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## **Training for Intercultural Sensitivity Skills: A Case for Agricultural Extension Professionals in Nigeria and Nations Facing Similar Challenges**

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### **Introduction**

The agricultural sector is one of the biggest contributors to Nigeria's economy in addition to being the employer of about 60% of its population (Odoemelam, 2011). In spite of the important role played by agriculture in the nation's economy, the sector is still underdeveloped. To foster the development of agriculture in Nigeria, agricultural extension and advisory services are being used to transform the practices of farmers, who are still largely subsistence producers. In fact, Anaeto et al. (2012) attributed the slow development of Nigerian agriculture to the failure of its farmers to respond positively to novel ideas or innovations. For farmers to respond positively to such change, they must be properly educated on how best to implement the new ideas or practices on their farms. This is because increased agricultural productivity depends largely on the acceptance of cultural and technological transformations that extension workers bring to the farmers.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse nation (Edewor, Aluko, & Folarin, 2014) with more than 250 ethnic groups, hence, agricultural extension professionals must possess intercultural communication skills and multicultural mindsets to design and implement effective programs for their ethnically diverse

audiences. The purpose of this tool of the profession paper is to generate support for the critical need to train agricultural extension professionals in Nigeria on intercultural sensitivity. To this end, Washington State University (WSU) Extension's *Navigating Difference Cultural Competency Training* model is described and recommended as a potential prototype and guide for the implementation of such training for extension professionals in Nigeria.

### **Prototype Training Model for Implementation in Nigeria**

Officials of WSU Extension recognized the need for intercultural sensitivity amongst professionals in its System and implemented a professional development program to expand the administrators, faculty, and staff regarding intercultural sensitivity. To achieve this aim, WSU developed a five-module training curriculum in 2005, which was the first of its kind worldwide (Deen, Parker, Hill, Huskey, & Whitehall, 2014). The five modules developed include cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural interaction, cultural sensitivity, and cultural understanding. The curriculum uses fundamental adult education theories to foster a safe and friendly environment for all the participants, and their life experiences

are regarded as an important source of knowledge. The training content addresses topics on privilege and oppression, communication styles and barriers, as well as organizational culture, and stresses active learning activities such as role-play, group discussions, individual reflections and presentations, and case studies to enhance participants' self-awareness and build intercultural skills. According to Deen et al. (2014), the week-long training curriculum is designed to prepare participants to accomplish three behavioral outcomes: First, to be able to engage in culturally diverse settings, initiatives, and programs. Second, to be able to integrate cultural competencies in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programming. Third, to be prepared to practice strategies for successful intercultural communication in professional settings.

Developers of WSU Extension's training curriculum conducted an evaluation of the effectiveness of their model on 172 participants who attended nine different trainings during the course of one year (Deen et al., 2014). Results showed that participants had changed specific beliefs and practiced novel behaviors such as integrating cultural competency when planning, implementing, and evaluating programs.

### Conclusion

No doubt the societal context in which agricultural extension education and leadership is exercised, and the variation in cultural orientation of the farmers in Nigeria, necessitates the need for cultural competence and fluency of agricultural extension professionals (Shehu, McElravy, Matkin, & Balschweid, 2016). To this aim, cultural competence/sensitivity should be considered an essential skill along with communication, facilitation, and program development/evaluation (Deen et al., 2014)

for all agricultural extension personnel, and included in the professional development schemes of agricultural extension organizations. In fact, Schaubert and Castania (2001) posited that in addition to employing staff that can work efficiently with diverse audiences, Extension can offer continuous cultural competency training that not only orients extension staff to the importance of diversity but also assist to develop comprehensive skills to work across different cultures.

Although very important to note it is impractical to expect the acquisition of extensive knowledge of intercultural skills from a few days of training, participants will likely gain a much better understanding of the fundamental principles for working effectively amidst culturally diverse groups. The curriculum developed by WSU Extension can be used as a prototype for developing similar training curriculum that suits the Nigerian contexts as well as similar settings and is recommended for such use.

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