

# Implications of Small Ruminant Farmers' Socio-Economic Characteristics for Extension Services in South Western Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Farmers' perception of innovation are deeply rooted in the socio-economic structure of existing social systems. Adoption studies have shown that the farmer would not adopt a new practice unless it is compatible with their socio-economic characteristics.

This paper highlights some implications for extension services to livestock farmers taking into cognisance the socio-economic characteristics. Two hundred and eighty farmers were selected from the seven states\* of South Western Nigeria using the large sample size technique ( $n \geq 30$ ). Data were collected on the socio-economic characteristics of farmers and their production activities on small ruminant animals. The data collected was subjected to frequency counts and percentages.

**Introduction:** Nigeria's ability to feed its teeming population with adequate calorie and protein remains one of its greatest challenges today. This is inspite of the fact that it possesses vast resources for livestock development. Although considerable efforts have been made to increase the availability of protein from farm products the contribution of animal protein to the average diet has been negligible with respect to the need due to scarcity and low level of production.

To increase protein intake substantially, a more dynamic and aggressive policy of livestock development especially in the area of livestock extension will need to be pursued seriously. The reason is to ensure the vital role of livestock extension in livestock production as it is the responsibility of extension service to transfer improved practices in livestock husbandry and management to the livestock farmers as well as form the link between livestock research and farmers.

Extension programme planners have often advocated the involvement of clientele groups in extension programme development. The case for identification and involvement of all target groups in extension programmes has been clearly established (Swanson, *et al* 1984). Involvement is also to a large extent determined by the socio-economic characteristics of its clientele (FAO 1997). Involving all clientele groups in extension programme development is not simply an attempt at mobilising labour and non-labour resources but constitutes standard operating procedures in problem solving situations especially in rural development projects.

The current approach to the delivery of extension services in Nigeria is through the Training and Visit Extension system (T & V). Farmer would also save valuable time they spend with different extension agent by having contact with a single extension agent who would be delivering available and relevant messages on all areas of agriculture to them in their respective localities.

Farmers' perceptions of innovations are deeply rooted in the socio-economic structure of existing social systems. Adoption studies have shown that farmers would not adopt a new practice unless it is compatible with their socio-economic characteristic.

It is recognised that the adoption of livestock innovations like other agricultural innovations is not solely determined by the availability of the technology but a series of interacting socio-economic characteristics (Vabi *et al* 1993). This paper highlights some implications of extension service to livestock farmers taking into cognizance their socio-economic characteristics. Livestock farmers' characteristics have been documented in several studies; however these characteristics should be considered when planing extension programme for them such that the desired goal of increased productivity will be attained.

**Methodology:** Farmers in the seven states of the South West constituted the target population for the study. The large sample size  $n \geq 30$  was used as no definite sampling frame could be obtained. Fifty farmers were interviewed from each state giving a total of 350 for the states with the aid of a structured questionnaire. Of the 350 questionnaires only 280 were returned and used for the analysis (A response rate of 80%). Data were collected on the socio-economic characteristics of farmers; and subjected to frequency counts and percentages.

**Results and Discussions:** About 61 per cent of the respondents are male while 39 per cent are female. The implication that could be drawn is that a greater percentage of women are now involved in livestock production thus extension messages should be focussed at these women farmers. Also, programmes should be planned in view of involving women taking into consideration their multiple household roles.

Majority of the respondent are in the age category of 30 and 50 years (50%). This shows that the farmers are in the active labour years which suggest high aspirations and desires. This will intum make them willing to accept innovations and thus receptive to extension messages. Adoption studies have show that farmers that are not very old as innovators and possessing such characteristics.

Sixty-eight per cent of the farmers are married, an important factor in the socio-cultural setting of the study area. Closely related to this is the availability of family labour for farming activities. It has also been reported that women are involved in the decision making process of the farming household. (Vabi *et al* 1993). Also, 42 per cent of the respondents have between 4 and 6 children. This number is an indication of fairly high family size of the farmers. The size of family will stimulate the need for high production and thus the search for innovative means of improving their production. The effort to maintain household food security due to large family size would encourage their receptivity to extension messages.

The educational level of respondents is 55 per cent non formal, 27 per cent formal, others are illiterates. The higher percentage of the non-formal type may be due to the extensive educational activities of non-governmental organisation in the study area. Their literacy campaigns as well as the campaigns mounted by the states government would have been responsible for the ability of farmers to acquire necessary skills in the art of writing, and reading. Respondents' religion recorded 51 per cent Christianity and 29 per cent Islam. Religion has a way of determining what type of extension messages are received by the farmers e.g artificial insemination it may also be responsible for contact between farmers and agents. Islam for example circumscribes male-female contact, which may not be avoidable in a male dominated extension services. Religion also determines the type of livestock enterprises engaged by the farmers. e.g pig.

Social participation of the respondents determined the number of group belonged. It shows that 37 per cent belong to two groups. In another measurement of social participation about 17 per cent are executives in their groups. This indicates high level of social participation among the respondents. This will enhance their participation in extension programmes as well as other developmental programmes. This can be a basis for capacity building as a take off point for development projects.

Seventy-three per cent of the respondents are primarily farmers while the remaining 27 per cent are engaged in other non-farming activities. This would help in directing extension messages to them as well as to their other income generating activities. Message types and channels to be used can also be determined. Timing of extension activities can also be inferred from the occupation of the respondents. Many of these farmers have more than 15 years experience, (52 per cent), this indicate long years on their main occupation. It would then mean that extension agents visiting these farmers have to be experienced and should know how best to reach them.

The pattern of small ruminant ownership by the respondents shows that goat is the most popular livestock. This may be due to the tolerance of goat to trypanosomiasis which is very rampant in the study area. Closely behind this is poultry, which implies that the environment suits the production of birds as well as the availability of feeding materials.

The most common system of production is the extensive system. About 36 per cent indicated the use of this system for the production of different animals. while majority of the poultry farmers indicated the intensive system of management. Other classes of animals were reared with the semi-intensive system.

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Variables		Frequency	Percentages
Gender	Male	171	61.1
	Female	78	27.9
Age	<30	2	0.71
	30-40	64	22.5
	41-50	77	27.5
	51-60	105	37.5
Marital status	single	6	2.1
	married	191	68.2
	divorced	23	8.2
	widowed	27	9.6
Number of children	1-3	82	29.3
	4-6	62	22.1
	>6	97	34.6
Educational level	formal	77	27.5
	non formal	153	54.5
Religion	christianity	143	51.1
	islam	81	28.2
	others	16	5.7
Number of group membership	1	104	37.1
	2	79	28.2
	3	16	5.7
Position in group	executive	47	16.7
	ordinary	155	55.4
Occupation	farming	203	72.5
	non farming	77	27.5
Farming experience	1-5	16	5.7
	6-10	38	13.6
	11-15	60	21.4
	>15	146	52.1
Language ability (English)	read	120	42.9
	write	124	44.3
	speak	127	45.4
Mother tongue	read	173	61.8
	write	170	60.7
	speak	226	80.7
Livestock types	Poultry	134	47.9
	goat	154	55
	sheep	80	28.6
	rabbit	38	13.6
	pig	80	28.6
Production systems	extensive	100	35.7
	intensive	90	32.1
	both	90	32.1
Sources of Livestock	inheritance	166	59
	purchase	50	17.9
	gift	64	22.9
	purchase&inheritance	100	35.6

Majority of the farmers acquired their animals by inheritance (59%), as against other sources such as gift, and purchase. Small ruminant production among farmers in the South West has shown that there is need for more extension messages on those classes of animals being produced as determined by the environment.

**Conclusion:**

- \*Majority are male, with non formal education.
- About 38 per cent are between 51 and 60 years age bracket.
- \* Sixty-eight per cent are married, having between 4 and 6 children and more than 6 dependants.
- \*About 37 per cent belong to at least a social group with another 16 per cent being executives in their groups.
- \*Seventy-two per cent are primarily farmers with 52 per cent having farmed for more than fifteen years
- \*Livestock ownership pattern has goat as the predominant animal with majority using extensive system of management.
- \*Fifty-nine per cent of the respondent sourced their livestock through inheritance.
- \*The ability of respondents for English language recorded low scores for reading, writing and speaking while the mother tongue ability recorded high score for the three indicators above.

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