

1.1. Principles of Agricultural Extension

1.1.1. Basic Principles of extension

Certain basic principles underlie the conduct of agricultural extension work. These principles differ with respect to the kind of community in which extension education is carried on. Extension principles may be defined as guidelines for the conduct of extension work and these principles are the bedrock upon which extension service rests. The principles are:

1. Extension should start where the people are. Williams et al., 1984 believed that extension should work at the level where the people are, that is, at their level of knowledge, understanding, interest and degree of readiness. In order to be able to assist the people to move to higher levels of aspiration, it is important that extension worker should know what the conditions are. It means personal contact with the local condition, and its environment, an understanding of the social structure, the habits, traditions, attitude and economic status of the people and society.

The first principle therefore implies that to succeed with farmers, new ideas must be related to what the farmer already knows and that with which he is familiar.

2. Extension should be based on the needs and interests of the people which are closely related to improving their livelihood through increasing farm production and their physical environment (Williams et al., 1984). It is imperative therefore to conceptualize the basic needs of the people in the rural set up since the needs and interests of people vary from one set of people to the other due to difference in culture. Extension can only function if these two variables are put into consideration.

It is also imperative to note that extension workers must gain the confidence of their audience. This is so because farmers are said to be fatalistic as well as conservative in their attitudes. They are wary to thread on unsure grounds and are unlikely to take action without conviction. This is why it is necessary that the extension worker should gain their confidence (Obibuaku, 1983). Unless they are sure of the ability and skill of an extension worker, they will not be persuaded to accept his recommendations. This is more so if the extension worker is young and has had little

or no farm experience. In that case, he must start with one or two programmes that are likely to succeed and must work on them until eventual success.

3. Extension should assist farmers to determine their own problems, help them to find desirable solutions and to encourage them to take action. This assistance does not imply that the extension worker's problems are replica of the farmer's problems and does not indicate that the farmers cannot think on their own.

Embarking on this will enable the farmers to have the perception that the extension worker cares about their problems by assisting them in identifying their problems. In proffering solutions to these problems, the extension worker should not in any way solve their problems on their behalf as this will amount to imposing his own value judgment on them.

4. It is an established fact that human beings have unsatisfied wants, this assertion is also applicable to the farmers. An extension worker cannot go far with people unless they want to help themselves, therefore **programmes must start with the felt needs** of the people and proceed to others that are also needed by them.

The wants of the people must be kept in reasonable relationship with the effort they are capable and willing to make. All the people within a community do not want the same thing at same time, and in the same fashion (Obibuaku, 1983). To this end, their values differ and so do their goals and the ability to achieve them.

5. The principle of co-operative work must be pursued to logical conclusion. This is so because the best programmes are those determined by the local people and extension staff working together. Planning of programmes with the people is an important part of extension teaching. People understand a programme better and are more likely to support it if they participate in its creation.

Planning is also a learning process. By participating in programme planning, people learn to work together. Decisions that are collectively made are stronger and are more acceptable than the decisions that are passed and imposed on them from the outside. Rural people tend to resist

change until they see the benefit of such a change and there is no better way of helping them than by involving them in planning for change.

6. Extension workers should work with all members of the family.

The family should be regarded as a working unit in the home and in the field (Williams et al., 1984). Religion, race or political interests should be put aside in working with rural people, extension worker should treat them as rational adults who are capable of making their own decisions.

7. The principle of the use of variety of teaching methods is another basic principle. In this case, a teaching method can be conceived in teaching a segregated learning unit. This is equally based on the principle of variety is the spice of life and that no one method will help to bring out desirable changes in people. No method therefore is an island. The implication of this principle is that, the more the variety of ways a topic is presented and practised, the quicker the people tend to grasp the subject matter.

8 In African rural communities, participation in extension programme is voluntary and therefore programmes must meet the varying needs of individuals. Participation in extension programmes differ significantly in age, sex, education, attitudes, interests, needs and economic and social values. Programmes must therefore be attractive and tailored to meet the needs and interests of the varying groups.

9. Extension workers should provide maximum **opportunity** for the people to work on **programmes that have been determined by them and the extension agent working together.** The joint determination of the programmes is one thing and full participation is another dimension which is crucial to the eventual success of such programmes. The farmers feel fully satisfied when they are given maximum opportunity to practice what they participated in building. The principle of involvement has a sound psychological basis in that people are never interested in programmes which they have not helped to develop.

10. Extension workers should take advantage of any existing local groups to involve the people in extension programmes. The people in rural areas tend to listen more to the local leaders than even the extension workers since they are power brokers and the inability of the extension agent to work with them makes it impossible for him to succeed in his programmes. This principle must be strictly adhered to if innovation is to be well adopted by the local people. The existence of these local leaders makes it possible for extension agents to spread his service over a wide area. There are numerous organizations and groups that are in existence in Ethiopia such as farmers' co-operative societies or unions, farmer's kebele administrative councils. All these groups should be used more intensively in involving the people in extension programmes.

11. Subject matter covered in extension must have definite purpose and must be specific so that programme would be able to achieve the purpose for which it was established. The subject matter here refers to the content of the extension programme, which must be relevant to the lives of the rural people and must therefore be useful to them. The content of the programme must be presented when it is most needed by the people. This is so because retention falls off rapidly if opportunity for application of what is learnt is not present. The subject matter covered must therefore be attainable within the time available, and within physical and economic resources of clientele, and within the social condition and learning ability of the participants.

12. The principle of constant evaluation must be followed. It should appraise periodically its work in the light of existing and changing conditions so that it can be seen whether the objective are being achieved. Extension workers have to make endless decisions and then act according to what they understand to be the mandates of their decisions. In a similar vein, the longer a practice has been followed, the harder it is to be objective about its limitations and the harder it is to get at making needed changes. Therefore frequent appraisal will assist a long way in arriving at these benefits.

13. The principle of professionalism should be followed. Extension workers should therefore work with extension professionals who can sell their programmes to their clientele. Credibility is therefore essential here. It should provide continuous opportunity, additional training and professional improvement for its staff.

14. Learning is a gradual process and therefore results must not be expected too soon.

Research evidence has shown that learners must be exposed to new ideas over a period of time and in variety of ways before they begin to respond to them. The rural people must not be rushed as they do not learn at the same rate. This principle must be put in mind when basic things are expected from the rural people. The adoption rate is therefore to be considered as a gradual process.

15. Adult learning remains high throughout life. Adults have had years of varied experience, set beliefs and habits. Their beliefs and habits tend to change very slowly. However many of these have to be changed if progress is to be made. The Extension workers must therefore use all available strategies in taking care of these beliefs and habits.

16. A closer principle to the one just highlighted is the principle that **extension is educational in function through assisting people to make their own decisions among various alternatives** put before them. Extension workers should not be involved with supply activities. The farmers may be expecting the extension agents to supply them with needed planting materials, fertilizers and fungicides. This is basically contrary to its educational function.

17. Extension workers should promote the use and development of volunteer leaders. It is through this forum that extension agents can reach many people and educate them of the need for change. This principle therefore sees the volunteer leaders as loud speaker for extension. Without the use of the volunteer leader, most of the planned programmes will not be achieved.

18. Extension should be based on facts and knowledge. This principle can be achieved through the process of working closely with the researchers and the farmer. Therefore, extension in this regard will be seen as an intermediary or a link between researcher and the farmer.

1.1.2. Guiding principles of extension

Extension activities are widespread throughout the developing world and most governments have set up formally structured extension services to implement extension programmes and projects. The practice of extension is supported by budget, offices, personnel and other resources. Before

examining extension in detail in later chapters, however, it will be useful to consider the principles which should guide it.

Extension works with people, not for them

Extension works with rural people. Only the people themselves can make decisions about the way they will farm or live and an extension agent does not try to take these decisions for them. Rural people can and do make wise decisions about their problems if they are given full information including possible alternative solutions. By making decisions, people gain self-confidence. Extension, therefore, presents facts, helps people to solve problems and encourages farmers to make decisions. People have more confidence in programmes and decisions which they have made themselves than in those which are imposed upon them.

Extension is accountable to its clients

Extension services and agents have two sets of masters. On the one hand, they are accountable to their senior officers and to the government departments that determine rural development policies. Agents are expected to follow official policies and guidelines in their work.

On the other hand, extension is the servant of the rural people and it has the responsibility to fulfill the needs of the people in its area. This means that the rural poor should have a say in deciding how effective extension actually is. One measure of effectiveness is to see how well policies and plans have been carried out. An equally important measure is the extent to which incomes and living standards of the rural people have increased as a result of extension work.

Extension programmes, therefore, are based on people's needs, as well as on technical and national economic needs. The extension agent's task is to bring these needs together. For example, an important part of government policy may be to increase the amount of food grown and sold in the country. By choosing to encourage the mass of small farmers to increase their output by improving their farming methods, national needs and farmers' needs can be satisfied together.

Extension is a two-way link

Extension is not a one-way process in which the extension agent transfers knowledge and ideas to farmers and their families. Such advice, which is often based upon the findings of agricultural and other research stations, is certainly important but the flow of information from farmers to extension and research workers is equally important. Extension should be ready to receive farmers' ideas, suggestions or advice, as well as to give them. This two-way flow of ideas can occur at different stages.

When the problem is being defined. Being in regular contact with the farmers, the extension agent can help research workers to understand the farming problems of the area and the limitations under which farmers have to work. It is even better if the agent can bring researchers into direct contact with farmers in order to ensure that research recommendations are relevant to farmers' needs.

When recommendations are being tested in the field. A new farm practice or crop variety might produce good results at a research station but not do so well on a farmer's field. Trials on farmers' fields are an opportunity to test research recommendations and provide feedback for research staff.

When farmers put recommendations into practice. Sometimes farmers discover problems with a recommendation which the research station failed to note. With the feedback the recommendations can be adjusted accordingly.

The two-way link between research, extension and the farmer is fundamental to sound extension practice and should be a basic principle of extension activity.

Extension cooperates with other rural development organizations

Within rural areas, extension services and agents should work closely with the other organizations that provide essential services to farmers and their families. Extension is only one aspect of the many economic, social and political activities that seek to produce change for the better in rural society. Extension, therefore, must be prepared to collaborate with all other such organizations, both government and non-government, and to take them into account when preparing to implement extension policies.

Extension works with different target groups

Extension recognizes that not all farmers in any one area will have the same problems. Some will have more land than others and will be keen to try out new ideas. Others, with fewer resources, will probably be more cautious. Extension cannot offer a single "package" of advice, suitable to all farmers. Different groups need to be identified and the agent will have to develop programmes appropriate to each group.

In the past, much extension effort was concentrated on the progressive farmer who was expected to spread new ideas to others. It has been seen, however, that this does not always work, because progressive farmers often have different problems. They have more land, more education and are usually more involved in the marketing of their produce.

Extension must, therefore, be aware of the existence of different farming groups and plan its programmes accordingly. The smallest and poorest farmers will need particular attention, as they may lack the basic resources needed to become involved in extension activities. The point to stress, therefore, is the existence of farmer groups with different resources and skills in any one community, and the need for extension to respond to these groups accordingly.