Chapter 7
Harmonising Roles of Agricultural Extension With Other Agencies Involved in Agricultural Development Towards Sustainable Food Systems in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The success of sustainable agriculture depends not just on the motivations, skills, and knowledge of individual farmers, but on action taken by the agricultural extension agency in harmonising the activities of other agencies involved in agricultural development. This chapter looks into the coordinating roles of agricultural extension with other agencies involved in agricultural development towards sustainable food systems in Nigeria. The agricultural extension agency needs to coordinate other agencies in rural development to ensure unity of purpose and avoid duplication of efforts. Agricultural extension is considered the best institution to coordinate other agencies involved in agricultural development towards sustainable food system in Nigeria because of the edge agricultural extension has at grassroots level in light of community organizing and empowerment role. Government in all tiers should support the agricultural extension agency by ensuring that all development partners liaise with the agency before carrying out their work to enhance sustainable rural development.

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INTRODUCTION

Agricultural extension and advisory services plays a critical role in facilitating linkages with farmer-based organizations and other relevant accleartors including government agencies, private sector and non-governmental organizations, research institutes and education centres (Davis and Heemsker, 2012). According to Feder et al. (2010), Swanson and Rajalahti (2010), agricultural extension has a tremendous potential to improve agricultural productivity and increase incomes through transfer and facilitation of knowledge, skills, and technologies. Extension is an activities that provide information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in rural setting to assist them in developing their own technical, organizational, and management skills and practices so as to improve their livelihood and well-being. It could also be seen as systems and mechanisms designed to build and strengthen the capacity of rural farmers and other stakeholders.

Changes and a range of other pressures are forcing a re-examination of public extension services. Re-examination also shaped by a climate of today’s perception of poor performance of past investments in extension. The monopoly public services model for extension is obsolete in the more competitive, market-oriented agriculture (Alex, et.al., 2004). In Nigeria, there are numerous extension service providers, including public-funded institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), commodity processors, farmers’ associations, and private agrochemical input suppliers. Smallholder farmers rely heavily on public extension systems such as the agricultural development programme (ADP), which are experiencing increasing operational difficulties as a result of dwindling resources (Madukwe, 2008).

Extension systems and delivery methods in many developing countries have been constantly viewed as ineffective in responding to the demands and technological challenges of various types of clients and in reaching the rural poor (Birner et al. 2009). According to Davis et.al. (2010), the number farmers per extension agent in Nigeria is 3330. This sometimes was as a result of financial challenges. On the other hand, NGOs have better financial resources, but service only small clienteles and deal with only limited numbers of commodities.

Various grassroots’-level extension providers operate with specific objectives and outputs that are of little significance to productivity and sustainable agricultural development. Pluralism in agricultural extension allows farmers to choose among alternatives because the various extension providers offer different services. However, the levels of pluralism and uncoordinated extension services at the grassroots level are resulting in lower outputs and confusion, at farmers’ expense (Hanyani-Mlambo, 2002).
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