

Performance of Agricultural Extension Workers at the Agricultural Extension Center of Babirik District, Hulu Sungai Utara Regency

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Abstract: Agricultural development is a manifestation of the process of modification of agriculture with dimensions of farming, commodities, regions, and the environment. At the Extension Center of Babirik Sub-District, North Hulu Sungai Regency, there is still a problem with the activity of extension workers: the lack of extension workers in each district. This study aims to determine the performance of agricultural extension workers at the Extension Center of Babirik District, North Hulu Sungai Regency, and the factors that influence it. This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of descriptive - qualitative research. Data collection techniques used were observation, interviews, and documentation. The technique for selecting informants in this study used a purposive sampling technique with a total of 12 people. After the data is collected, it is then analyzed using techniques including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The data credibility test uses source triangulation and technique triangulation. The results of the research on the performance of Agricultural Extension Officers at the Babirik District Extension Center of Hulu Sungai Utara Regency can be said to be quite good. The aspects that are quite good cover the agricultural extension service system. Agricultural extension service strategy, ability to explore the needs of farmers, develop agendas and priorities for agricultural extension services, agricultural extension principles, ability to respond to the community and work policies in carrying out tasks. Furthermore, the less good aspects cover the level of work efficiency of agricultural extension workers, the effectiveness of agricultural extension services, the quality of agricultural extension human resources, and extension activities for the benefit of the public or farmers. In addition, the factors related to the performance of agricultural extension workers are the inhibiting factors, namely the lack of facilities and infrastructure, the lack of mastery of computer use, and the topography of the agricultural extension work area. The driving factors are quick response, understanding of the work, work enthusiasm, and extension workers having a strategy. To improve the performance of agricultural extension workers at the Babirik District Extension Office of North Hulu Sungai Regency, it is suggested that the Head of the Babirik BPK improve the quality of human resources of agricultural instructors. To the instructor to carry out their tasks according to their main duties and functions. It is recommended that Gapoktan and Poktan respond more to the new skills successfully taught by the instructors to be applied so that they will further increase agricultural production.

Keywords: Agricultural Extension Workers, Performance, Agricultural Extension Services

Introduction

The development of the agricultural sector is one of the important pillars in improving the welfare of the community, especially in rural areas where most of the population depends on the agricultural sector for their livelihood. Agricultural development aims not only to increase agricultural production but also to enhance farmers' income, productivity, and capacity through human resource development, technology utilization, and strengthening agricultural institutions. Therefore, the success of agricultural development is highly determined by the effectiveness of the mentoring process for farmers through agricultural extension activities [1], [2], [3], [4], [5].

The development of agricultural progress in Indonesia has currently shifted from an approach that solely focuses on increasing production to the development of the full potential of agricultural commodities possessed by each region. This shift demands agricultural human resources capable of adopting innovations, utilizing technology, and developing sustainable farming practices. In this context, agricultural extension workers play a strategic role as agents of change, bridging government policies with the needs of farmers in the field.

The government has provided a strong legal foundation through Law Number 16 of 2006 on the Agricultural, Fisheries, and Forestry Extension System, which emphasizes that extension is part of efforts to enlighten the nation's life and improve community welfare. Agricultural extension is understood as a non-formal education process carried out systematically, planned, and sustainably to enhance farmers' knowledge, skills, and behavioral changes, enabling them to develop their farming businesses more productively and competitively.

The success of agricultural extension is greatly influenced by the performance of extension workers in carrying out their main duties and functions. Agricultural extension workers are not only tasked with conveying information and technological innovations but also with providing assistance, mentoring farmer groups, identifying problems, evaluating programs, and encouraging the capacity building of farmers. Therefore, the quality of extension workers' performance becomes one of the indicators of the success of agricultural development at the regional level.

The Agricultural Extension Center (BPP) of Babirik District, Hulu Sungai Utara Regency, is one of the institutions involved in the implementation of agricultural extension to the community. However, based on initial observations, there are still several issues that prevent the implementation of agricultural extension from running optimally. First, the number of agricultural extension workers is not proportional to the areas they oversee. Out of the ten available agricultural extension workers, they have to supervise 23 villages, so each extension worker is responsible for two to four villages at once. This condition causes the intensity of assistance to farmers to be less than optimal.

The next issue is the limited capacity of farmers' human resources in operating agricultural tools and machinery (alsintan). Although the government has provided various agricultural machinery assistance, its utilization has not been optimal due to the limited knowledge and skills of farmers and extension workers in operating and maintaining the equipment. As a result, several agricultural mechanization programs have not been implemented optimally.

In addition, there are still extension programs that have not been fully realized, one of which is the Rice Farming Business Insurance Program (AUTP). The suboptimal implementation of the program is influenced by budget constraints, lack of inter-agency coordination, and uneven outreach to farmers, resulting in low community participation levels. This condition indicates that the implementation of the extension program has not yet fully met the needs of farmers in the Babirik District.

Various issues indicate that the performance of agricultural extension workers still faces several obstacles, both in terms of human resources, program implementation, and institutional coordination. Therefore, an evaluation of the performance of agricultural extension workers is necessary to determine the extent to which the execution of their duties has been in line with the

objectives of agricultural extension services.

This research uses the public bureaucracy performance theory proposed by Dwiyanto, which measures performance thru five indicators: productivity, service quality, responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability. These five indicators are used to comprehensively analyze the performance of agricultural extension workers at the Agricultural Extension Center in Babirik District, Hulu Sungai Utara Regency. Based on the description, this study aims to analyze the performance of agricultural extension workers and identify the factors influencing the implementation of their duties at the Agricultural Extension Center in Babirik District, Hulu Sungai Utara Regency.

Methodology

This research was conducted at the Agricultural Extension Center (BPP) of Babirik District, located on Babirik–Nagara Road, Babirik Hilir Village, Babirik District, Hulu Sungai Utara Regency, South Kalimantan. The selection of the research location was based on various issues in the implementation of agricultural extension, such as the limited number of extension workers, the suboptimal execution of extension programs, and the low effectiveness of assistance to farmer groups.

The research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of agricultural extension workers' performance based on natural conditions in the field. According to Sugiyono (2012), qualitative research is conducted in natural conditions with the researcher as the main instrument, while data collection techniques are carried out thru triangulation and data analysis is inductive in nature, thus emphasizing meaning rather than generalization. This approach allows the researcher to obtain a comprehensive picture of the implementation of agricultural extension workers' duties at the Agricultural Extension Center in Babirik District [6], [7], [8], [9], [10].

The data sources in the research consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data is obtained directly thru in-depth interviews and observations of informants who understand the implementation of agricultural extension, while secondary data is obtained from various documents, activity reports, regulations, archives, and literature related to the performance of agricultural extension workers. The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling, which involves deliberately choosing informants based on the consideration that they possess knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the implementation of agricultural extension.

Data collection was carried out using three techniques, namely observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly observe the activities of agricultural extension workers in carrying out their duties in the field. Interviews were used to obtain more in-depth information regarding the implementation of tasks, obstacles, and efforts made by extension workers in providing services to farmers. Meanwhile, documentation was used as a data complement thru the collection of various documents, activity photos, extension reports, and other archives relevant to the research.

Data analysis uses an interactive analysis model consisting of three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation is carried out thru the processes of selection, simplification, grouping, and transformation of the data obtained during the research. Next, the data is presented in the form of a narrative description, making it easier for the researcher to understand the relationships between the findings. The final stage is the continuous drawing of conclusions throughout the research process by connecting various findings, resulting in valid conclusions regarding the performance of agricultural extension workers at the Agricultural Extension Center in Babirik District.

To ensure the validity of the data, the research applies credibility tests thru source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing information obtained from various informants, while technique triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. The application of these two techniques aims to increase the level of trust in the obtained data, thereby giving the research results stronger validity.

Results and Discussion

This study analyzes the performance of agricultural extension workers at the Agricultural Extension Center (BPP) in Babirik District, Hulu Sungai Utara Regency, using five performance indicators according to Dwiyanto, namely productivity, service quality, responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability. The research results show that, in general, the performance of agricultural extension workers has been quite good, but they still face various obstacles that prevent the implementation of extension services from being optimal.

Productivity is the primary indicator used to assess the performance of agricultural extension workers. Productivity is not only related to the level of efficiency in resource use but also to the effectiveness of achieving service goals. Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, the productivity of agricultural extension workers in Babirik District is still considered less than optimal. From the efficiency perspective, the number of available agricultural extension workers is not proportional to the number of assisted villages. There are ten extension workers who have to supervise 23 villages, so each extension worker handles two to four villages. This condition causes the workload of the extension workers to be high, and the intensity of assistance to farmer groups cannot be maximized. In addition, the effectiveness of the service is also not optimal because the implementation of the extension schedule often experiences changes or delays due to the limited number of extension workers. As a result, some extension activities do not take place as planned.

In terms of service quality, the research results indicate that the quality of service provided by the extension workers falls into the fairly good category. The service system implemented has followed the applicable extension mechanism, allowing farmers to receive guidance and assistance according to procedure. However, the quality of human resources remains a constraint, especially the low ability of some farmers to operate agricultural tools and machinery (alsintan). This condition requires extension workers to provide more intensive assistance, thereby reducing the effectiveness of their services. From the perspective of service strategy, the extension workers have carried out their duties based on agricultural extension success indicators and have strived to provide services according to farmers' needs, although the results have not yet been fully optimal.

The aspect of responsiveness demonstrates the extension worker's ability to understand farmers' needs and develop service programs according to field conditions. Based on the research results, the responsiveness of agricultural extension workers can be categorized as quite good. Extension workers strive to uncover farmers' needs through direct communication with farmer groups before preparing the extension agenda. The extension program that is implemented generally takes into account the needs of the farming community, although not all aspirations can be accommodated due to the limitations of extension workers and supporting resources. The preparation of the agenda and service priorities has also been carried out in accordance with the conditions of the agricultural extension work area (WKPP) [11], [12], [13], [14], [15].

Next, in terms of responsibility, the research results show that agricultural extension workers have carried out their duties in accordance with the principles of extension administration. Extension workers have the responsibility of providing guidance to farmers and are able to respond to various issues faced by the community. However, the limited number of extension workers results in their ability to provide comprehensive support to all farmer groups still being suboptimal. In general, the implementation of extension workers' duties has been in accordance with the responsibilities assigned, but there is still a need for improvement in terms of service intensity.

In terms of accountability, the performance of agricultural extension workers shows quite good results. Extension workers carry out their duties in accordance with the applicable policies and regularly coordinate with both leaders and the community. Forms of accountability for the implementation of extension activities have been carried out thru reporting and good communication. However, the implementation of outreach activities for public interest has not been fully optimal because meeting schedules often change due to work policies or the limited number of extension workers. This has resulted in some extension activities not being able to be carried out consistently according to the established schedule.

Overall, the research results indicate that the performance of agricultural extension workers at the Agricultural Extension Center in Babirik District falls into the fairly good category, but still requires various improvements, especially in increasing productivity, equalizing extension services, and optimizing program implementation so that all farmers' needs can be met maximally.

Factors Affecting the Performance of Agricultural Extension Workers

The research results also identified several factors that influence the performance of agricultural extension workers at the Agricultural Extension Center in Babirik District, both inhibiting factors and factors that need to be improved.

The first inhibiting factor is the limited facilities and infrastructure. Supporting facilities for extension activities, such as official vehicles, operational equipment, and office facilities, are still inadequate, which hinders the mobility of extension workers in carrying out assistance in the relatively large areas they oversee.

The second factor is the capability of human resources. Some extension workers still need to improve their competencies, particularly in mastering information technology, using computers, and operating modern agricultural tools and machinery. This condition highlights the importance of implementing continuous education and training so that the competencies of extension workers can be enhanced and they can keep up with agricultural technology developments.

The third factor is the vastness of the agricultural extension work area (WKPP) and the limited number of extension workers. The number of extension workers, which is not proportional to the number of assisted villages, results in a high workload, making it impossible to optimally conduct field visits and provide support to farmer groups. This condition affects the effectiveness of the agricultural extension program implementation and the achievement of service targets for the farming community.

Thus, increasing the number of extension workers, providing adequate facilities and infrastructure, and developing human resource capacity through training are strategic steps to improve the performance of agricultural extension workers at the Agricultural Extension Center in Babirik District, Hulu Sungai Utara Regency.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The research results show that the performance of agricultural extension workers at the Agricultural Extension Center in Babirik District, Hulu Sungai Utara Regency, is generally in the fairly good category, although its implementation is not yet optimal in several aspects. Based on productivity indicators, the performance of agricultural extension workers still faces challenges due to the limited number of extension workers not being proportional to the number of assisted villages. This condition causes each extension worker to have to supervise more than one village, resulting in the frequency of field visits not being optimal. The impact is that the effectiveness of extension services has not been fully achieved because the implementation of activities often requires schedule adjustments.

In terms of service quality, the service system provided to farmers has been functioning according to the extension mechanism thru activities such as visits, supervision, and group farmer assistance. However, the quality of human resources still needs to be improved, both among extension workers and farmers, especially in mastering agricultural technology and the use of agricultural tools and machinery (alsintan). The service strategy implemented by the extension workers has referred to the agricultural extension program, thus generally capable of supporting the implementation of extension tasks.

The responsiveness of the extension workers also shows quite good results. Extension workers are able to identify farmers' needs thru the preparation of Regional Condition Identification (IKW) and extension programs, so that the activities carried out are relatively in line with the needs of the farming community. However, the limited number of extension workers causes not all service agendas to be realized according to the established schedule.

In terms of responsibility, the extension workers have carried out their duties in accordance with the principles of agricultural extension and have shown commitment in helping farmers solve

various farming problems. Extension workers also have quite good abilities in responding to farmers' needs according to their respective areas of expertise. Meanwhile, in terms of accountability, the extension workers have carried out their duties in accordance with organizational policies thru good coordination with leaders and farmer groups. However, the implementation of extension activities for public interest is still not fully optimal due to the limited number of extension workers and the vastness of the areas being served.

This research also found that the performance of extension workers is influenced by several factors. The inhibiting factors include the limitations of operational facilities and infrastructure, low mastery of information technology and agricultural tools, and the imbalance between the number of extension workers and the vastness of the work area. Conversely, the supporting factors include the ability of extension workers to respond to farmers' needs, understanding of the duties and functions of extension work, high work commitment, and service strategies tailored to the needs of the farming community.

Implication, The findings of this research indicate that improving the performance of agricultural extension workers requires policy support focused on strengthening human resource capacity and providing adequate operational facilities. The increase in the number of agricultural extension workers according to the needs of the assisted areas is a strategic step to enhance the effectiveness of support to farmers. In addition, the implementation of continuous education and training for both extension workers and farmers needs to be carried out to keep up with the developments in modern agricultural technology.

The Agricultural Extension Center also needs to strengthen the coordination, monitoring, and evaluation system for the implementation of extension programs so that each activity can be carried out consistently according to the established schedule. With the support of the local government thru the provision of budgets, operational facilities, and the enhancement of extension workers' competencies, it is hoped that the quality of agricultural extension services can improve, thereby boosting agricultural sector productivity and enhancing the welfare of farmers in Babirik District, Hulu Sungai Utara Regency.

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