BURNOUT, JOB SATISFACTION AND WORK SITUATIONS AS PERCEIVED BY DISTRICT EXTENSION OFFICERS, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Agricultural extension workers in developing countries face many constraints such as poor working conditions and unfavorable government policy support for agriculture. The question is whether under these challenging circumstances extension workers still view their profession with pride. A study of district extension officers in Ondo State, Nigeria was conducted to answer this question. Their perceptions of burnout, job satisfaction and work situations were studied. It was found that in spite of significant economic hardships in Nigeria, motivation of extension administrators remains high. The study contributes to Extension’s knowledge base by identifying other types of incentives for extension workers besides salaries.

Introduction

Decades of a persistent food crisis in the developing world, particularly Africa, coupled with budgetary crises, threaten the future of Extension. There is common admission that Extension has not fulfilled the purpose for which it was established, namely to eradicate poverty and hunger through increased food production (Benor & Harrison, 1977; Najjar, 1980). Extension professionals are also criticized for "…not doing enough, not doing it
well, and not being relevant” (Rivera, 1991, p. 9). Antholt (1991) noted that if Extension is to be useful in the 21st century, it must learn to operate in an increasingly complex, interdependent, rapidly changing, and resource-stressed world. Woog, Kelleher, and Turner (1992) contended that a credible extension system must “… accommodate the problems and challenges associated with complexity, sustainability, and the need to consider human values, judgment and perceptions” (pp. 5-6).

Clearly, these operational and intellectual demands of having to do more with less in a resource-stressed Third World environment could mean frustration on the part of extension professionals in developing countries. How do district extension administrators in Nigeria feel about their jobs in terms of burnout, satisfaction and other concerns? This is the question addressed in this paper. Many studies in the United States and other industrialized countries have helped improve our knowledge of job stress or burnout and satisfaction. However, work on these issues in developing countries is limited. This study contributes to filling this void.

**Extension Conditions in Nigeria Necessitating the Study**

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is located on the west coast of Africa and covers an area of 923,768 sq. km. or 356,700 sq. miles - about the size of California, Nevada and Arizona combined (Nelson, 1982). It is bounded by Benin on the west, Cameroon on the east, Niger and Chad to the north, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. The 1991 census estimated the population of Nigeria to be 88 million, and this is projected to reach 115 million by the year 2000. Nigeria is composed of about 300 ethnic groups and languages. Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo are the predominant language and ethnic groups (Metz, 1992). The literacy rate is about 40%.

Although Nigeria is a predominantly agricultural country, the discovery of oil has many Nigerians abandoning farming for get-rich-quick jobs in the oil fields. The result is that Nigeria which was self-sufficient in food production in the early 1960s now depends heavily on food imports (Metz, 1992). Falling oil prices and a ballooning population forced the government to re-emphasize agriculture, as evidenced by the Fifth National Development Plan of 1988-92, which stressed agricultural self-sufficiency.

Not only did agricultural development in Nigeria witness a long period of neglect, starting from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, as a result of the oil boom, but Extension also suffered. Atala (1986) stated:

> Extension services have been understaffed and the workers have been underpaid, ill-equipped, under-trained, consequently, they have low status and low work motivation relative to workers in other sectors of government ministries. (p. 14)

Atala added that Extension in Nigeria is “still slow and unexciting,” implying that extension workers are unhappy and take no pride in their performance. This study was carried out largely in an effort to test the assumption that extension workers in a resource-stressed environment lack motivation and do not look upon their job with pride.

This study was carried out in Ondo State, one of 30 states in Nigeria. The State is divided into six zones and each zone is headed by a zonal director of agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources in Ondo State is responsible for formulating extension policy. Ondo State extension is based on the Training and Visit System as the state currently enjoys a major agricultural development project financed by a loan from the World Bank. The overall objective of this project is small farmer development. Therefore, extension features prominently in this project. The extension component of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources is composed of two parts: Communication Support and Extension. These are represented at the national, zonal and district levels. Extension workers collaborate with
subject matter specialists in areas such as agroforestry, women in agriculture, livestock and fisheries.

**Burnout and Extension Productivity in Nigeria**

How a worker feels about his or her job has an impact on productivity. If the worker feels that his or her role is ambiguous or cannot see any future prospects for that position, negative stress or burnout is likely to occur and poor performance will result. Potter (1985) defines burnout as a reduction in one's motivation to work. The concept of motivation is difficult to define. Lawler (1973) addresses the concept at length. He notes that motivation is the “...single most important determinant of performance” (p. 1). However, he fails to define motivation except to say that “…the distinguishing characteristic of motivated behavior is that it is goal-directed” (p. 2). He concludes that motivated behavior is one that “…is under central or voluntary control” (p. 3). Thus, in the work organization, the challenge for administrators is to create a suitable environment whereby people voluntarily aspire to excel. Lawler notes that money plays an important part in motivation but adds “…just as organizations differ in what they can do to influence motivation, people differ in what motivates them to work” (p. 7). He notes that overall job performance of a worker is a function of his/her ability plus motivation.

Closely related to motivation and performance (or output) is the notion of job satisfaction, or “…affective attitudes or orientations on the part of individuals toward jobs” (Lawler, 1973, p. 62). He notes that job satisfaction is related to absenteeism and turnover (or resignations), both of which are very costly to organizations. In his view, “…satisfaction is a function of the amount of rewards a person receives and the amount of rewards he(she) feels he(she) should receive” (p. 84).

Potter (1985) describes the burnout process: "It begins with small warning signals: feelings of frustration, emotional outbursts, withdrawal, health problems, alienation, substandard performance and the increased use of drugs and alcohol” (p. 2). Freudenberger (1980) defines burnout: “To deplete oneself. To exhaust one’s physical and mental resources. To wear oneself out by excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectation imposed by oneself or by the values of society” (p. 16).

Newcomb and Clark (1985a) identify four stages of burnout. The first is enthusiasm. At this stage, one has high hopes, high energy and sets high expectations for oneself. The second stage is stagnation. Here, one is still doing the job but is no longer thrilled by it. The third stage is frustration where one begins to develop self-doubt and question one’s own ability to get the job done. The last stage is apathy whereby one simply does enough to get by, putting in the barest minimum to avoid losing one’s job. Newcomb and Clark (1985b) note that burnout is likely to occur where workers face role ambiguity, dim career prospects, tight economic times, and frustration. The question is whether the economic hardships prevalent in developing countries including Nigeria (Borgin & Corbett, 1982), affect the way extension administrators perceive their roles and the satisfaction derived from performing these roles.

**Objectives of the Study**

Against this backdrop of poor government support for Extension, the purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions of district extension officers in Ondo State, Nigeria in terms of burnout, job satisfaction and work situations.

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To describe the characteristics of district extension officers.
2. To determine burnout as perceived by district extension officers.
3. To determine job satisfaction as perceived by district extension officers.
4. To determine perceptions of district extension officers regarding work situations and opportunities.

5. To identify problems perceived by district extension officers.

**Methodology**

The population for the study consisted of all district extension officers in Ondo State of Nigeria (N=30). Because of the relatively small number, the entire population was used for the study. A questionnaire was developed by the researchers based on a review of relevant literature on Extension and burnout. The questionnaire consisted of questions eliciting demographic information, and perceptions regarding burnout, job satisfaction, work situations, promotion and salary, and problems and issues faced by district extension officers. Perceptions of district extension officers regarding burnout and job satisfaction were obtained using a series of statements and a 6-point Likert scale of disagreement-agreement. A total of 19 statements comprised this portion of the questionnaire on burnout and job satisfaction. With regard to work situations, 10 statements on various issues were included and the respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale the extent to which the statements were true. In addition, responses were elicited to questions dealing with promotion and salary issues.

Content and face validity of the questionnaire were established by a panel of experts in Nigerian Extension. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was .77 for the job satisfaction scale, and .84 for the Extension issues perception scale.

Questionnaires were hand-delivered by one of the authors to the Ondo State Extension Coordinator who then distributed it to the district extension officers through their regional extension directors. There are five regions in Ondo State. District extension officers had two weeks to complete and return the questionnaires to their regional coordinators, who passed these on to the state coordinator and then to the researchers. Twenty-six percent of the population did not respond. However, there was no time for follow-up. The main reason for the non-response is that many of them were either on vacation or were traveling out of state during the time the study was done.

All data were analyzed with the Macintosh SPSS/PC+ personal computer program. Appropriate descriptive statistics were used to meet the objectives of the study.

**Results**

**Characteristics of District Extension Officers**

As shown in Table 1, about 91% of the district extension officers were male, and about 82% were married. The district extension officers’ ages ranged from 20 to 50 years, with about 60% being more than 40 years old. A majority (63.3%) had the diploma in agriculture. The average number of years in Extension was 12.59.

**District Extension Officers’ Feelings of Stress, Frustration or Burnout.**

Table 2 describes district extension officers’ feelings of stress, frustration or burnout in their jobs. Nearly 90% of them felt that top management did not know what was happening at the local level. This could mean the introduction of national extension policies with little relevance to local situations which, in turn, could lead to district officers’ feelings of helplessness in changing strategies which may have no relevance to their areas. Over 60% of the respondents felt that there were problems of coordination, which is an indicator of stress or frustration as district development could not be approached in an integrated manner. Over 90% of district extension officers felt that they needed inservice training to help them cope with their work. Despite these concerns, many of them, nearly 60%, did not feel that their work was emotionally draining. The majority of them also did not feel a sense of frustration in spite of their admission that national extension policies...
are being made without adequate understanding of problems at the local level.

Table 1

Characteristics of District Extension Officers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age¹</td>
<td>Less than 30 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 - 39 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 - 49 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than 50 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Children²</td>
<td>0 - 2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 - 5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree</td>
<td>Diploma in Agriculture</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor in Agriculture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master in Agriculture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Current Position³</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Years in Extension⁴</td>
<td>Less than 10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 - 19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 - 29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Mean=39.82, SD=7.35, Range=26-50
²Mean=3.32, SD=2.01, Range=0-7
³Mean=2.86, SD=1.46, Range=1-8
⁴Mean=12.59, SD=8.75, Range=2-29
### Table 2

Perceptions of District Extension Officers Regarding Selected Statements of the Extension System Related to Burnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel top management does not understand the local situation.</td>
<td>No. 0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel emotionally drained from my work.</td>
<td>% 0.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel burned out from my work.</td>
<td>No. 5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I'm working too hard on my job.</td>
<td>% 22.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel frustrated in my job.</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish I had more training to deal with the demands placed upon me at work.</td>
<td>% 4.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are problems of coordinating extension work across different departments of agriculture at the district level.</td>
<td>No. 4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District officers need frequent inservice training on communication.</td>
<td>% 18.2</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top management provides me with adequate support.</td>
<td>No. 3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish I had more training to deal with the demands placed upon me at work.</td>
<td>% 13.6</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my job responsibilities are increasing.</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish I had more training to deal with the demands placed upon me at work.</td>
<td>% 4.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are problems of coordinating extension work across different departments of agriculture at the district level.</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District officers need frequent inservice training on communication.</td>
<td>% 4.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1=Very strongly disagree, 2=Strongly disagree, 3=Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree, 6=Very strongly agree

### Job Satisfaction as Perceived by District Extension Officers

Table 3 shows district extension officers’ level of satisfaction with their jobs. They conveyed mixed feelings about how satisfied they were with their work. The majority of them felt that the Extension Service is not a better employer than other government organizations. District extension officers were about evenly divided on the question of whether the work they did was worth the salaries they received. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents felt proud of their jobs, felt that they had accomplished worthwhile things, and were pleased to be working for Extension. Nearly 60% of them, however, felt that the Extension Service would be more efficient if privatized.

### Perceptions of District Extension Officers Regarding Work Situations

Table 4 shows district extension officers’ views about their work situations. Responses were elicited on a 5-point scale of the extent to which different aspects of work were true in their personal situation. A majority of them felt that they were not being asked to do things for which they were not trained. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents felt proud of their jobs, felt that they had accomplished worthwhile things, and were pleased to be working for Extension. Nearly 60% of them, however, felt that the Extension Service would be more efficient if privatized.
them. A small proportion of the respondents indicated they were responding to more than one supervisor, and practically nobody experienced conflict between employer expectations and personal integrity.

Salaries and Opportunities for Promotion

Table 5 shows district extension officers’ perceptions of their opportunities in terms of promotion and salary. About one-half of the respondents felt that there was good opportunity for promotion, and a majority of them did not see their jobs as dead-ends. However, an overwhelming majority of the respondents were disappointed with their salaries. Over 80% said their incomes were not enough to meet normal expenses. Concern was also expressed about the lack of security against bad times.

Table 3

Perceptions of District Extension Officers Regarding Selected Statements of the Extension System Related to Job Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Extension System is a better employer than most other government organizations.</td>
<td>No. 3 3 6</td>
<td>1 6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel the work I do is not worth the benefits I receive.</td>
<td>% 13.6 13.6 27.4</td>
<td>4.5 27.3 13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, the Extension System meets the needs of farmers.</td>
<td>No. 1 1 2</td>
<td>10 4 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Extension System will be more efficient if it is privatized.</td>
<td>No. 4 2 4</td>
<td>4 5 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel very energetic.</td>
<td>% 18.2 9.1 18.2</td>
<td>18.2 22.7 13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud of my job.</td>
<td>No. 1 0 1</td>
<td>4 8 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have accomplished many worthwhile things in the job.</td>
<td>% 4.5 0.0 4.5</td>
<td>18.2 36.4 36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am pleased to work for the Extension System.</td>
<td>No. 2 0 1</td>
<td>4 9 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my job has a good future.</td>
<td>% 9.1 0.0 4.5</td>
<td>18.2 40.9 27.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1=Very strongly disagree, 2=Strongly disagree, 3=Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree, 6=Very strongly agree
Table 4

Perceptions of District Extension Officers Regarding Their Work Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Extent to which truea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am expected to perform tasks on my job for which I have never been trained.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the resources to get my job done.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to satisfy my needs for success and recognition in my job.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor asks for one thing, but really wants another.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the basis on which I am evaluated.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel conflict between what my employer expects me to do and what I think is right or proper.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more than one person telling me what to do.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel good about the work I do.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud of what I do for a living.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I need a vacation, I take one.</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a: 1=Rarely true, 2=Occasionally true, 3=Often true, 4=Usually true, 5=True most of the time

Problems Experienced and Incentives Desired by District Extension Officers

Open-ended questions were asked to gain a better understanding of the problems experienced by district extension officers and the incentives and resources needed by them.

Major problems identified were inadequate funding for staff and the conduct of research; funding not being released on time by government and other agencies; agricultural tools not being provided; tractors not available at the right time; agro-chemicals too costly; and discouraging attitude of participating farmers.

Many of the respondents said they needed reliable transportation for field visits; more opportunities for study tours in and outside the country; regular promotions, coupled with regular prompt payment of salaries and transportation claims; and more local and overseas training.
Table 5
Promotion and Salary Issues as Perceived by District Extension Officers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good opportunity for advancement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity somewhat limited</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead-end job</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular promotion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair promotion policy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequent promotions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income adequate for normal expense</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than I deserve</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barely live on income</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income provides luxuries</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

A major conclusion drawn from the study is that while the position of district extension officer may be prestigious, the salary is not necessarily attractive. Although questions were not asked to explore this, the experience of two of the researchers in Nigeria and West Africa suggests that district officers seek supplementary income outside their jobs to make ends meet. Having to take a second or even a third job could have a detrimental effect on productivity since district officers are unlikely to commit themselves fully to their professional tasks.

The majority of respondents did not feel that there were good opportunities for professional development. However, they also did not feel that they were in dead-end jobs. The majority also felt that their salaries were less than they deserved, and that the reward system barely kept them and their families alive.

Under these circumstances, one could conclude that these officers stay on their jobs, perhaps because they do not perceive there are good alternative jobs. It appears that while their jobs may not be financially rewarding, they are socially attractive as district extension officers are often well respected in their communities.

The value of this study is that it points to other avenues for increasing staff motivation, besides salaries. However, the study is limited in terms of suggestions for what these forms of incentives are or could be.

This study was focused on one state in Nigeria. Therefore, the conclusions drawn are limited to that state. However, since the established structure and operational procedures of Extension are similar in the several states of the country, it would appear that if this study was replicated in other states, the findings would likely be similar.

The Government of Nigeria could use the findings of this study to alleviate adverse employment conditions which would decrease the possibility of burnout, and improve job satisfaction among district level administrators in the Extension Service of Ondo State. Consideration could also be given to replicating the study with field agents working at the village level, as well as in other countries in Africa.
References


