EAs who engage in other trades in order to meet up with the financial challenges of a dilapidating economy.

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristic of the ADP Extension Agents in the Three Geopolitical Zones of Southern Nigeria

Variables	South-South Rivers State n - 20		South-East Imo State n =20		South-West Ondo State n =20		Grand Percentage /Mean N = 60	
Gender	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**
Female	5	(25.00)	8	(40.00)	6	(30.00)	19	(31.67)
Male	15	(75.00)	12	(60.00)	14	(70.00)	41	(68.33)
Age	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**Mean Age**	
21 - 30	1	(5.00)	2	(10.00)	2	(10.00)		
31 - 40	3	(15.00)	3	(15.00)	4	(20.00)		
41 - 50	8	(40.00)	6	(30.00)	8	(40.00)	**46 years**	
51 - 60	8	(40.00)	9	(45.00)	6	(30.00)		
Above 61 years								
Marital Status	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**
Single	2	(10.00)	3	(15.00)	1	(05.00)	6	(10.00)
Married	18	(90.00)	17	(85.00)	19	(95.00)	54	(90.00)
Educational Qualification	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**
Secondary		-		-		-		-
OND	8	(40.00)	11	(55.00)	5	(25.00)	24	(40.00)
B.Sc.	12	(60.00)	9	(45.00)	15	(75.00)	36	(60.00)
M. Sc and above		-		-		-		-
Regular and Timely meetings with farmers	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**
Weekly		-		-		-		-
Fortnightly	10	(50.00)	11	(55.00)	13	(65.00)	34	(56.67)
Once in a month	9	(45.00)	7	(35.00)	5	(25.00)	21	(35.00)
Quarterly	1	(05.00)	2	(10.00)	2	(10.00)	5	(08.33)
Linkage with Research Stations, SMS and other input agencies	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**
Monthly		-	8	(40.00)	13	(65.00)	21	(35.00)
Quarterly	3	(15.00)	3	(15.00)	5	(25.00)	11	(18.33)
Yearly	13	(65.00)	3	(15.00)	2	(10.00)	18	(30.00)
None	4	(20.00)	6	(30.00)		-	10	(16.67)
Engagement in extra curriculum jobs	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**	**(f)**	**(%)**
Yes	15	(75.00)	12	(60,00)	7	(35.00)	34	(56.67)
No	5	(25.00)	8	(40.00)	13	(65.00)	26	(43.33)

Source: Field Survey, 2020

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Extension Trainings Received by Agricultural Extension Staff in the Three Geopolitical Zones of Southern Nigeria

The result in Table 2, showed in the cumulative point of view that the EAs in the South-West geopolitical zone received trainings more regularly (CM = 3.10) than the South-East (CM = 2.56) and South-South (CM = 2.45) geopolitical zones. It also indicated that apart from: Involvement in Field Trip/Excursion (GM = 3.18): Attending Farmers' Field School (FFS) and Training in entrepreneurial skills with equal grand mean (GM = 3.03) that were almost regular in the three geopolitical zones, the rest training variables were generally not regular except in the South-West that showed some degrees of training among the training variables. This finding portrays the reason why agriculture has slacked in its goal of food supplies in southern Nigeria before now, since the extension practitioners are not receiving regular and adequate trainings for useful updates and for promising transfer to farmers at the time of need. The finding agrees with Udiandeye, (2017) who noted that agricultural extension services will not thrive excessively in large areas of operation without providing regular training for updating knowledge of extension workers.

Table 2: Mean distribution of the respondents on the Extension Trainings Received by Agricultural Extension Staff in the area of Study

Extension Training Variables	South-South Rivers State n – 20 Weighted Score	Mean	South-East Imo State n =20 Weighted Score	Mean	South-West Ondo State n =20 Weighted Score	Mean	Grand Mean N = 60 Weighted Score	Mean	Remark
Regular Forthnightly Training (FNT) meeting for EA's and BES's in your area	54	(2.69)	53	(2.65)	63	(3.15)	170	(2.83)	Not regular
Attending at least one Extension conferences per annum.	50	(2.48)	50	(2.55)	58	(2.89)	158	(2.63)	Not regular
SMS regularly and monthly workshop organized by the research stations	46	(2.31)	53	(2.63)	59	(2.95)	158	(2.63)	Not regular
Attending Monthly Technical Review Meetings (MTRM)	60	(3.00)	62	(3.10)	61	(3.03)	183	(3.05)	Not regular
Attending seasonal zonal meetings	49	(2.44)	60	(3.00)	60	(3.00)	169	(2.81)	Not regular
Attending Farmers' Field School (FFS)	59	(2.95)	61	(3.03)	62	(3.11)	182	(3.03)	Regular
Regular in-service training for EAs apart from FNT meetings.	45	(2.23)	53	(2.63)	79	(3.97)	177	(2.95)	Not regular
Attending Agricultural Seminars at least twice per annum	47	(2.35)	43	(2.15)	75	(3.75)	165	(2.75)	Not regular
Participating in Research Extension Farmers Input Linkage System (REFILS)	39	(1.95)	41	(2.05)	64	(3.20)	144	(2.40)	Not regular
Regular visit to farmers at least once/month/farmer	41	(2.05)	39	(1.95)	46	(2.30)	126	(2.10)	Not regular
Participation in Annual Farmer's Day Exhibition	34	(1.70)	35	(1.80)	62	(3.11)	130	(2.13)	Not regular

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Involvement in Field Trip/Excursion	63	(3.15)	62	(3.10)	66	(3.30)	191	(3.18)	Regular
Attending ICT/Computer trainings at least twice a year	41	(2.05)	45	(2.23)	51	(2.55)	137	(2.28)	Not regular
Training in entrepreneurial skills	59	(2.95)	61	(3.03)	62	(3.11)	182	(3.03)	Regular
Cumulative Mean		**2.45**		**2.56**		**3.10**		**2.70**	

Source: Field Survey, 2020 **Critical Mean = 3.00**

The ANOVA result on the extension trainings received by Agricultural Extension Staff in the three geopolitical zones of Southern Nigeria (Table 3) showed an (F-cal = 9.19) and (F-crit = 3.26) at 0.05% probability level. This implied a significant difference in the extension trainings received by agricultural extension staff among the three geopolitical zones in Southern Nigeria in favour of the South-West zone**,** an indication that each geopolitical zone carry out extension obligation according to the interest of the extension service providers and the objectives they pursue and not according to the universal standard. It was based on this submission that Odinwa, Isife and Nlerum (2019) recommended a unified extension package involving the State Ministries of Agriculture, non-governmental agro agencies, extension professionals and the farmers to be developed for these States, to encourage uniformity in training, extension method and service delivery to the farmers.

Table 3: ANOVA Result on the Extension Trainings Received by Agricultural Extension Staff in the Three Geopolitical Zones of Southern Nigeria

Source of Variance	SS	Df	MS	f-cal	f-Critical	Remarks
B/W Group variance	3.56	2	1.78			
W/Group variance	6.97	57	0.19			
Total	10.53	59		**9.19**	**3.26**	**S**

Source: Field Survey, 2021 **P > 0.05**

Major Constraints to Extension Staff Training in the area of Study

The result in Table 4 showed in ranking order that: Poor funding of Agricultural Extension (GM = 4.50); Lack of public/private extension partnership for training synergy (GM = 4.43); Poor implementation of extension policies and poor monitoring or regulation of extension policies with equal grand mean (GM = 4.30); Inadequate social learning (ICT) facilities (GM = 4.23); Not linking extension agency with the University for Staff training corroboration (GM = 4.12); Absence of young people as EAs (GM = 3.98); Lack of personal laptop or desktop (GM = 3.92); Lack of logistic supports (GM = 3.88); and Lack of smart phone (GM = 3.52) were the top ten constraints to extension staff training across the three geopolitical zones in Southern Nigeria. These were followed by: Poor or no allowance for training (poor motivation of EAs) (GM = 3.50); Poor organizational and administrative structure for Agric Ext. (GM = 3.28); High cost of training facilities (GM = 3.27); Political imbalance/favoritism (GM = 3.15); and Attitude of Ext Agents towards the use of digital tools (GM = 3.05). These findings are grievous and crucial for equipping extension professionals for the smooth operation of extension system. The result on poor funding was in line with Anderson (2007) who noted that the single most key issue that brought about the dismantling of the

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T&V extension system was the dilemma of financial sustainability and a generic problem made worse by the high cost of the system. Also, in support of the poor funding was the World Bank (2004) revelation that after the closure of the World Bank loans in the early 1990s, the tempo of the ADPs activities slowed down drastically resulting in shrinkage of their roles. They maintained that in some states the ADPs staffs were only paid salaries, which were the statutory responsibility in funding arrangements.

The issue of lack of public/private extension partnership for training synergy was validated by the recommendation of Rivera (2001) that a well-organized research-extension-linkage is an effective means by which extension workers acquire new techniques which they transmit to the farmers. Based on the same issue, FAO (1997) advised that consideration should be given to linking future extension to the university which should be mandated to collaborate with NGOs and international development agencies.

The aspect of poor implementation of extension policies and poor monitoring or regulation of extension policies as well as poor organizational and administrative structure for Agricultural Extension was supported by Unamma *et al* (2004) who observed that in many countries, the problems of establishing or maintaining an effective agricultural extension service can be traced back to the lack of a realistic policy or an unstable policy framework for guiding the mission of the extension system - contradictions in the areas of the functions of extension, the clientele to be served, financing extension, changes in organizational structure and programme priorities, rapid turnover of the extension staff, and lack of coordination between different organizations that undertake extension work are some of the common problems that highlight the issue of extension policy; and maintained that all national governments should develop and periodically review their agricultural extension policy, which should include the goals of agricultural extension, the responsible agencies and personnel, the clientele to be served, the broad programmatic areas to be addressed, and other relevant guidelines.

However, the findings showed that: Insecurity (GM = 2.63); Timing of extension staff training (GM = 2.27); and Shortage of extension professionals for staff training (GM = 2.13) were not challenges across the three geopolitical zones in Southern Nigeria. This finding was in order with the record of Benor et al (1987) when they said that the chief means of updating and upgrading the professional skills of Extension Agents (EAs) and the Block Extension Supervisors (BES's) in under developing countries and under conditions where availability of field staff with adequate academic background is limited, is tackled at the Forth-Nightly Training Session (FNTS), hence, timing of extension staff training and shortage of extension professionals for staff training have been overcome over the years.

Table 4: Mean distribution of the respondents on the Major Constraints to Extension Staff Training in the area of Study

Training Constraints	South-South Rivers State n – 20 Weighted Score	Mean	South-East Imo State n =20 Weighted Score	Mean	South-West Ondo State n =20 Weighted Score	Mean	Grand Mean N = 60 Weighted Score	Mean	Rank
Poor funding of Agricultural Extension	88	(4.40)	90	(4.50)	92	(4.60)	270	(4.50)	1
Poor implementation of ext. policies	82	(4.10)	93	(4.65)	83	(4.15)	258	(4.30)	3

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Poor monitoring or regulation of ext policies	85	(4.25)	91	(4.55)	82	(4.10)	258	(4.30)	3
Poor or no allowance for training (poor motivation of EAs)	80	(4.00)	88	(4.40)	63	(3.15)	210	(3.50)	10
Poor organizational and administrative structure for Agric Ext.	67	(3.35)	77	(3.85)	53	(2.65)	197	(3.28)	11
High cost of training facilities	63	(3.15)	72	(3.60)	61	(3.05)	196	(3.27)	12
Inadequate social learning (ICT) facilities	84	(4.20)	86	(4.30)	84	(4.20)	254	(4.23)	4
Lack of personal laptop or desktop	79	(3.95)	93	(4.65)	63	(3.15)	235	(3.92)	7
Lack of logistic supports	80	(4.00)	80	(4.00)	73	(3.65)	233	(3.88)	8
Lack of smart phone	64	(3.20)	93	(4.65)	54	(2.70)	211	(3.52)	9
Inability of EAs to make use of the internet/ mobile telecommunication for accessing and exchanging information	65	(3.25)	62	(3.10)	46	(2.30)	173	(2.88)	15
Attitude of Ext Agents towards the use of digital tools.	63	(3.15)	68	(3.40)	52	(2.60)	183	(3.05)	14
Absence of young people as EAs.	83	(4.15)	80	(4.00)	76	(3.80)	239	(3.98)	6
Lack of public/private extension partnership for training synergy.	88	(4.40)	90	(4. 50)	88	(4.65)	266	(4.43)	2
Not linking extension agency with the University for Staff training corroboration	86	(4.30)	89	(4.45)	72	(3.60)	247	(4.12)	5
Shortage of Extension Professionals for staff training	48	(2.40)	44	(2.20)	36	(1.80)	128	(2.13)	18
Timing of ext staff training	46	(2.30)	48	(2.40)	42	(2.10)	136	(2.27)	17
Political imbalance/favoritism	58	(2.90)	64	(3.20)	67	(3.35)	189	(3.15)	13
Insecurity	49	(2.45)	51	(2.55)	58	(2.90)	158	(2.63)	16
Cumulative Mean		**3.57**		**3.84**		**3.29**		**3.54**	

Source: Field Survey, 2021 **Critical Mean = 3.00**

Test of significance on the major constraints to extension staff training in the three geopolitical zones of Southern Nigeria (Table 5) revealed an (F-cal = 2.31) and (F-crit = 3.17) at 0.05% probability level. This means that no significant difference exists among the three geopolitical zones in Southern Nigeria concerning the constraints to extension staff training, implying that the challenges facing extension staff training in Southern Nigeria are similar and will require unified extension measures to tackle them.

ANOVA Result on the Major Constraints to Extension Staff Training in the area of Study

Source of Variance	SS	Df	MS	f-cal	f-Critical	Remarks
B/W Group variance	2.87	2	1.44			
W/Group variance	33.53	57	0.62			

Total	36.40	59	**2.31**	**3.17**	**NS**

Source: Field Survey, 2021 **P > 0.05**

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it showed that there are much more middle adult (46 years old) male extension staff in extension work than the female in the three geopolitical zones of Southern Nigeria, Also, it revealed that the Extension staff(s) in the South-West geopolitical zone received trainings more regularly than their South-East and South-South counterparts. It further indicated that apart from the extension staff: Involvement in Field Trip/Excursion; Attending Farmers' Field School (FFS) and Training in entrepreneurial skills that were almost regular across the three geopolitical zones, the rest training variables evaluated in this study were generally not regular except in the South-West geopolitical zone that showed some degrees of regular trainings.

In fact the result revealed a significant difference in the extension trainings received by agricultural extension staff among the three geopolitical zones in Southern Nigeria in favour of the South-West zone**.** Although, the finding did not observe a significant difference among the three geopolitical zones regarding the constraints to extension staff training in the area, meaning that the challenges facing extension staff training, especially poor funding, poor implementation of extension policies and poor monitoring or regulation of extension policies among others in Southern Nigeria, are common to all and will require unified extension measures to deal with them.

Recommendations

Base on the findings, the study recommended the following:

1. Considering the role of women in agriculture, more but qualified women should be recruited into the agricultural extension industry for gender balance in extension service in Southern Nigeria.
2. Young digital compliant extension professionals yearning for innovations should be encouraged and employed into extension industry in Southern Nigeria for greater productivity.
3. A unified extension package involving the State Ministries of Agriculture, non-governmental agro agencies, extension professionals and the beneficiary farmers to be developed for these zones, to encourage uniformity in extension training welfare across the States.
4. Fund should be made available nationally and internationally for agricultural extension to function according to its genetic and generic purposes in Southern Nigeria.

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