



A survey of communication effectiveness by agricultural extension in the Gweru district of Zimbabwe

Rachel Moyo*, Abiodun Salawu

Department of Communication, North West University, Mafikeng Campus, Private Bag X2046, Mmabatho, 2735, South Africa



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
 Extension
 Communication
 Smallholder farming
 Productivity
 Agricultural development

ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative survey of the effectiveness of communication between agricultural extension personnel and smallholder farmers in the Gweru district of Zimbabwe. Extension communication, particularly, has a large bearing on the sustainability of agricultural developments projects. The apparent lack of information, education and training during the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) of Zimbabwe contributed to low agricultural production and productivity which could consequently lead to continuing food insecurity in the country. The findings indicate a discrepancy between work experience and qualifications of the extension workers which could imply a lack in the quality of knowledge, information and skills imparted to the resettled farmers. Further findings indicate a lack of stakeholder analysis in designing agricultural communication projects and an absence of a multi-media communication approach to enhance adoption of agricultural innovations. The study concludes that agricultural extension is not adequate due to multiple resource constraints. The findings imply that agricultural communication should be integrative. A model of smallholder agriculture stakeholder mobilization has been developed to encourage effective agricultural communication and productivity therein.

1. Introduction

Effective communication is a key source from which sustainable development in societies can be engineered and subsequently realised (Technische, 2006). Therefore, the communication process should be regarded as one of the fundamental development tools which must always be prioritised in development programmes in order to realise the anticipated development goals. The Rockefeller Foundation (1999 cited by Technische, 2006: 31) defines effective communication as 'a process of public and private dialogue through which people define who they are, what they want and how they can get it, its initiative being informed by principles of tolerance, self-determination, equity, social justice and active participation for all'. This proposition by the Rockefeller Foundation is also supported by (Cheney et al., 2010; Keyton, 2011), and it echoes the characteristics of participatory communication for development which is said to be emancipating. The current study explores development communication effectiveness in the agriculture sector of Zimbabwe as it is the main economic activity of the country. This has been prompted by the argument that the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) played a contributory role in the declining agricultural productivity of Zimbabwe (Masiwa, 2004; Pazvakavambwa and Hungwe, 2009).

The FTLRP emerged as a quest to redress the imbalances of land acquisition among the majority of the populace, perpetuated during the colonial era in Zimbabwe (Masiwa, 2004). This emanated from growing dissatisfaction by the rural population, of the delays in land reform, and rising disappointment over hardships caused by the 1995 Economic Structural Adjustment Programme among the urban dwellers (Masiwa, 2004). Official reasons given by government for the slow progress in land reform were: lack of resources, limited capacity of implementing agencies, constitutional constraints (such as willing buyer-willing seller basis), and the rise in land prices (Masiwa, 2004: 5). The consequent land-grab of 1994, conveniently called the Tenant-Farmer Scheme (Moyo, 1995), demonstrated that the government was not wholly committed to the resettlement programme (Masiwa, 2004: 6). The situation worsened when Britain's new labour government announced that Britain had no historical obligation arising from colonialism to support land redistribution in Zimbabwe (Pazvakavambwa and Hungwe, 2009: 149). The inception phase of land redistribution was viewed as a substantive failure and the rising pressure from people for land led the government to legitimise the violent farm invasions through an accelerated resettlement programme named 'Fast Track' (Masiwa, 2004). Despite such an elaborate institutional framework put in place by the government to implement the FTLRP, events unfolding

* Corresponding author. Number 11 Sol Plaatjie Drive, Unit 3, Mmabatho, Mafikeng 2745, South Africa.
 E-mail addresses: moyorachel@gmail.com (R. Moyo), Abiodun.salawu@nwu.ac.za (A. Salawu).

on the ground were chaotic (Masiwa, 2004). Notably, the fast track programme was implemented with limited resources. Whereas land redistribution in the previous phases was driven by technical assessments and administratively cumbersome procedures, the FTLRP was politically driven, generating tensions that posed a major challenge for government and for the technicians responsible for implementing the redistribution programme (Pazvakavambwa and Hungwe, 2009: 152).

We echo the sentiments of Cliffe et al. (2011), that there was a lack of information, education and training during the implementation process due to the haphazard nature of the FTLRP. Therefore, we agree that the resettled farmers are not benefiting from communication technologies to learn about agricultural innovations due to lack of knowledge, information and training about them (Chhachhar et al., 2014: 281), a manifestation which largely reflects on poor policy making. Thus we adopted a grassroots level approach to determine challenges faced by agricultural extension personnel in communicating with smallholder farmers. Apparently, the literature echoes continued food insecurity in Zimbabwe (Food Security Brief, 2012; The Emergency Appeal, 2012). It has been argued that the appropriation and redistribution of targeted agricultural land under the FTLRP appears to be approaching completion, yet the economic potential of the reform is yet to be realised (The World Bank, 2016). It is our anticipation that agriculture productivity could be improved in the country if farmers are actively engaged in the communication of agricultural development. Therefore, exploring how agricultural extension workers impart agricultural knowledge and information to smallholder farmers could give an insight on how to design tailor-made communication media, modes, channels, methods, approaches and materials that promote adoption of innovations.

The Gweru district, from which the study sample was drawn, is in zone three, one of the food insecure agro-ecological zones (Food Security Brief, 2012; The Emergency Appeal, 2012; Manyeruke et al., 2013). The encroaching of the agro-ecological zone four, which is drier, into zone three, obviously impacts negatively on agricultural productivity and hence the current study's interest in that region (Mugandani et al., 2012). Before the 2000 land reform programme, Zimbabwe had a thriving agriculture sector and was a net exporter of food (Ignowski, 2012: 3). However, the dawn of the FTLRP has realised continued food insecurity. It should not be overlooked that 17 years after the commencement of the FTLRP, some of the resettled farmers might still lack the necessary knowledge and skills to exploit agricultural technologies to increase their productivity in the light of safeguarding the country's food security.

The food security situation in Zimbabwe is dire and points to a larger economic decline, low agriculture productivity and deteriorating standards of living, corruption and policy inconsistencies (Zim VAC, 2014: 87). The Zimbabwe Gross Domestic Product growth rate slowed from 3.8% in 2014 to 1.5% in 2015 and 2016 due to low agricultural production (The World Bank, 2016). During the FTLRP, there was no significant non-government stakeholder participation in the Land Redistribution and Resettlement Programme, and as such, the process was highly technocratic, centralised and was concerned more about numbers of people given land rather than the empowerment process (Anseeuw et al., 2012). The occupation of commercial farms was later legitimized through amendments to the constitution and legislation passed quickly through parliament by what had become an autocratic, dominant ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Anseeuw et al., 2012). The fragmentation of the land distribution process created problems of synchronisation and co-ordination. As a result, a coherent vision of the programme did not emerge that would move the resettled farmers out of subsistence into commercial activities as intended. These challenges have impacted negatively on agricultural productivity. Thus we argue that effective extension communication enhances smallholder farmers' skills, and that could consequently lead to increased productivity.

As early as in 2000, the United Nations Development Programme

team sent to determine the feasibility of a sound technical basis for furthering the land reform programme noted with concern that the FTLRP was causing severe economic damage because it was done in an unplanned and violent manner (Masiwa, 2004; Cliffe et al., 2011). This reduced agricultural production *diversity* and productivity *quantities*. A drop in productivity ranging from 20% for the traditional food crops to 70% for export crops such as tobacco is recorded (Pazvakavambwa and Hungwe, 2009). Ironically, since 2000, the country has faced severe grain deficits, yet countrywide, allocated farmland lies idle (Thebe, 2010). The FTLRP experience has shown that adequate funding must be provided for activities associated with land redistribution since the financial constraints associated with the programme made some critical activities unaffordable.

The availability of food is based on production, pricing, marketing, affordability and access. The existence of these interdependencies implies that any policy shift in one sector affects the other sectors. The major challenge is economic decline which, among other issues, has seen increasing national food insecurity (Masendeke et al., 2010: 2). Agriculture productivity could improve if a favourable agriculture policy is designed which would see communication gaps, particularly with smallholder farmers who occupy the most arable land, being addressed. The Land Tenure Commission (1994), among other findings, noted that the insecurity of tenure among the resettled farmers grossly affected their commitment and long-term investment. In addition, different sets of laws, administrations, and policies on multiple tenure systems have created grounds for conflicts that have impacted agricultural production adversely (Munyuki-Hungwe and Matondi, 2006). However, lately, the Zimbabwe Government started an audit of reformed landholdings and accelerated the distribution of permits to smallholders (The World Bank, 2016).

Unfortunately, where productivity is concerned, the interventionist policies were in vain because several policies have been drafted but none has been successfully implemented, including the Zimbabwe Agricultural Policy Framework and Strategy, 1995–2020, the National Agricultural Strategy Framework, 2005–2035, the Agricultural Mission Statement Strategy Framework and Action Plan, 2007–2011, and the Zimbabwe Regional Agricultural Policy draft 2009, also known as the Nyanga Document (Matondi, 2012). Out of concern, stakeholders identified the development of an agricultural marketing system as a major priority in strengthening the efficiency and recovery of the agricultural sector in Zimbabwe. To this end, the Zimbabwe Agricultural Investment Plan has allocated the largest proportion of the budget, 58.13%, towards agricultural marketing. However, implementation of policy that improves the smallholder farming sector is yet to be realised (Zimbabwe Agricultural Investment Plan, 2013–2017). Given that Zimbabwe has neither an ongoing agricultural and food security policy nor an industrial and trade policy, the country inevitably lacks an appropriately integrated agricultural strategy (Anseeuw et al., 2012).

Importantly, the creation of small to medium-sized land holdings (A1 and A2 farms) from what were previously large scale commercial farms, has expanded the mandate of the public extension services. The farmers have become more heterogeneous, both in production orientation and productivity, requiring varied approaches to adequately address their needs (GoZ and FAO, 2012–2015: 10). The challenge is finding the most appropriate strategy that will make a positive impact on the lives of the target group (Tire, 2006: 18). Consequently, to date, neither agricultural technologies nor research and development have been adapted to smallholder farming requirements (Trade Development Board, 2015). Considering the broad spectrum of knowledge needed by the smallholder farmers, the role of agricultural extension in communicating farmer information and knowledge should be reviewed. Therefore, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the effectiveness of communication between agricultural extension workers and the Gweru district smallholder farmers in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6545268>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6545268>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)