



Farmers' perceptions of the quality of extension services provided by non-governmental organisations in two municipalities in the Central Region of Ghana



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ABSTRACT

Since independence in 1957, the provision of major support services for farmers such as physical infrastructure and research services for the agricultural sector in Ghana has been the preserve of the government. However, with respect to agricultural credit, extension and marketing services, there has been a mix of both public and private sector participation with public services declining in quantity over the period of structural adjustment programmes in the country beginning in 1983–2006. Over this 24-year period, government involvement in extension delivery to farmers declined. Since 2007 the level of government support for the agricultural sector has increased considerably with government support for investment in agriculture outpacing its recurrent expenditures for the sector. The decline of government extension delivery led to an increased role for not-for-profit organizations such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in supporting farmers. We assessed the quality of extension services provided by four NGOs in two municipalities of the Central Region of Ghana: Mfantseman and Komenda–Edina–Eguafo–Abrem (KEAA). The study was based on random sampling of farmers with the gender used as the key attribute in the choice of the optimal random sample. Beneficiary farmers assessed six main services provided by NGOs, namely information support, input supply, training, technology transfer, credit and monitoring and evaluation of extension activities. Farmers generally perceived the services to be relevant to their operations. However, they had mixed opinions concerning the services with respect to their adequacy, availability and their timeliness of supply. Monitoring and evaluation of extension activities by NGOs was generally acceptable.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

For many countries in Africa, agriculture continues to be a major source of income and livelihood for large numbers of people. The agricultural sector provides food and basic subsistence needs of many farmers living in the rural areas of these countries. In Ghana, over the 2006–2012 period, the gross domestic product (GDP) was re-measured after a rebasing exercise by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) with the conclusion that the country had attained a lower middle income status as of 2010 measured by a real GDP per capita of over 1300 United States dollars. Based on the revised

or rebased GDP figures, the share of the agricultural sector as a proportion of the GDP was about 28.1% over the more recent 2008–2012 period. The industrial sector accounted for about 22.3% with the remaining 49.6% of GDP accounted for by the services sector (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013).

Despite its relatively smaller size, the agricultural sector employs about 41.6% of the economically active population aged 15 and over compared to the figures of 15.3% and 43.1% for the industrial and services sectors respectively (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012, pp. 76–78). This makes the agricultural sector an important source of employment of people and consequently poverty reduction in the country. Agriculture in Ghana is dominated by semi-subsistence farmers, who live mainly in rural areas and cultivate about 1–3 ha of land using hand tools like hoes and cutlasses. The export crop agriculture sub-sector, such as the cocoa industry, is largely dominated by male farmers who cultivate larger sizes of land on average between 6 and 10 ha. However, the food crop industry is largely dominated by women farmers. Rural non-export

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agricultural production is characterized by inadequate extension delivery services, little modern capital inputs and resilient but relatively low yielding farming methods. The consequences of low support systems, and low quality inputs are low yields, relatively low commercial outputs and low revenues and endemically high levels of poverty for food crop farmers.

The results of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) 5 undertaken by the GSS in 2005/2006 showed that poverty reduction had improved with about 28.5% of people living in poverty with poverty measured as per capita expenditure below the 1.25 United States dollars per day threshold. This poverty level ascertained from GLSS5 was significantly lower than the 38% level in 1998/99 and the 51% level in 1991/92. Nevertheless, the GLSS 5 results indicated that most food crop farmers lived in poverty and poverty levels were over 80% in the three northern regions of the country (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). Poverty reduction in Ghana achieved in 2005/2006 was largely due to improvement in incomes of cocoa farmers due to relatively high world market cocoa prices which were passed onto cocoa farmers and expanded support services including the release of high-yielding cocoa varieties for cocoa farmers which increased yields per hectare. Cocoa farmers in Ghana were paid at least 70% of free-on-board world cocoa prices from 2000 to 2011.

There has been a growing awareness that sustained increases in poverty reduction in Ghana are more likely to be achieved through improvement in the agricultural sector especially the food crop sector (for example, refer to various Ghana Government medium term development strategy documents such as the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2003–2005, Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2006–2009 and the more recent policy statement, the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda, 2010–2013) (Government of Ghana, 2003; Government of Ghana, 2006; Government of Ghana, 2010). Despite this awareness, the real monetary value of support services to farmers in Ghana had declined except for cocoa farmers. This legacy was mainly due to the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) undertaken by the Government of Ghana since April 1983 with the support of various international lending agencies mainly the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

SAPs became necessary in Ghana after the near collapse of the economy over the 1979–83 period. The causes of the near collapse of the economy of Ghana have been documented by Anaman (2006). These included political instability, extremely severe droughts in 1977 and 1983 which were linked to a very severe form of the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) weather phenomenon, and economic mismanagement of various military governments that seized power from 1966 to 1983.

A major consequence of SAPs was the general diminution of the State in the provision of social and public services including agricultural extension services. Over the period from 1983 to 2006, the level of public agricultural support services declined with the services targeted at food farmers being hit severely (Anaman and Okyere, 2012). Levels of support services for the agricultural sector started to increase in real terms from the beginning of the 21st Century (2001) with the initial focus on cocoa farmers. Towards the end of the first decade of the 21st Century starting in 2007, the government started to increase sharply its investment support to the agricultural sector because of the world food crisis of 2007–2008 which hit the country with high food prices (Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 2010). Despite the increased awareness of public support services for the agricultural sector, the public extension service is constrained by many factors including inadequate finances and manpower and poor roads to rural areas where many farmers live. As a result many farmers have not benefitted much from public extension services in terms of important information related to new techniques of farming, training for improved skills in farming and access to credit (Government of Ghana, 2010).

Asuming-Brempong et al. (2006) document several factors and bottlenecks that reduce the effectiveness of agricultural extension services in Ghana.

The diminution of the State in the provision of agricultural extension services in Ghana saw the rise of the role of NGOs in the provision of these services especially since the era of SAPs starting in 1983. It must be noted that the role of NGOs in agricultural extension services delivery is not new. For much of the 19th Century and the first two decades of the 20th Century, European Christian missionaries, especially the Swiss-German Basel Evangelical Church Missionaries, provided valuable agricultural extensions services as part of their package of Christian livelihood mission activities which included spreading the message of Christianity, improved health and education services. The expulsion of the Swiss-German Basel Missionaries in 1917 by the British Colonial Authorities from Ghana (then Gold Coast) reduced significantly the role of Christian Missionaries in agricultural extension services delivery (Debrunner, 1967).

The role of NGOs in economic and social development in Ghana has also been noted by a number of scholars. Frantz (1987) pointed out that NGOs were usually involved in solving economic, social and cultural problems of a country. Asibey-Bonsu and Posamentier (2001) documented the growth of NGOs in the supply and financing of extension services in Ghana. According to Swanson and Sammy (2000), with the necessary support from the government, NGOs could be more effective in helping resource-poor farmers gain access to resources and technologies. Services provided by NGOs in Ghana come in the form of services like agricultural information support, provision of input and credit, training, technology transfer, and monitoring and evaluation of projects related to agricultural improvement. Farmers require training to enhance their performance on the job (Halim and Ali, 1997) and improve their competency (Kwarteng, 1995).

In order to improve production and overcome the drudgery that results from the use of traditional farm practices and tools, farmers need to adopt new technologies. But local farmers generally have limited access to education and credit, and also lack information and knowledge about a wide range of technological alternatives. Many rural farmers lack the capital to purchase inputs for expansion of their farms. Agricultural extension involves offering advice and sharing information (Garforth, 1997). Farmers obtain information from several sources including the mass media, other farmers, extension services, training courses for decision-making. A major requirement for the implementation of the recommendations of extension is inputs. Even though these must be available and affordable, farmers sometimes complain of their untimely delivery and high cost. An important service that NGOs render is monitoring and evaluation. It is critical to the effective implementation of projects. It provides timely information on project progress and performance and gives an assessment of whether the target group is getting the benefits.

In Ghana, a few published studies have been undertaken to assess the quality of agricultural extension activities of NGOs (for example, refer to the work of Amanor and Farrington (1991)). There is an inadequate level of published literature on the services of agricultural NGOs in the country; the kind of services provided, the approach used, and the perception of the beneficiaries of these services. The gap in the knowledge of agricultural extension services provided by NGOs in Ghana prompted this study. For example, in the two municipalities that the study was conducted, there was a gap in service delivery by the public extension services which was filled by several NGOs; yet there is no published study on the performance of these NGOs. Knowledge of the performance of agricultural NGOs could help the government and the commercial private sector gain valuable information to shape policies and programmes to enhance the standard of living of rural people and thereby reduce poverty and improve rural livelihood.

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