

## MOTIVATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF EXTENSION AGENTS OF ABIA STATE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

S. N. Odurukwe<sup>1</sup>

**Correspondence author:** Department of Agricultural Extension, Federal University of Technology, PMB 1526 Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. +234-8033565659, Email: [snodurukwe@yahoo.com](mailto:snodurukwe@yahoo.com)

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### ABSTRACT

*This study assessed the motivational needs of extension agents of Abia Agricultural Development Project. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select a total of 128 extension agents (EAs) from the State. Data on the effects of various needs/motivational theories (as Maslows' needs hierarchy theory, Alderfers' ERG theory, Reinforcement or law-of effect theory, Frederick Herzbergs' two-factor theory, and Douglas McGregors' theory X and theory Y), on the extension agents were collected through structured questionnaire from October - December 2004. Result analyses were achieved using tables and percentages. Research findings, revealed that greater percentage of the EAs are motivated towards the achievement of lower level physiological needs (93%), and security (72%) than higher level needs of ego (9%) and self actualization (6%). Such positive reinforcers as pay raises, and favourable performance evaluation motivated all the EAs at work. In addition, negative reinforcers as threat of sack, suspension, and query, motivated (93%) and (63%) respectively of the agents towards organizational goal achievement. The result further reveals that Theory Y attributes are more widespread among the extension agents than Theory X. It is recommended that the agents be allowed greater autonomy, responsibility, recognition and influence over decision making in matters relating to technology transfer to farmers.*

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Agricultural Extension, Federal University of Technology, PMB 1526 Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. +234-8033565659, Email: [snodurukwe@yahoo.com](mailto:snodurukwe@yahoo.com)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria since the 1980's operate the Daniel Benor's "Training and Visit (T&V) system of agricultural extension. This system is housed under each State's Agricultural Development Project (ADP). The basic goal of the T&V system is to build a professional extension service capable of assisting farmers in raising agricultural production and/or income and of providing appropriate support to agricultural development (Benor and Baxter, 1984: 8). Like all other agricultural extension models, T&V is an educational service or process, rather than a monolithic structure. It has a well-defined organization with a clear mode of operation, and provides continuous feedback from farmers to extension and research and continuous adjustment to farmers needs (Amalu, 1998:126).

Abia Agricultural Development Project (AADP) came into being in 1991 following the bifurcation of the former Imo State; into Abia and Imo States. It has the mandate to:

- Obtain a complete coverage of the State through a revitalized extension programme
- Establish a reorganized, disciplined and well-supported extension service based on the T&V system, which is capable of motivating small-scale farmers and ushering in significant increases in agricultural production and incomes of small-scale farmers.
- To disseminate low-cost, labour saving technical information/messages to farming communities in order to upgrade their knowledge and skills for increased production (Okarimia and Nwogu, 1996:160).

To achieve these laudable objectives, the extension arm of AADP has an organizational structure, which permits the flow of information from the Chief Agricultural Extension Officer down to the base-line staff described as Extension Agents (EAs) or Village Extension Workers (VEWs). The extension agent while frequently less educated than other staff, has a role that is no less professional and specialized. He is the only extension worker who teaches production recommendations to farmers. In addition to teaching and persuading farmers to adopt production recommendations, he also brings feed-back to the extension

and research services, information on actual farm production conditions and constraints, and farmer's reactions to recommended practices (Benor and Baxter, 1984:14). AADP goals set for the VEWs, are to increase the productivity and income of farmers in their areas of jurisdiction. A high extension agent (EA): farm - family (FF) ratio of 1:1490 is set for each VEW. These set goals are quite high and needs an equally high level of motivation from the Agricultural Extension systems' management to become realistic.

The success of the T&V extension system depends on the level of commitment to duty shown by the EAs, who can adequately be described as the life-wire of the ADPs. Their commitment and loyalty to duty calls for high level of motivation, which must emanate from the ADP management. A highly motivated EA will not only achieve the coverage of the target farm family ratio of 1:1490, but will also employ innovative ideas in the discharge of his/ her duties. He takes every farmer in his area of jurisdiction as a contact farmer, establishes a good inter-personal relationship with them and derives joy to go the extra mile of providing solution on farm and non-farm related problems of the farmers.

However, most of the extension agents lack this loyalty and commitment to duty and display a high level of demoralization concerning their job. They work only when closely supervised and engage in other private income generating activities that compete with their time for effective extension work. In most cases, such VEWs fail to make contact with half the set target of farm families. They do not use their initiative in the discharge of their duties and always insist on transferring the technology received during the immediate past fortnightly training even when such technologies do not suit the target farmers. Such agents are in most cases, not acceptable to the farmers and therefore make little impact on the farmers' life.

This therefore calls for the need to study the motivational needs of the extension agents for effective job performance. In the course of the study, the EAs will be assessed on such motivational needs theories as Abraham Maslow's Needs Hierarchy, Thorndike's Law-of-Effect theory, Frederick Herzberg's Two-factor-theory and McGregor Douglas theory X and theory Y.

Abraham Maslow (1943), in Flippo (1982:328) postulates that fundamental needs can be placed in a hierarchical order of basic physiological needs, safety and security needs, social, ego, and self-actualization needs. As each need level in the hierarchy is satisfied, the person will concentrate on meeting needs at the next level. He concludes that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs, not by those that have been gratified. People however are never satisfied on any need level but a reasonable amount of gratification of first priority needs must be forthcoming if they are to perceive a lower priority need (Flippo, 1982:329).

According to Thorndike (1911:443), the reinforcement or law-of effect theory states that behaviour that is followed by some positive consequences (referred to as reinforcers) will likely be repeated. This theory identified four key consequences that motivate peoples' behaviour at work as: i) positive reinforcers (examples; praises, compliments, letters of commendation, favourable performance evaluation, pay-raises and enriched job), ii) negative reinforcers (examples are when people perform well and avoid punishments), iii) punishment (examples are criticizing, shouting on an employee, issuance of /or threat of issuance of query, suspension or sack), and iv) extinction (examples; not giving compliments for a job well done, forgetting to say thank you for a favour, and setting impossible performance goals by management).

Herzberg (1966) put forward the two-factor theory. This theory postulates that there are two broad categories of factors that affect peoples' work motivation and satisfaction. The first categories called "hygienic factors" are characteristics of the workplace, such as company polices, working conditions, pay and supervision, which might improve job satisfaction, but not necessarily employee motivation. The second category called "motivators" according to Herzberg are factors pertaining to the job itself such as work itself, achievement, recognition, responsibility, and achievement/growth, These factors actually promote employee satisfaction and job motivation (Bateman and Snell, 1999:450).

Another important approach to motivation developed by Douglas McGregor as reported by Bateman and Snell (1999) involves two opposing theories about the nature of human behaviour. Theory X

holds that some employees are lazy or unwilling to work unless motivated by negative factors such as threats and constant supervision. Theory Y holds that employees want to work and do a good job and are motivated best by incentives, responsibility and ownership of their work.

Bateman and Snell (1999:440) have described motivation as forces that energize, direct and sustain a person's effort. Motivation results from an individuals' desire to satisfy personal needs or goals since every person has a set of needs or goals that influence his or her behaviour. The motivation of the EAs towards goal achievement is directly affected by the AADP management style. Such management policies as poor salary structure, non-regularity in salary payment, non-provision of training materials and motorbikes for easy mobility, hamper employee motivation. Most often, the leadership style does not recognize and reward positive outcomes, nor does it allow the VEWs the freedom to creatively use their initiatives in manners that may suit the local farmers. In the course of this study, the needs and motivational factors of the VEWs towards goal achievement will be investigated through the application of the 4 motivational theories discussed earlier.

### **1.1 Objective of the study**

The broad objective of this study is to reveal the process underlying motivation of VEWs of AADP towards goal achievement. The specific objectives are:

- To apply Maslows' needs hierarchy in describing the needs category of the EAs that motivates them to work.
- Examine the effects of Reinforcement theory on VEWs' motivation at work
- Determine the influence of Herzbergs' two-factor theory on the EAs
- Describe the Theory X and Theory Y attributes of the EAs, and
- Make recommendations.

This study will provide the managers of the ADP system with guidance based on empirical studies for effective administration of the system for enhanced extension agents' performance and achievement of the set objectives of agricultural development, and improved living conditions of rural farmers.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Abia Agricultural Development Project (AADP) was selected for this study based on researchers' familiarity with the organization and the high level of rural farm household coverage by the extension agents. The organizational structure of the Extension arm of AADP is hierarchical with specific lines of authority and flow of information. The system is organized with political and administrative heads, broken down into departments and units, each with a precise responsibility and function within the structure. The Chief Agricultural Extension Officer is responsible to the Project Manager for all policy and administrative matters relating to agricultural extension. The headquarter staff and functions are delegated down to the Zonal, Block and Circle levels where programmes are worked out with the farmers. The extension agent forms the all-important link between the farmers and the extension system.

From Table 1, AADP has a total of 212 (VEWs), comprising of 136 males and 76 females. Umuahia Agricultural zone has the largest EA size of, 84 comprising of 51 males and 33 females, followed by Aba, 69; with 38 males and 31 females and lastly Ohafia 59; with 47 males and 12 females. This distribution shows that Umuahia Agricultural Zone provides 40% of the total number of EAs, Aba Agricultural Zone, 32% and Ohafia Agricultural zone has the least contribution of 28%.

The selection of the respondents followed stratified random sampling to reflect this unequal zonal distribution by selecting a total of 51, 41 and 36 EAs from Umuahia, Aba & Ohafia Agricultural Zones respectively. To reflect the unequal distribution of the respondents by gender, they were further stratified into sex groups. Hence, 31 males and 20 females from Umuahia, 21 males and 20 females from Aba, and 29 males and 7 females from Ohafia Agricultural zones were randomly selected and interviewed. Data for the study were collected through structured questionnaires administered to the respondents during their various

**Table 1: Distribution of extension agents of the Abia State Agricultural Development Programme, (AADP) by sex and agricultural zones**

	Agricultural zones			
	Aba	Umuahia	Ohafia	Total
LGA	7	5	5	17
Extension agents (EAs)	69	84	59	212
Males	38	51	47	136
Females	31	33	12	76
Block extension agents (BEAs)	11	10	8	29
Block extension supervisors (BE S)	11	12	13	36
No of Blocks	12	13	13	38
No of Circles	96	93	85	274
Farm family	315 910			
Extension agent: Farm family ratio = 1: 1490				

*Source: Displayed on the AADP Chief Extension Officers' Notice Board, March 2004*

fortnightly training (FNT) sessions held from October to December 2004. The questionnaire solicited information from the VEWs on how the various work motivation theories (as Maslows' need theory, Herzbergs' two-factor theory, Reinforcement theory, and Theories X and Y) apply to them. Result analyses were achieved using tables and percentages.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Assessment of Abia State Agricultural Development Programme extension agents needs based on Maslow's needs hierarchy theory

Table 2 reveals that VEWs are primarily motivated to achieve their lower level priority basic physiological needs (93%), and safety (72%). These values represent multiple responses to the question addressing their needs hierarchy. This high value is attributed to the low economic status of the EAs since most of them are not University graduates and are poorly remunerated. However a very small percentage (9%) and (6%) are motivated towards the achievement of higher level needs of ego and self-actualization respectively. This shows that the VEWs do not follow strictly Maslows' hierarchy of needs where the satisfaction of

a lower need allows aspiration for a higher need. Rather, Alderfers' ERG theory is observed to be operating among the needs of the VEWs, who even though with lower level needs are still motivated to satisfy higher level needs at the same time.

**Table 2: Assessment of VEWs needs based on Maslow's need hierarchy**

Needs Hierarchy	Frequency (N = 128)	Percentage responses
Physiological	119	93
Safety or Security	92	72
Social	43	34
Ego	12	9
Self actualization	7	6
Total	273*	

\* Multiple responses recorded

Source: Field survey 2004

This result has shown that as long as the lower level basic physiological needs of the EAs are left unsatisfied, majority of them will not be motivated to achieve their set objectives. This hierarchy of needs implies that the emphasis of the AADP management on elaborate personnel in-service training without the basis of a fair, competitive and regular wage structure and job security is a waste of effort and resources.

### **3.2 Effects of reinforcement theory on Abia State Agricultural Development Programme extension agents' motivation to work**

Effects of reinforcement theory on the VEWs revealed that both positive and negative reinforcers motivated the VEWs to work hard on their job. From Table 3, all the agents reported that such positive reinforcers as receiving favourable performance evaluation and pay raises motivate them to work. Negative reinforcers that led to job motivation were; to avoid sack (93%) and punishments like query and suspension (63%).

VEWs reported that poor salary structure, delayed salary payment, setting of impossible performance goals of meeting the 1:1490 EA: FF ratio, non recognition of extra efforts, favouritism, and not giving

compliments for a job well done are management attributes that reduce motivation at work.

**Table 3: Effects of reinforcement theory on Abia State ADP extension agents' motivation to work**

Reinforcing attributes	Frequency	Percentage
Positive Reinforcers	(N = 128)	
To receive praises/compliments	112	88
Letters of commendation	99	77
Favorable performance evaluation	128	100
Pay raises	128	100
Enriched job	75	59
Negative reinforcers		
To avoid sack	119	93
To avoid criticism /rebuke	7	6
To avoid punishment or threat of punishment as query/suspension	81	63
Total	749*	

\*Multiple responses recorded.

Source: Field survey 2004

Therefore, the AADP management unit can achieve some level of employee motivation in this time where funds is tight and the organization can not motivate people through pay raises by using non monetary rewards. These include favourable performance evaluation, praises/compliments, and threat of such punishments as query, suspension and sack.

### 3.3 Extension Agents Assessment of Herzbergs' "Motivation" and "Hygienic" factors

From Table 4; contrary to Herzbergs' theory, salary and working condition were indicated by the VEWs as motivators to work with high percentage values of (72%) and (52%) respectively. Other important motivational factors are responsibility (92%), recognition (91%), and achievement (76%). Factors as organizational policy and administration (95%), relationship with supervisors and superiors (94%), and supervision (93%) are given as serious hygienic factors that lead to job satisfaction.

**Table 4: Abia State ADP extension agents' assessment of Herzbergs' "motivation" and "hygienic" factors as they affect them**

Herzbergs 'Factors (N = 128)	Motivators		Hygienic Factors	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Organizational policy & Administration	6	5	122	95
Supervision	9	7	119	93
Working conditions	67	52	61	48
Relation with supervisors & superiors	8	6	120	94
Salary	92	72	36	28
Relationship with peers	51	40	77	60
Job Security	12	9	116	91
Achievement	97	76	31	21
Job itself	79	62	49	38
Recognition	117	91	11	9
Responsibility	118	92	10	8
Advancement/Growth	89	70	39	31

*Source: Field survey 2004*

The VEWs reported their dissatisfaction over such issues as performing a challenging job for low pay that is not regular and timely; job condition that does not provide the materials needed for its execution such as mobility, demonstration materials etc, improper supervision, and poor working condition such as shabby offices and the fact that most of them operate in rural areas where the basic necessities of life are lacking.

This result implies that AADP management can achieve some degree of increased performance on the part of the EAs by combining both extrinsic rewards (from hygiene factors) with intrinsic rewards (from motivators) with more emphasis placed on intrinsic rewards.

### **3.4 Theory X and theory Y attributes of extension agents of the Abia State Agricultural Development Programme**

Extension agents' assessment of their theory X and theory Y attributes are discussed in the preceding section and their percentage responses presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Abia State ADP extension agents' assessment of their theory X and theory Y attributes**

Theory "X" characteristics (N = 128)	%	Theory "Y" characteristics (N = 128)	%
Dislike work and attempt to avoid it	4	View work as being as natural as rest and play	41
Need to be controlled, threatened and supervised to achieve desired goals	10	Exercise self control and self direction to committed objective	84
Shy away from responsibilities and seek formal direction	33	Learns not to only accept but seek responsibility	3
Display little ambition and places security above all work related factors	22	Has high capacity to exercise high degree of imagination, ingenuity and creativity	26
		Views his intellectual potentials as being only partially utilised	61

*Source: Field survey 2004*

Table 5 shows that a higher population of the VEWs exhibits more of theory Y attributes than Theory X. A high percentage (84%) and (61%) believe they display such theory Y attributes as; exercising self control and self direction to committed objective, and viewing their intellectual potentials as being only partially utilised respectively. Some VEWs however admitted possessing some theory X attributes as shying away from responsibilities and seeking formal direction (33%), and displaying little ambition and placing security above all work related actors (22%). This result therefore suggests that most of the VEWs have a considerable potentials and ability for growth.

The findings from Tables 4 and 5 imply that management can achieve increased performance of the VEWs, by pursuing job enrichment practices. In this light, the managers can create a work environment that provides resources, ensures proper supervision and good inter-personal relationship with superiors. In addition, autonomy, recognition, responsibility, challenging assignments, and greater influence over decision should be granted to VEWs. This will allow the agents a chance to use their discretion in making decisions as to what technology to disseminate to farmers at any particular time based on farmers' needs, rather than insisting on transferring to the farmers, technology received

during the immediate past fortnightly training which in most cases, might not arouse their interest This can be achieved by employing managers that manage by objectives and display participative/democratic decision making traits concerning the general extension system.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The research findings permit the following conclusions:

- Alderfers' ERG theory operates among the needs of the VEWs, who even though with lower level needs are still motivated to satisfy higher level needs at the same time.
- The effect of Herzbergs' factor on VEWs is a case of a "good" job in a "bad" condition, which does not offer any form of job satisfaction and motivation.
- More of Theory Y attributes than theory X attributes are widely spread among the VEWs.
- EAs can make greater impact on the lives of the rural farmers if they are paid regularly, provided with mobility and working materials, and allowed greater autonomy, responsibility, recognition, and decision over job discretion.

##### **4.1 Recommendations**

- Government should ensure adequate funding of the ADP system
- The ADP management should ensure prompt payment of staff salaries, and provision mobility and other necessary working materials to field staff.
- The ADP management should employ participatory approaches in the administration of the general Extension System.
- Non- monetary rewards as favourable performance evaluation, praises/compliments and threats of query, suspension and sack,

should be employed by management to achieve motivation of the extension agents.

- Management to allow extension agents greater autonomy, responsibility, recognition and decision over job discretion.

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