

Basic Skills Development in Farm Management for the Visually Impaired in Nigeria: Challenges and Expectations

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Abstract. The paper attempts to examine basic skills development in farm management for the visually impaired in Nigeria and the challenges that may be faced. It identifies the basic skills needed in farm management generally and outlines the benefits of developing such skills, for the visually impaired. An impediment of the development of such basic skills, for the visually impaired was identified and the challenges and expectations outlined. The paper offers useful suggestions and recommendations on the procedure for development basic skills in farm management for the visually impaired in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

In many parts of the world, farmers are known to be seeking ways to improve upon their farming systems and to adopt their practices to the exigencies of changing agro-ecological and socio-economic conditions. Skills related to farm management techniques are constantly being reviewed evaluated and improved upon, with the circle repeating itself over the over again. For the visually impaired, there are considerable impediments that militate against their ability to perform certain tasks. As pointed out by Skyes and Ozoji (1992), visual impairment results in visual disability, which further reduces the ability of individuals in tasks such as reading, mobility and daily living skills. These skills are not doubts essential to the success of participation in economic ventures by the visually impaired. But with the loss of vision, the visually impaired are left at the mercy of unscrupulous elements that may want to capitalize on their situation to exploit them to their own advantage. Farm management needs competencies in a number of areas most of which require the use of vision or in the alternative, the use of information that can and should be written down for accounting purposes or for research and evaluation.

It is in view of this that the paper attempts to examine various issues related to basic skills development in farm management in farm for the visually impaired and the challenges that service providers may face.

2. The Concept of Management

Management, according to Parames (1975), includes administrative management and the related technical problems, research as applied to the objectives of an organization, the promotion of trade and market studies, financial and personal administration and methods of action. He argues that management implies direction, planning, programming, regulating, financial, personnel and equipment management, output and time control, the conduct of meetings and upward as well as downward communications. In view of the above positions, one can look at managers as responsible for organization, directing staff, planning the progress of work, setting standard of attainment and measuring results, reviewing positions and quantifying different courses of action. This means that management, as a science requires farm management to demonstrate all round competencies in the process of agricultural production.

3. Basic skills require in Farm Management

Agricultural ventures are in many respects the same as other commercial enterprises. They are geared towards profit, which means that the practice needs scientific knowledge and organization. Ijomah (2002) stated that farm management is a science that attempts to coordinate farm inputs of all types in order to achieve the desired output. According to Ijomah, the aim is to minimize input costs and to achieve the highest level of output at the lowest possible or sensible costs thereby maximizing the

profit and satisfaction of the farmer or farm manager or both.

To successfully achieve this, the farm manager must recognize the fact that he has to deal with inputs of material nature such as land, labour, machines and tools, agro-allied chemicals, irrigation systems, tractors, combine harvesters and so on. The farm manager must also be ready to deal with intangible inputs including the weather, the social, economic and political situation at any given time.

Ijomah (2002) also states that there is not room for failure in farm management and so the farm manager must equip himself so thoroughly that he should be able to achieve profitability in spite of all odds.

The basic skills needed in Farm Management may include:

- Literacy in the agricultural process through training;
- The intrinsic ability to anticipate obstacles and how to cope in situations where conditions are unfavorable;
- Having those branches of knowledge and information which will enable the farm manager to perform very well including good knowledge of economics, mathematics, accounting, agriculture, soil science, crop and animal science as well as fisheries and forestry. In fact knowledge of disciplines in all the areas of human endeavour;
- Having the skills to acquire information on any issue relating to his vocation as a farm manager;
- Having the liability to manage cash which Van Home (1980) defined as managing monies in order to attain maximum cash availability and maximum interest income on any idle funds.
- Having the competence to keep adequate records in terms of management outputs as well as farm accounts. The types of accounts being referred to here included inventory records, production records, expenditure and income records and special or supplementary records;
- Having the ability to record farm activities in farm record books;
- Having the ability to prepare simple income statement and balance sheet;
- Having the competence to identify depreciable assets;
- Demonstrating basic skills in budget preparation;

- Having a basic knowledge of farm planning process, tools and techniques and
- Being able to evaluate and appraise farm projects especially in relation to cost benefit analysis (Sulaiman, 1999, Ijomah 2002).

The basic skills required in farm management are numerous and complicated but very essential. There is no doubt that these skills would pose some problems for the visually impaired farm manager?

4. Developing basic skills in Farm Management for the Visually Impaired

The main characteristic of the visually impaired manifests in the appearance of the eye that looks different from the normal and visual behavior like bumping into objects. Ozoji (2003) stated that behavior associated with this trait can be used to identify a visually impaired person.

The lack of sight or adequate vision is a great impediment to successful mobility, independent and safe movement and therefore the performance of daily living skills as well as full participation in economic activities. Considering the expected functions of a farm manager as earlier enumerated elsewhere in this paper, there is no doubt that the visually impaired need to develop certain basic skills in order to manage a farm successfully.

However, since most of the skills to be developed are centered around the acquisition of necessary competencies, there is no doubt that what must be done in order to succeed in developing these basic skills is to improve upon the reading proficiency of the visually impaired. According to Andzayi and Yakwal (2004), the visually impaired are expected to have a firm foundation structured on wide experiences and opportunities for learning through all available sensory modalities. Skyes and Ozoji (1992) believe that tactual skills, visual efficiency, motor development and concept development are important in all areas. They posit that print reading is desirable for the majority of visually impaired individuals who might have use of optical aids.

...Reading by listening "talking books" tape recordings, and records is very important for all visually handicapped children and, for many, the preferred mode of reading...
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However, some visually impaired individuals prefer to use Braille or talking books (radio cassettes) to obtain information that may be needed. In order to develop the necessary basic skills required by the

visually impaired in farm management therefore, we may need to consider the provision of needed materials in Braille in cassettes. With the above considerations together with the formal training in the rudiments of farm management, the visually impaired would certainly succeed as farm managers.

5. Benefits of developing Farm Management skills for the Visually Impaired

The benefits of developing basic skills in farm management for the visually impaired are numerous. They include the following:

- Boosting food production for the nation;
- Supporting the countries industrial development through the provision of agricultural raw material for the industries;
- Creation of employment opportunities to the teaming unemployment youths hat are found in all nooks and crannies of the country there by reducing the problem of crime;
- Serving as a veritable source of foreign exchange for the country;
- Providing investment opportunities in agriculture through large scale for industry oriented crops, fruits, livestock, poultry and so on;
- Providing opportunities for the visually impaired to excel thereby contributing there own quota to sustainable national development while being economically independent with its import on their acceptability by society.

6. Impediments to the development of basic Farm Management skills for the Visually Impaired

Attitudes of the society towards the disabled are negative. As a result of the negative attitudes towards the visually impaired, they are denied certain rights and privileges even though they may have demonstrated coping ability, are independent and have social maturity as well as being productive.

Lack of encouragement by government and non-governmental agencies is another impediment to the development of basic farm management skills for the visually impaired. This is because there is no concerted efforts to that have their orientation in practical agricultural.

Other impediments include:

- Lack of adequate financing for the visually impaired to set up commercial farm outfits.
- Non availability of farm inputs in terms of machineries and sophisticated agro-allied technologies.
- Inadequate training in the area of farm management techniques.
- Apathy on the part of the visually impaired themselves some of them who believe they cannot cope with a vocation like that.

7. Suggestion and recommendations

- Concerted efforts should be made by government, non-governmental and philanthropic organization as well as other stakeholders in the effort to improve on the capacity of the blind to change the negative attitudes of the society towards them.
- A comprehensive public education program could be initiated through public relations activities, tools and resources to project the image and capabilities of the visually impaired in Nigeria. This is in view of the adage that says there are handicapped but capable and therefore handicap able.
- The visually impaired should be supported to establish and manage farms through agricultural credit facilities and loans from consortium of banks and other financial institutions.
- They should be allowed to obtain training in reputable institution across the nation.
- Necessary inputs should be made available to them to ensure their success in farm management.

8. Conclusion

In view of what has been discussed in relation to basic skill development in farm management for the visually impaired in Nigeria, suggestions and recommendations were offered as a way forward. The paper concludes that through concerted efforts by all stakeholders and the provision of certain necessary conditions by governmental organizations, the visually impaired can be successfully involved in farm management at whatever level thus allowing them to contribute meaningfully to sustainable national development.

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