Farmers' Knowledge and Perception regarding Privatization and Commercialization of Agricultural Extension Services in Delta State, Nigeria

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This study examined the knowledge and perception of farmers regarding privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services in Delta State, Nigeria. A sample size of 90 farmers in contact with extension agents was randomly selected for the study. Data for the study was collected through the use of a validated structured interview schedule. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in analyzing data generated from the study. Results show that respondents had a low to moderate knowledge regarding the concept, principles and objectives of privatization and commercialization. Respondents also had a favorable perception towards privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services. There was no significant difference in the perceptions of small, medium and large-scale farmers. The study concludes that the favorable perception held by the respondents is an indication of their willingness to accept the introduction of privatization and commercialization in agricultural extension services delivery. It therefore recommends that the government of Delta State should consider privatizing and/or commercializing agricultural extension services in the state. **[Ajieh Patrick Chuks. Farmers' Knowledge and Perception regarding Privatization and Commercialization of Agricultural Extension Services in Delta State, Nigeria. International Journal of Agricultural Science, Research and Technology in Extension and Education Systems, 2012; 2(4):175-179].**

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, the public sector plays a dominant role in the provision of agricultural extension services (Less, 1990). According to a worldwide survey conducted by the FAO, about 81% of extension work around the world is carried out through a ministry or department of agriculture (Swanson et al, 1990). Rivera and Cary (1997) also reported that a larger proportion of the 600,000 extension workers engaged in the provision of agricultural information to farmers globally work in the public sector extension. The public extension system is now seen as outdated, top-down, paternalistic, inflexible, subject to bureaucratic inefficiencies and therefore unable to cope with the dynamic demands of modern agriculture. (Rivera et al; 2000).

The failure of public sector extension has been attributed to a number of factors including poorly motivated staff, a preponderance of non-extension duties, inadequate operational funds, lack of relevant technology, poor planning, centralized management and a general absence of accountability in the public sector (Antholt, 1994). In general, public extension services have consistently failed to deal with the site-specific needs of and problems of the farmers (Ahmad, 1999). As a result of the relatively poor performance record of public extension, there has been the proposition that private extension services should play a greater role in service provision. Privatized extension has been the subject of widespread discussion by those considering the challenge of proving an efficient agricultural extension system for farmers in developing countries (Rivera, 2001).

According to Rasheed et al (2005), the arguments in favour of privatization and commercialization of extension services suggest that: (a) the private sector is a more efficient service provider, (b) there is an effective demand for advisory service and hence farmers can shoulder some if not all of the cost of extension; and (c) the presence of private extension services stifles the development of a private sector capability in this area. The main objective of the study therefore, is to examine how farmers' knowledge and perception of privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services as an alternative approach to financing agricultural technology transfer in Delta State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study was designed

to: (i) ascertain the knowledge level of farmers on privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services; (ii) ascertain farmers' perception of privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services; and (iii) determine the differences in the perception of Privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services among small, medium and large scale farmers.

2. Materials and methods

The study was carried out in Delta State, Nigeria. A multistage sampling technique was used in selecting respondents of the study. In the first stage, one extension block was selected from each of the three Agricultural zones in the State. They include Aniocha North (for Delta North Agricultural zone); Isoko South (for Delta Central Agricultural zone); and Warri North (for Delta South Agricultural zone). In the second stage, three extension cells were randomly selected from each of the selected extension blocks. This gave a total of nine extension cells used for the study. In the third stage, 10 farmers in contact with extension were randomly selected from the list provided by the extension agents covering the selected cells. This gave a total of 90 farmers involved in the study. The selected extension blocks and cells can be gleaned from table 1.

For the purpose of the study, the respondents were categorized into small, medium and large-scale farmers on the basis of farm size. Those with farms ranging between 0.5 and 2.4 hectares were regarded as small-scale farmers, while those whose farms are between 2.5 and 4.4 hectares were regarded as medium-scale farmers. Those whose farm sizes are between 4.5 and 6.4 hectares were regarded as large-scale farmers. A validated structured interview schedule was used in collecting data. A focus group discussion was also conducted for farmers in the selected extension cells. Trained field assistants selected in each location, in addition to the researchers collected the data for the study.

To obtain a quantitative measure of respondents' knowledge on the concepts, principles and objectives of privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services, ten questions were developed and a maximum of 1 point was awarded for a correct answer while 0 point was awarded for a wrong answer. The respondents were then categorized into 3 groups based on their knowledge score namely: (a) low knowledge (for those with 0-3 points); (b) moderate knowledge (for those with 4-7 points); and (c) high knowledge (for those with 8-10 points).

Respondents' perception of privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services was measured by requesting them to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to a pool of positive and negative statements relating to the features of privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services. A four-point likert-type scale with values of strongly agree = 4; agree = 3; disagree = 2; and strongly disagree = 1 was used to determine respondents' level of agreement and disagreements to the statements. A cut-off point of 2.50 which is the mean of the response values was used to select statements which were perceived favorably by the respondents. Thus, a statement with a mean score of ≥ 2.50 depicts a favorable statement while scores of < 2.50 depicts unfavorable statements for all the positive statements. Also for all the negative statements (the scoring of all the negative statements used to ascertain the perception of the respondents were reversed) a mean score of ≥ 2.50 implies a favorable statement to Privatization and commercialization. Percentage scores, mean scores and standard deviations were used to summarize data while Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was to determine differences in the perceptions of farmers' categories.

Table 1. Extension blocks and cells used for the study

S/N	Agricultural Zone	Extension block	Extension cell
1	Delta North	Aniocha North	Issele-Azagba, Olona Idumugo
2	Delta Central	Isoko South	Uzere, Oleh, Irri
3	Delta South	Bomadi	Esama, Akugbene Okoloba

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Farmers' knowledge of privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services

Data on table 2 show that a majority (56.6%) of the respondents had moderate knowledge while 37.8% had low knowledge. Only 5.6% of the respondents had high knowledge. In other words, the farmers had a low to moderate knowledge regarding the concept, principles and objectives of Privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services. This finding is in line with that of an earlier study by Madukwe and Erie (1999) who reported that stakeholders in agricultural information delivery have been sufficiently sensitized and mobilized and therefore possess adequate knowledge of the issues underlying the privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services in Nigeria. The knowledge level of respondents as revealed by this study is an indication that they can make useful contribution to the debate on whether or not to

privatize and/or commercialize agricultural extension services in Delta State, Nigeria.

3.2. Farmers' perception of Privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services

Entries in Table 3 show that the mean scores and standard deviations of farmers' perception of Privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services. Results show that out of the 17 statements investigated, farmers perceived 13 statements in favour of Privatization and commercialization. These include statements 1- 8, 10, 13 and 15-17. Out of these statements that were favourably perceived, 10 were positive statements while 2 were negative statements. The remaining 4 statements were perceived unfavourably by the farmers. These include statements 9, 11, 12 and 14. They were all negative statements.

From the above results, it was concluded that farmers are favourably disposed to Privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services. This may be due to the poor performance of the public extension system in the delivery of better and desired services to farmers. According to Ozor et al (2007), farmers noted that apart from the low contacts they had had with extension agents, the extension agents have also failed to deliver their choice farm needs at the proper time.

3.3. Differences in perception of privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services among small, medium and large-scale farmers

The difference in the perception of small, medium and large-scale farmers on P and C of agricultural extension services is shown in Table 3. Results reveal that there were differences in the mean scores of the three categories of farmers in the following 4 statements: privatization and commercialization will make it possible for more farmers to be reached (F = 0.83); privatization and commercialization will make agricultural extension services unaffordable by farmers (F = 8.43); privatization and commercialization will encourage income inequality (F = 16.95); privatization and commercialization will encourage foreign domination in the provision of agricultural extension services (F = 19.33).

The above areas of significant differences clearly reveal that small-scale farmers feel that their interest will not be accommodated under privatized and commercialized agricultural extension services. They believe that private extension service providers will focus attention on the medium and large-scale farmers who have the resources to pay for extension services thereby neglecting resource poor farmers. The negligence of the small-scale farmers may result in income inequality. It is therefore expedient that policy makers give serious consideration to the areas where the farmers differ significantly in their perceptions if the P and C of agricultural extension services are to achieve its desired objectives. Data in Table 3 also show that there were no significant differences in the perceptions of the farmers in the remaining 13 statements. This implies that their general perception of P and C of agricultural extension services was not significantly different.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their knowledge level (n =90)

Knowledge level	Percentage
High knowledge	5.6
Moderate knowledge	56.6
Low knowledge	37.8

Table 3. Mean score and standard deviation of farmers' perception of P and C of agricultural extension services

Statements (Privatization and commercialization will:)	X	SD	Rmk	PCC
make agricultural information delivery to become more effective	3.33	0.76	A	F
encourage competition among extension service providers	3.34	0.86	A	F
make it possible for more farmers to be reached	3.04	0.84	A	F
break the monopoly of public extension service.	3.12	1.00	A	F
help reduce govt. financial burden on agriculture	3.14	0.89	A	F
lead to job insecurity among public extension workers*	2.92	0.97	A	F
make agricultural extension services unaffordable by farmers*	3.12	0.99	A	F
create job opportunities	2.76	0.87	A	F
promote corruption and nepotism*	2.21	0.90	D	NF
encourage exploitation of farmers*	2.72	0.82	A	F
encourage income inequality*	1.98	1.19	D	NF
lead to poor capacity building.*	1.77	1.19	D	NF
increase priority areas of extension coverage	3.28	0.82	A	F
encourage foreign domination in the provision of extension services*	2.06	1.21	D	NF
make extension services to be directed at specific needs of the people	3.19	0.79	A	F
provide opportunity for neglected areas of agric production to be attended to	3.14	0.89	A	F
improve linkages between research and extension	3.10	0.85	A	F

Key: * = negative statement; X = mean scores; SD = standard deviations; Rmk = remark; A = agree; D = disagree; PCC = privatization and commercialization condition; F = favorable; NF = not favorable.

Table 4. Analysis of difference in perception of P and C of agricultural extension services among small, medium and large-scale farmers

Statements (Privatization and commercialization will:)	Small - scale farmers (n =29) $\bar{X}$	Medium -scale farmers (n =32) $\bar{X}$	Large - scale farmers (n =29) $\bar{X}$	F-Value	Remarks
make agricultural information delivery to become more effective	3.31	3.31	3.38	0.76	NS
encourage competition among extension service providers	3.38	3.75	3.17	3.75	NS
make it possible for more farmers to be reached	2.21	3.00	2.93	0.83	S
break the monopoly of public extension service.	2.59	3.53	3.21	7.97	NS
help reduce govt. financial burden on agriculture	3.07	3.22	3.14	0.21	NS
lead to job insecurity among public extension workers*	2.52	3.24	2.06	6.20	NS
make agricultural extension services unaffordable by farmers*	2.36	3.66	2.79	8.43	S
create job opportunities	2.69	2.66	2.93	0.68	NS
promote corruption and nepotism*	2.17	2.13	2.34	0.48	NS
encourage exploitation of farmers*	2.62	3.00	2.52	3.09	NS
encourage income inequality*	3.21	2.56	2.41	16.9	S
lead to poor capacity building.*	1.03	1.81	2.45	13.0	NS
increase priority areas of extension coverage	3.21	3.50	3.10	1.97	NS
encourage foreign domination in the provision of extension services*	1.17	2.16	2.83	19.3	S
make extension services to be directed at specific needs of the people	3.34	3.34	2.86	3.88	NS
provide opportunity for neglected areas of agric production to be attended to	3.00	3.47	2.93	3.49	NS
improve linkages between research and extension	2.72	3.25	3.03	3.02	NS

Key: X= mean scores; S = significant; NS = not significant ($p \leq 0.05$)

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the knowledge and perception of farmers regarding the proposed P and C of agricultural extension services in Delta State, Nigeria. Results show that the respondents had a low to moderate knowledge regarding the concepts, principles and objectives of P and C. It was also revealed that respondents had favorable perception about P and C. Major areas of agreement include that P and C will: make agricultural information delivery to become more effective, encourage competition among extension service providers; make it possible for more farmers to be reached; break the monopoly of public extension services; help reduce government burden on agriculture and create job opportunities.

There were discrepancies in the perception held by small, medium and large-scale farmer in some statements used to investigate their perception; however, the overall difference between them was not significant. The favorable perception held by the respondents is an indication that they are willing to accept P and C of agricultural extension services whenever it is introduced. Since farmers are a major stakeholder in agricultural extension services delivery, and have expressed favorable perception towards the privatization and commercialization of agricultural extension services. It is recommended that the government of Delta State should consider privatizing and/or commercializing agricultural extension services in the state. The areas of differences in the perceptions of P and C among the small, medium and large-scale farmers should however be carefully examined to ensure a smooth operation of the programme whenever it is introduced.

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