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COMPETENCY NEEDED BY VILLAGE EXTENSION AGENTS OF OSUN STATE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Training has been identified as important process for developing individuals with genuine professional competence . It is therefore crucial to devote training opportunities to those areas where training is important and most needed. The study examined the competency needed by Village Extension Agents (VEAs) of Osun State Agricultural Development Programme (OSADEP). A random sampling technique was used to select sixty VEAs and all the three zonal officers (ZEOs) were purposively sampled in order to confirm the competency areas of VEAs . Kendall coefficient of concordance, Pearson correlation and student's t-test were used for the analysis of data. The finding showed that majority (93.3%) of the VEAs are male mostly (90%) between 30 and 49 years of age and very high percentage (96.7%) are married. A significant percentage (90.0%) of the VEAs hold Ordinary National Diploma (O.N.D) certificate. Also more than half (61.7%) have not had any in service training and all of them (100.0%) have served more than five years in the OSADEP. VEAs indicated that all the eight competency areas are important to their job performance but they only indicated research methodology, teaching and programme evaluation competency areas as areas where they need training. Kendall coefficient of concordance showed that there is a relatively low degree of agreement between the ranking of VEAs and ZEOs of the competency areas (w=0.32). Pearson correlation coefficient showed a significant relationship between the training needs of VEAs and age ($r=0.68$ $p<0.05$); level of education ($r=0.72, p<0.05$) and length of service ($r=0.84, p<0.05$). The student t-test revealed that there is a significant different in the rating of competency needed as indicated by the VEAs and the ZEOs ($t=1.75$, $p<0.05$). It is therefore recommended that training courses should be held for them in these areas and this should be prioritized with the other competency areas and review regularly by the OSADEP management. Finally, Government should allocate more funds to train village extension agents.

INTRODUCTION

Training is seen as a process of education for providing the individual with genuine professional competence. Its end product is the development of innate leadership and managerial ability, intellectual understanding of the substance, know-how of the management profession and the ability to apply that understanding to actual management situation (Ekpere, 1990). Competencies are the application of knowledge, technical skills, and personal characteristics leading to outstanding performance. According to Boyd (2004), extension agents need learning experiences that will provide the critical skills and knowledge for them to be able to perform the roles of an effective recruiter, trainer, developer, and manager of volunteers. Regardless of the form or purpose of any development programme, it cannot succeed beyond the qualification of the personnel who staff it. It is therefore, essential that proper training of extension agents on a continuous basis be the utmost concern of any organization concerned with promoting agricultural development in the country (Androulodakis & Siardos, 1996). The process of providing training takes place in a cycle of steps (Certo, 1997). The first step is to assess needs for training. It is logical to start by identifying needs and using them as the basis for developing training (FAO, 1992). The success of any programme depends largely on the quality, character and skill of those who plan and

implement such programmes. For agricultural sector to contribute its share to the economic development of the country; local institutions staffed by trained manpower are essential. Rapid agricultural development requires large number of extension agents and local officials who understand local problems and how to solve them. If these professionals are to serve effectively, they require a wide range of knowledge, skills and attitudes many of which can be provided by a formal educational system.

Village extension agents are commonly employed after a pre-service training in their areas of specialization and they need competences in the extension education process. They must understand the human development learning, and social interaction processes, and they must become knowledgeable about the organization within which they work. Unfortunately, time, personnel, and other resources for in-services training are very limited. Therefore, it is crucial to devote training opportunities to those areas in which training is most important and most needed (Gibson & Hillison, 1994). This forms the basis for the study in Osun state Agricultural Development Programmes.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study was to determine the competency needed by VEAs of Osun state Agricultural Development Programmes. The specific objectives were to:

1. identify personal characteristics of the village extension agents;
2. determine the importance of each competency area to the effectiveness of their performance;
3. assess the specific elements of competencies where training are needed;
4. determine the numbers of past in-service training programme the VEAs have attended;
5. determine the degree of agreement among the VEAs and ZEOs on the rating of the importance of competency areas.

Hypotheses of the study

Three hypotheses stated in null-form were tested viz:-

HO_1: There is no significant relationship between some selected demographic characteristics of VEAs and their needs for training.

HO_2: There is no significant difference in the rating of competency needed as indicted by VEAS themselves and the ZEOs.

HO_3: There is no agreement among the VEAs and ZEOs in the rating of the importance of competency areas.

METHODOLOGY

There are three zones in Osun State Agricultural Development Programme (OSADP) and the three zones are: Osogbo, Iwo and Ife/Ijesha.All the three zones were included in the study. The sample frame provided by OSADPs headquarters at Iwo was used and the population size of VEA in these three zones was eighty nine (89). A simple random sampling technique was used to select 20 village extension agents (VEAs) from each of the three zones giving sample size of 60 VEAs with a response rate of 100% and all the three zonal extension officers (ZEOs) were also sampled in order to know the competency areas where VEAs need training. The Fortnightly Training centre in each zone were used to contact VEAs and gather relevant information from them.

Data was collected using a questionnaire based on an instrument adapted by Price (1960), Hubbard (1971), and Adesiji (2002). The questionnaire focused on eight general competency areas necessary for the effectiveness of extension agents:

Extension organization and administration
Programme planning and development
Communication
Research
Human development
Social Systems
Evaluation
Teaching

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each competency areas to effectiveness of VEAs. Importance was rated on a four-point scale with little or none=1; moderately important=2; important= 3; very important=4. In analyzing the results, the minimum point is 8 while the maximum is 32.Competencies having 24-32 is rated very important,15-23 as important(and included in the study) and 8- 14 as not important.

They were also asked to indicate the VEA's need among the given items of each competency area and specific elements of knowledge and ability within each of those competency on four point scale with little or no need = 1; moderate need =2; need =3; great need =4. Competencies and elements rated 2.5 or more were considered to be important and included in the study. The data collected were subjected to statistical analyses. These included the use of percentage, frequency, means, Pearson Correlation, t-test and Kendall's coefficient of concordance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Selected personal characteristics of VEAs

Table 1: Personal characteristics of VEAs

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Gender		
Male	56	93.3
Female	4	6.7
Total	60	100.0
Age (year)		
30-39	9	15.0
40-49	45	75.0
50 and above	6	10.0
Total	60	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	2	3.3
Married	58	96.7
Total	60	100.0
Educational level		
Below O.N.D	4	6.7
O. N. D	54	90.0
HND/B.Sc	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0
Working experience (years)		
6-10	18	30.0
>10	42	70.0
Total	60	100.0
Number of Training Attended		
None	12	61.7
1	3	20.0
2-3	37	5.0
>3	8	13.3
Total	60	100.0

Source: Field survey 2005

Selected personal characteristic data were collected for VEAs as shown in Table land the results indicated that majority of them (93.3%) were male with 90% age range between 30 and 49 years. Large proportions (96.7%) of them were married and a significant percentage (90.0%) holds Ordinary National Diploma (O.N.D.) certificates. Also more than half (61.7%) have not had in-service training and all of them (100%) served more than five years in the Agricultural Development Programmes.

Importance of Training

Table 2. Competency areas in which respondents indicated as important.

Competency Area	VEAs	ZEOs
Extension organization and administration	16	
Program planning and development	20	28
Communication	17	
Research methodology	26	30
Evaluation	18	18
Human development	16	20
Social system	15	
Teaching	23	

Source: Field survey 2005

Importance of training to the effectiveness of VEAs' performance was determined as shown in table 2. The table shows the score rating of each competency area by VEAs are as follows: extension organization administration (16), programme planning (20), communication (17), research methodology (26), human development (16), social systems(15) and teaching (23). This indicated that VEAs considered all the eight competency areas important to the effectiveness of their job performance. The ZEOs indicated that programme planning and development (28), teaching (22), research methodology(30), human development (20) and programme evaluation (18) were important for the effectiveness of VEAs' job performance.

TRAINING NEEDS

Table 3: Specific elements of Competency Areas in which respondents indicated need for training.

Program evaluation	**Mean**
1. Developing evaluation Plans	3.0
2. Focusing and organizing Evaluations	2.8
3. Preparing evaluation reports	3.0
4. Using evaluation results	2.2
5. Conducting needs Assessments	1.6
6. Writing Programme objectives.	2.0
Research Methodology	
1. Designing Survey instrument	3.2
2. Tools for data Analysis	3.4
3. Analysis of data	3.0
4. Interpretation of data	2.2
5. Data collection Method	2.4
6. Sampling techniques	2.8
7. Conducting focus group.	1.6
Teaching	
1. Curriculum design	3.4
2. Review available material	1.6
3. Select non-formal teaching Methods	1.8
4. Employ principles of learning and teaching	3.0
5. Prepare educational programme units	2.0
6. Identifying and organizing learning experiences	1.8

Source: Field survey 2005

The two groups of respondents rated research methodology, programme evaluation and teaching as having mean greater than 2.5 as shown in table 3. Within the competency area of research methodology, four specific elements received rating of at least 2.5 from all the three response groups in the following descending order: choosing an appropriate tools for data analysis (3.4); designing of survey instrument (3.2); analysis of data(3.0) and sampling technique(2.8). Three specific elements of programme evaluation have at least mean of 2.5 from the two response groups in the following descending order: developing evaluation plan (3.2); preparation of evaluation reports (3.0); and focusing and organizing evaluations (2.8).

Also, two specific elements of teaching have means greater than 2.5 and these are: curriculum design (3.4), and employing principle of teaching and learning (3.0).

TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Test of Relationship between Selected Personal Characteristics of VEAs and Competency Needed

Characteristics	r	Significant
Age	0.68	0.05
Educational level	0.72	0.05
Length of service	0.84	0.05

Source: Field Survey 2005

Table 4 reveals the summary of Pearson Correlation analysis results on the test of relationship between Selected Personal Characteristics of VEAs and Competency Needed. It shows that the relationship were significant at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore HO_1 which stated that there is no significant relationship between the VEAs personal characteristics and competency area was rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between VEAs' age and competency area ($r=0.68$, $p<0.05$). Also, there is significant relationship between VEAs' level of education and training need($r=0.72$, $p<0.05$).The result further shows that there is a significant] relationship between VEAs' length of service and training need ($r=0.84$, $p<0.05$).This can be explained by the fact that the educational qualification affects individual performance on the job which in turn depends on the training being exposed to. Also, the higher the number of years in service , the greater the need for training.

Table 5: t-test Analysis of competencies rating between VEAs and ZEOs.

t-test	Value
Calculated	1.75
Tabulated	1.73

The confidence limit is at 95%

The null hypothesis HO_2 stated that there is no significant difference in the rating VEAs' competency needed as indicated by ZEO_s and VEAs themselves. The result in table 5 shows that the calculated t value is 1.75 and tabulated value is 1.73 with degree of freedom of 61.This indicates that there are significant differences in the competency needed assessment of VEAs and ZEOs. At 95% confidence limit the tabulated value ($t=1.734$) is less than the calculated value ($t=1.75$). Hence, there is a significant differences between the mean rating of VEAs and ZEOs. The null hypothesis HO_2 is rejected. Since the areas where VEAs stated they need training is different from that of ZEOs the implication is that training opportunities have to be devoted to those areas where the two groups agree the VEAs need training.

TABLE 6: Kendall's coefficient of concordance showing the degree of agreement among the two response groups.

Kendall's W[a]	0.32
Sig.	0.05

The Kendall's coefficient of concordance is 0.32 as shown in table 6. The null hypothesis HO_1 stated that there is no degree of agreement among the VEAs and ZEOs in the rating of the importance of competency areas. The coefficient of concordance shows a significant correlation in the raking of importance of competency areas for VEAs performance as indicated by ZEOs and VEAs themselves. ($w = 0.32$, $p<0.05$) as shown in Table 6. This value indicates that the two response groups agree on the rating of importance of competency areas.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicated that ninety percentage of VEAs have ordinary National Diploma certificate which might be as a result of the fact that this is the minimum qualification in which VEAs are being employed although, some were employed with lesser qualification. There is need-to employ more women VEAs, since we have few number of them as result indicates. Majority of them had been in the service for long and more than half had not attended any in service training programme. Therefore, Emphasis must be laid particularly to those specific elements where the two groups indicated needs for training of VEAs . These are choosing appropriate tools for data analysts; designing of survey instrument and analysis of data technique for research methodology. Developing evaluation plan: preparation of evaluation reports; focusing and organizing for valuation programme evaluation competency area. Also there is low agreement among the VEAs and ZEOs on the importance of each competency areas but a significant difference in the area where each of them indicated needs for training of VEAs. The study recommends increase in funding of in-service training programmes and a training course should be held for VEAs in the areas of research methodology and programme evaluation.

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