The Research Probe
Volume 3 Issue 2 December 2023
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53378/trp.12232

Performance of Agricultural Extension Workers in the Implementation of Agriculture Programs and Project in the Third District of Laguna

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Abstract

The study generally aimed to determine the performance of the agricultural extension workers (AEWs) in the implementation of agriculture programs and projects in the third district of Laguna, Philippines. The data were gathered from 31 AEWs and 151 farmers of the six local government units using a researcher-made questionnaire. The data were treated and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that AEWs in the third district of Laguna were dominated by single, middle-aged, female and agriculture professionals. Also, the study suggest that age, sex, and employment status have no significant difference as to the performance related dimensions but with strong effect sizes that have practical significance. Further, there was strong correlation between the level of competency of AEWs and level of support of LGUs/MAOs to the performance of the AEWs which implies that the higher the level of AEWs technical knowledge and skills and substantial support from LGU/MAO, the better services are being rendered by the AEWs. This study has also proved that programs and projects are still being dominantly funded by the national government and little has been provided by the respective LGUs. Based on the findings, an enhanced monitoring and evaluation tool was recommended to ensure the successful execution of the programs and projects. It is further suggested for LGUs the immediate augmentation of AEWs to effectively deliver agricultural extension services to the farmers. Finally, it is recommended to include LGU-funded agricultural programs as a criterion to obtain the Seal of Local Good Governance.

Keywords: *banner programs, food sufficiency, agricultural extension workers, farmers monitoring, program reforms*

Article History:

***Received**: October 11, 2023* ***Revised**: December 19, 2023*
***Accepted**: December 20, 2023* ***Published online**: December 23, 2023*

Suggested Citation:
Delgado, E.A. & Villacruel, P.D. (2023). Performance of agricultural extension workers in the implementation of agriculture programs and project in the third district of Laguna. *The Research Probe,* 3(2), 5-12. https://doi.org/10.53378/trp.12232

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Introduction

In developing nations like the Philippines, agriculture is the queen of the economy (Martinez, 2013), the backbone of development and the stepping stone to get away from poverty. The World Bank (2000) describes agriculture as the main frame of rural life as it plays a critical role in guaranteeing food security and achieving global economic diversity. The two major agricultural sub-sectors in the Philippines historically have been farming and fishing. Rice, sugarcane, coconut, and banana production are among the highest in the country, and these crops are also among the most popular ones exported (Statistica, 2021). Despite decades of agriculture-led policies, programs, and projects and billions of pesos committed to reducing poverty and boosting farmer's income, there are still approximately 19.99 million Filipinos living in poverty, defined as the "proportion of Filipinos whose per capita income cannot sufficiently meet the individual basic food and non-food needs" (PSA, 2021).

The Department of Agriculture is the principal agency responsible of establishing the policy framework, public investments, and support services required to transform agricultural businesses profitable and help the less fortunate take advantage of development (LawPhil Project, n.d.). The DA sees a resilient, food-secure Philippines with empowered and affluent farmers and fisherfolk. As such, six national banner/commodity programs of the department that include corn, rice, high value crops, livestock, fisheries and organic agriculture are being recognized as the drivers for growth and employment in the sector. These banner programs are the priority commodity areas of the national government to address food security, poverty reduction, and long-term growth by increasing production and farming income in partnership with the local government units (LGUs).

As bridge between government and farmers, the role of the AEWs is crucial. The FAO affirms this role of AEW as responsible for the transmission of knowledge and expertise to farmers. In the Philippines, as affirmed by Cidro and Radhakrishna (2020), agriculture extension is critical in transfer of technology to increase productivity and revenue of farmers.

The emerging challenges in agriculture in the local setting such as limited diversification, low productivity, limited credit facility, low farm mechanization, inadequate post-harvest facilities and extension services, incomplete agrarian reform program

implementation, and ageing farmers and fisherfolk among others are the constrain for agricultural transformation (Brown et al., 2018). In addition, as revealed by Intong and Ravelo (2020), the success of the DA agenda and the execution of the government thrusts for food sufficiency, food security and increased income of the farmers lies in the capability, skills, passion and technical knowledge of the AEWs.

Henceforth, the focus of this research is to assess the 31 AEWs in the 3rd district of Laguna to be able to determine and compare the key factors that affect their performances in implementing agriculture programs and projects in their locality as perceived by self and farmers, randomly selected from the district.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive-correlation method of research and utilized a mixed-method design. A structured survey questionnaire was used to obtain the quantitative or primary data which was administered through online and face to face and was complemented by qualitative approaches like observation, interviews and focus group discussion conducted by the researcher herself with selected farmers. The secondary data was taken from existing records from various offices and agencies.

The primary respondents of the study were the agricultural extension workers (AEWs) who are directly involved in planning, execution, monitoring, and assessment of agriculture programs and projects in the local government units. A total of thirty-one (31) appointed and designated AEWs of each LGU in the 3rd district of Laguna were the participants in this study notwithstanding their employment status. There were twelve (12) AEWs from San Pablo City, four (4) AEWs from the municipalities of Victoria, Alaminos, Rizal, Liliw, while three (3) from Nagcarlan. To complement the responses of the AEWs, 151 farmer-respondents were included. Random sampling was used to select the farmers.

The survey questionnaire is composed of five parts. The first and second parts determine the socio-demographic profile of the respondents and work-related information, respectively. The third part enabled the researcher to evaluate the performance of the AEWs based on the performance dimensions using a 5-point Likert scale with verbal interpretations as strongly agree and strongly disagree. Likewise, the fourth and fifth parts of the survey questionnaire enabled the researcher to evaluate the level of support from the concerned

institution and AEWs competency level, respectively using 5-point Likert scale with verbal interpretation as very satisfied and very dissatisfied.

Descriptive and inferential statistical treatments were used to guarantee systematic and impartial data analysis and interpretation. The researcher observed professional standards in conducting the study guided by the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The privacy and anonymity of the respondents are protected.

Findings

Majority of the agricultural extension workers (AEWs) in the third district of Laguna belong to the age groups of 26-35 and 36-45; majority are female (61.3 %), single (54.8%), with 71% holding a permanent position, and are college graduates (77.4%). There are 41.9% whose length of service is from 1-5 years, while only 3.2% who have been in the service for 31-35 years. Around 32.2% respondents indicated LGU budget allocation of 500,000 and below, while only 3.2% declared a 2,600,000 to 350,00 budget allocation for their offices. In addition, only 74.19 % of the respondents have access through Wi-Fi connection.

Perceived assessment of AEWs revealed an overall verbal interpretation of “strongly agreed” as to performance related dimensions in terms of farmer’s monitoring, area of responsibility, farmer’s training, AEWs training, no of farmer’s association and adopted new farm technologies and innovations. Further, the level of support extended by the LGUs and Agriculture Offices revealed an overall verbal interpretation of “satisfied with a mean value of 3.92 and 4.01, respectively. Meanwhile, a “satisfied” and “very satisfied” verbal interpretations were obtained as to the level of AEWs competency as to technical knowledge and skills and personal attributes.

Conclusion

The goal of the DA programs and projects are to increase production for food security, and improve farmers living condition to address poverty. These twin goals realization is dependent on the performance of the extension workers in the local level and the support extended by the national and local governments units. The results of the study revealed that the socio-demographic profile, such as age, sex, civil status, employment status, income and educational attainment have no significant difference to the performance-related dimension of the AEWs. However, there is a significant relationship between the level of

support of the local government units and municipal agriculture offices and the performance-related dimensions. In addition, there is significant relationship between the level of AEWs competency and the performance-related dimensions. This imply that the AEWs knowledge, technical skills and personal attributes influence the performance of the AEWs in all performance-related dimensions.

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