

## CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF PRIVATE EXTENSION SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA

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### Introduction

Extension education is a vital instrument for promoting agricultural development, improving rural livelihoods, and facilitating socio-economic transformation in Nigeria. Traditionally, extension service delivery in Nigeria has been dominated by the public sector, particularly through state Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs). Extension education remains a critical mechanism for promoting agricultural productivity, rural development, and socio-economic transformation in Nigeria. As a form of adult and non-formal education, extension education facilitates the transfer of knowledge, skills, technologies, and innovations from research institutions and educational systems to farmers and rural communities. Given the central role of agriculture in Nigeria's economy and livelihoods, effective extension service delivery is indispensable for achieving food security, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. However, despite its acknowledged importance, extension education service delivery in Nigeria continues to face persistent challenges, even as new opportunities and prospects emerge in the context of policy reforms, institutional pluralism, and technological advancement. However, persistent inefficiencies, inadequate funding, and declining performance of public extension systems have stimulated increasing interest in private extension service delivery. Private extension refers to extension and advisory services provided by private firms, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), producer organizations, agribusinesses, and independent consultants, often on a fee-for-service or partnership basis. This paper examines the challenges and prospects of private extension service delivery in Nigeria using insights from recent and relevant literature.

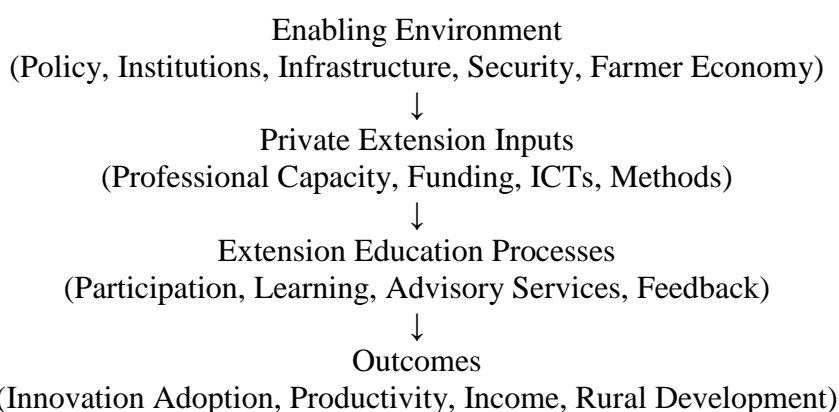
### Conceptual Framework for Private Extension Service Delivery in Nigeria

The conceptual framework for this paper is anchored on extension education theory, pluralistic extension systems, and innovation systems thinking. It explains how private extension service delivery operates within a broader socio-economic, institutional, and policy environment to influence agricultural and rural development outcomes in Nigeria. The framework consists of four interrelated components:

- 1. Enabling Environment:** These are macro-level factors that shape the functioning of private extension services; Policy and regulatory framework (existence of national extension policy, PPP guidelines); Institutional arrangements (public-private coordination, research-extension linkages); Infrastructure and security conditions (roads, ICT infrastructure, rural safety) and Economic context (farmers' income levels, access to credit). These factors determine whether private extension services can emerge, operate sustainably, and scale effectively (Anderson & Feder, 2004; Sulaiman et al., 2020; World Bank, 2023).

2. **Private Extension Service Inputs:** These represent the resources and capacities deployed by private extension providers such as Professional competence of extension personnel; Extension methods and approaches (participatory methods, advisory services, training); Use of ICTs and digital platforms and Funding mechanisms (fee-for-service, donor support, cost-sharing models). The quality and adequacy of these inputs influence the credibility, relevance, and effectiveness of private extension delivery (Davis & Sulaiman, 2014; Oladele, 2015).
3. **Extension Education Processes:** These are the core extension education activities through which change occurs such as Knowledge dissemination and skills development; Farmer participation and feedback mechanisms; Adult learning and experiential learning processes and Advisory support for production, marketing, and agribusiness. Effective extension education processes enhance learning, trust, and innovation adoption among farmers (Adedoyin, 2005; Ladan, 2021).
4. **Outcomes and Impacts:** Refers to the expected outcomes of effective private extension service delivery which include Improved adoption of agricultural innovations; Increased productivity and farm income; Enhanced market participation and agribusiness development; Strengthened rural livelihoods and food security and Sustainable agricultural and rural development. These outcomes contribute to national development goals when private extension services complement public efforts within a pluralistic system (FAO, 2019; World Bank, 2012).

The framework assumes that a supportive enabling environment enhances the capacity of private extension providers, which in turn strengthens extension education processes. When these processes are participatory, inclusive, and technology-driven, they lead to positive agricultural and rural development outcomes. Conversely, weak policies, insecurity, poor infrastructure, and farmer poverty constrain private extension effectiveness.



Adapted from Ladan (2021) and World Bank (2023)

### Concept of Extension Education

Extension education is commonly defined as an educational process designed to bring useful and practical knowledge to people outside formal school systems, with the aim of improving their livelihoods and well-being. It emphasizes learning by doing, participation, and problem-solving rather than classroom instruction (Adedoyin, 2005). In Nigeria, extension education is most visible in the agricultural sector, where it links farmers to innovations generated by research institutions. Over time, extension has evolved from a linear transfer-of-technology model to more participatory and pluralistic approaches that recognize farmers as active partners in development (Anderson & Feder, 2007; Davis & Sulaiman, 2014).

The purpose of all extension work is to change the lives of the people for the better. The starting point being the capability of man to learn, to profit by experience, to adapt and to renovate. It does rely on the premise that learning process is a continuing process which allows no age limit or other barriers and grows out of a situation of need, dislike for ignorance and backwardness and desire for knowledge and improvement. It is therefore an out of school non-formal education for both young and old to learn by doing. Extension as a system now has three main facets: As a discipline it deals with the behaviour of people. It is educational in content and purposive in approach. The content consists of agriculture, medicine (preventive and social medicine), public health, education, engineering etc. Extension is always dependent on a firm knowledge and expertise in sociology, anthropology, psychology, administration, economics, communication arts, political science and so on. As a process, extension seeks to influence the behaviour of rural people through education and information exchange. The aim is to assist them in gaining a livelihood, improving the physical and psychological level of living of rural families, and fostering rural community welfare. The success of the extension process requires an atmosphere of mutual trust, helpfulness and respect on the part of both extension worker and rural people. In a nutshell, the broader function of extension work is to help people to solve their own problems through the application of scientific knowledge. Extension in Nigeria can thus be categorized into two groups: Government-organized extension programmes; and Extension programmes organized and sponsored by private agencies.

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### **Concept of Private Extension Service Delivery**

Private extension service delivery involves the provision of agricultural and rural advisory services by non-state actors with varying objectives, funding mechanisms, and operational models. Unlike public extension, which is largely funded by government and offered as a public good, private extension often operates under market-oriented principles, emphasizing efficiency, responsiveness, and client demand (Anderson & Feder, 2004). In Nigeria, private extension services are delivered through agribusiness companies, input suppliers, commodity associations, NGOs, faith-based organizations, and development partners, often complementing public extension efforts (Saliu & Age, 2009). This pluralistic approach recognizes that no single actor can effectively meet the diverse and growing information needs of farmers.

### **Extension Education as a Private Enterprise**

Agricultural extension still remain the most crucial and critical means to reach farming households in the rural areas and globally. There are changing trends and challenges facing agricultural extension delivery in Nigeria which has necessitated the growing campaign for increase in private participation and funding (Oladoja, 2004). Since the pre-independence era, the extension service has been publicly funded and implemented in Nigeria. In reaction to the worrisome performance of the agricultural sector, the Federal Government has embarked on

various programmes and schemes aimed at returning the sector to its enviable position in the Nigerian economy (Alabi and Mafimisebi, 2004). 1970s witnessed maximum intervention exemplified in unprecedented deluge of Agricultural policies, programmes, projects and institutions (Olayemi, 1994). Some of these include; National Accelerate Food Production (NAFP), River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Green Revolution (GR). The 1980s and 1990s saw the establishment of such institutions as the Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRR), National Directorate for Employment (NDE) and National Land Development Authority (NALDA). All these are projects/agencies established by the Nigerian government (Omotayo, 2005) These Governments' efforts have not yielded sufficient desired results, as the country still witnessed increasing high cost of food, general cost of living and perpetual poverty. This calls for redirection of government to focus on better performance of agriculture in Nigeria. There has been a nationwide adoption of the World Bank support Training and Visit (T and V) as the main approach for extension delivery. Although the system was adopted with distinct home grown modifications, the withdrawal of World Bank funds in the last two decades has proved that the system is not sustainable. While the system is supposed to incorporate feedback from farmers, they are often passive receivers of agricultural information. Like in many other countries where the T and V is being implemented, messages are typically based on practices of farmers' needs or on the requirements or desires of public sector agencies like the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) in the case of Nigeria. Studies and critiques have shown that the T and V have not met user demand for appropriate content and appropriate learning methods (Omotayo, 2005). Anderson and Feder (2003) observed that "despite the fact that public financing for extension is often justifiable, the general trend towards fiscal restraint and a reduced role for the public sector has led to financial crisis in many extension services". Since the 1990s, inadequate funding has led to the virtually collapse of research and extension institutions that provided services small farmers and rural communities in Nigeria (Omotayo, 2004).

### **Challenges of Private Extension Service Delivery in Nigeria**

Despite its growing relevance, private extension service delivery in Nigeria faces several interrelated challenges that limit its effectiveness and sustainability.

#### **Weak Policy and Institutional Framework**

One of the major challenges confronting private extension services is the absence of a clear and comprehensive national policy framework that defines the roles, responsibilities, and regulatory mechanisms for private sector participation. The lack of legal backing and coordination structures has resulted in fragmented and uncoordinated private extension initiatives, often operating in isolation from public agencies and research institutions (Sulaiman et al., 2020). This weak institutional environment undermines accountability, standardization, and sustainability of private extension services.

#### **Limited Ability of Farmers to Pay for Services**

Most Nigerian farmers are smallholder producers with low incomes and limited access to credit. Their weak economic capacity constrains their ability to pay for private extension services, particularly where full cost recovery is required (Agwu & Chukwuone, 2005). Consequently, private extension providers tend to focus on commercial farmers, high-value

crops, or donor-funded projects, leaving resource-poor farmers underserved. This raises concerns about equity, inclusiveness, and the public-good nature of extension education.

### **Professional Capacity and Credibility Issues**

The effectiveness of private extension services depends largely on the competence and credibility of service providers. However, some private extension practitioners lack adequate technical expertise, pedagogical skills, and understanding of adult learning principles that underpin extension education (Davis & Sulaiman, 2014). Farmers' skepticism about the motives of private providers especially those linked to input sales can also reduce trust and adoption of recommendations. Maintaining professional standards and ethical conduct remains a significant challenge.

### **Infrastructure, Security and Environmental Constraints**

Private extension service delivery is further constrained by poor rural infrastructure, including inadequate road networks, weak communication systems, and limited access to electricity. These factors increase operational costs and reduce outreach to remote areas. In addition, rising insecurity due to banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts has discouraged private extension providers from operating in many rural communities, particularly in northern Nigeria (World Bank, 2023). Climate change and environmental degradation also pose challenges, as private extension providers may lack the capacity to address complex, location-specific climate risks faced by farmers.

### **Weak Linkages with Research and Public Extension**

Effective extension service delivery requires strong linkages with agricultural research institutions to ensure access to validated and context-specific technologies. In Nigeria, private extension services often operate with weak or informal links to research and public extension systems, resulting in limited access to up-to-date innovations and inconsistent advisory messages (Idachaba, 2006). This weak integration undermines the overall effectiveness of the extension system.

### **Insecurity**

Many rural areas where the agricultural activities are not secured and the farmers are battling with banditry, cattle rustling and kidnapping. Private extension service organizations may not comfortably send their staff to the rural areas.

### **Prospects of Private Extension Service Delivery in Nigeria**

Despite these challenges, several prospects suggest that private extension service delivery can play a more prominent and effective role in Nigeria's agricultural development.

- a) **Pluralistic Extension Systems and Public–Private Partnerships:** There is growing consensus that extension services should be delivered through pluralistic systems involving public, private, and civil society actors. Public–private partnerships (PPPs) offer opportunities to combine the outreach mandate of government with the efficiency, innovation, and responsiveness of the private sector (Anderson & Feder, 2007; FAO, 2019). Through cost-sharing arrangements, contract extension, and outsourcing models, private extension services can complement public efforts while maintaining government oversight and support for resource-poor farmers.

- b) **Emergence of NGOs and Producer Organizations:** Non-governmental organizations, farmer cooperatives, and producer associations are increasingly involved in providing extension and advisory services, particularly in value-chain development, agribusiness training, and livelihood diversification. These organizations often adopt participatory and community-driven approaches that align closely with the principles of extension education (Akinagbe & Ajayi, 2010). Their proximity to farmers enhances trust, relevance, and sustainability of extension interventions.
- c) **ICT and Digital Extension Opportunities:** The rapid growth of mobile phone usage and digital platforms in Nigeria presents significant opportunities for private extension service delivery. ICT-based extension models—such as mobile advisory services, digital marketplaces, and social media platforms—enable private providers to reach large numbers of farmers at relatively low cost (Oladele, 2015; FAO, 2021). When combined with face-to-face support, digital extension can enhance timeliness, feedback, and scalability of private extension services.
- d) **Capacity Building and Professionalization:** Strengthening the professional capacity of private extension providers through training, certification, and continuous professional development can enhance credibility and effectiveness. Emphasis on participatory methods, adult learning principles, climate-smart agriculture, and agribusiness advisory services will improve the quality of private extension delivery (Davis & Sulaiman, 2014; Ladan, 2021). Improved incentive structures and performance-based rewards can further attract skilled professionals into private extension practice.

In another development, Akinagbe and Ajayi, (2010) outlined the following issues as pertinent to the development of private extension service delivery in Nigeria:

1. Increase in population- resulting to an increase in the number of clients to be serviced.
2. Increase in international attention on Nigeria- a number of organizations now have interest in contributing to the development of Nigeria.
3. Modernization coupled with globalization- calling for the demand for new knowledge almost on daily basis so as to catch up with the ever changing society.
4. Training needs of extension staff- the old school concept is no longer accepted in extension.
5. Inadequate training centers- due to the increasing demand, the existing centers become inadequate
6. The need for participatory research methods- the people of nowadays want to be involved in all that affects their wellbeing
7. Inadequate number of extension staff- the ratio of extension staff to the clients is grossly lopsided and very far away from the recommended ratio.
8. Government's new policies on food security, entrepreneurship, job creation and self-reliance which call for increased demand for information

## Conclusion

Extension is a valuable method of disseminating new knowledge required for the survival of man that takes education to the people. Extension service delivery is challenged by a number of issues mostly arising from population growth, need for replenishment, modernization etc. These issues should energize extension practitioners on the need to overcome them and ensure speedy development of our nation. This has called for the privatization of extension

service delivery as a means to remedy the shortcomings of the public extension system in Nigeria. The paper concluded by presenting prospects of private extension service delivery that is anchored on certain pertinent issues that will support its realization.

Private extension service delivery holds significant potential for addressing the shortcomings of Nigeria's predominantly public extension system. However, its effectiveness is constrained by weak policy frameworks, limited farmer capacity to pay, professional and infrastructural challenges, insecurity, and poor institutional linkages. Harnessing the prospects of private extension requires deliberate policy reforms, strengthened public-private partnerships, investment in capacity building, and inclusive models that protect the interests of smallholder farmers. A well-coordinated pluralistic extension system, anchored on the principles of extension education, remains essential for achieving sustainable agricultural and rural development in Nigeria.

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