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Public extension agents need for new competencies: Evidence from Limpopo province, South Africa

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C mallholder agriculture in most developing countries world-wide including South Africa is largely rain-fed. Changes occurring **O** in the Extension environment include the climate, globalisation and technological improvements. Broad political and scientific consensus exist that climate change and variability is happening and will continue well into the future with negative effects on food production and food security. Extension professionals, therefore, need to constantly develop and improve their capabilities to remain useful and relevant to farming communities. The purpose of the paper is to determine the extension agents' competencies regarding coping strategies they promote and their effectiveness in contributing tosmallholder crop farmers' food production in light of climate variability. The study adopted a multi-stage random sampling approach to select districts, municipalities and respondents. Semistructured questionnaires were used to collect data from 194 smallholder crop farmersin 20 villages from four municipalities of Limpopo province, South Africa in January of 2014. Extension managers and field-level extension agents of the Limpopo Department of Agriculture Extension service took part in the survey. Findings show that only one-third of survey respondents receive public extension services including information on climate variability coping assistance; this group finds the information useful for farm production. The most popular climate variability coping strategies promoted by most extension agents were conservation agricultural practices. Small yield differences between extension service and non-extension service recipients indicate agents need new competencies in how to apply coping strategies with producers. Study recommends involvement of extension agents, scientists and farmers in adaptive, municipality-specific trials on the effective implementation of conservation agricultural practices to enhance crop yields. There is need for agents to use multiple channels for effective communication to improve adoption of climate variability coping innovations which have the potential to improve crop yields.

Biography

David B Afful holds a PhD (Agricultural Extension) from the University of Fort Hare, South Africa and held a Postdoctoral fellowship at the same University 2012. He is currently a Senior Lecturer in Agricultural Extension at the University of Limpopo, South Africa. He has published number of papers in reputed journals and serves as an external examiner for postgraduate studies at the University of Fort Hare, and a reviewer for a number of peer-reviewed journals.

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