



Addressing Organizational Challenges to Food System Transformation during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of the Extension System in Nigeria

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Introduction

Feeding and nourishing the global population in the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic increases the need for speedy transformation of global food system. Transformation of the food system at the national level, requires strong organizational and human capacity. Extension services can help build resilience of food systems and strengthen national agricultural innovation systems needed to support food system transformation. However, public extension services in developing economies like Nigeria continue to face challenges that could undermine food system transformation. In this study, using the public extension system in Nigeria as the case study, we studied potential changes in the extension system that could contribute to food system transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods/Approach

The study was carried at the Enugu State Agricultural Development Programme (ENADEP), which is the major platform for agricultural extension and advisory service delivery. The study employed qualitative method of data collection in the form of focus group discussions, participant observation and key informant interviews to elicit responses from the respondents. We also used document analysis to examine organizational changes in ENADEP that may affect food system transformation due to the COVID-19 pandemic based on the framework of the Kaleidoscope Model.

The Kaleidoscope Model was used as a diagnostic framework to identify factors affecting the capacities of the extension system to support food system transformation optimally during the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas the key informant interviews and focus group discussion were used to identify the solutions.

Findings/Interpretations

Organizational changes in ENADEP during the COVID pandemic

There were no major organizational adjustments in extension architecture during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was no increased funding from the state government to change the mode of extension service delivery to the use of digital tools in the light of the threat posed by the pandemic. Thus, there were no changes in the organizational structure in terms of the roles, responsibilities and information flow within ENADEP during the pandemic. Information flow between extension agents and farmers are still supply-driven and not based on the specific needs of farmers. Also, there were no changes in the extension teaching methods and approaches used by the field extension staff. There were also no changes in the way extension agents shared, accessed and exchanged knowledge among themselves and with the farmers. Table I summarizes the constellation of sporadic policy and organizational initiatives or mechanisms aimed at supporting food system transformation by ENADEP during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Policy stages	Determinants of policy stages	Existing status
Agenda setting	i) 'Recognized, relevant problem'. ii) Critical juncture, or punctuated equilibrium or 'focusing event'. iii) 'Powerful advocacy coalitions.'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges of extension organizations in contributing to food system transformation eg poor funding, inadequate extension staff, poor linkages with relevant stakeholders, poor technical capacities of extension staff etc Adverse effects of COVID-19 pandemic on food system transformation resulting in mobility restrictions The different international agencies, namely, FAO, World Bank, IFAD, farmers and other food system actors
Policy design	i) 'Pressing versus chosen problems'. ii) 'Ideational consideration' iii) 'Cost-benefit calculation'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is in 'pressing versus chosen' dualism. Interventions from different national and international agencies due to the adverse effects of COVID-19 pandemic on food system transformation are forcing factors for policy design. These have resulted to national and state action plans on COVID-19 recovery Traditional face-to-face interaction, limited funding, supply-driven information flow and traditional extension teaching methods and approaches Vulnerable food system actors of low socio-economic status are included in the scheme
Policy adoption	i) 'Veto players'. ii) 'Opponents versus proponents.'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No prominent role played by any player, rather initiatives from Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the state government is accelerating the process of policy adoption Propitious time is prevailing.
Policy implementation	i) 'Budgetary strength' ii) 'Institutional capacity' iii) 'Veto Player' iv) 'Commitment of policy champion'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state government is mostly dependent on donors, and the central government and budgetary strength is wholly inadequate Inadequate and not adopted in the policy system or document. Federal Government is playing the role through COVID-19 recovery action plan. Not yet evident.
Policy evaluation and reform	i) 'Changing information and belief'. ii) 'Changing material condition.' iii) 'Institutional shift.'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate in respect of support for food system transformation Inadequate. Inadequate.

Building the Organizational Resilience of the Extension System for Food System Transformation in Nigeria

Table 2 summarizes the organizational resilience building measures based on the current status of the extension system presented in the above section (table I).

Existing Status of ENADEP	Proposed Resilience Building Measures
Traditional face-to-face mode of communication is prevalent	Paradigm shift from traditional extension approach of face-to-face interaction with food system actors to use of modern digital tools in extension service delivery
Poor linkages between extension system and other relevant stakeholders	Multi-stakeholder platforms should be established within the extension system and linkages should be strengthened for sustainable food system transformation
Poor administrative and technical capacities of extension staff	Continuous in-service training of extension service providers in the areas of marketing, value addition and agri-business
Inadequate funding of the extension system	External funding through bilateral and multilateral donor agencies as well as cost sharing by food system actors could help to provide adequate and sustainable funding for the ADP extension system
Supply-driven information flow between extension service providers and food system actors	A practical demand-driven, pluralistic and participatory extension service delivery based on the needs of food system actors should be deployed
National extension policy is not yet functional	Fully implement the national extension policy which is expected to harmonise the critical elements required to build the resilience of the ADP extension system to support food system transformation

Conclusions

- ❖ The COVID-19 pandemic has reaffirmed that public extension organizations in Nigeria are not efficient and do not have adequate capacity to contribute to food system sustainability and resilience.
- ❖ Extension organizations need to undergo deep transformation in organizational capability to transform food systems due to changes in the context and environment in which they operate, especially with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ❖ It is therefore recommended that the government should establish well-defined policies on the recovery of extension organization after exposure to shocks.