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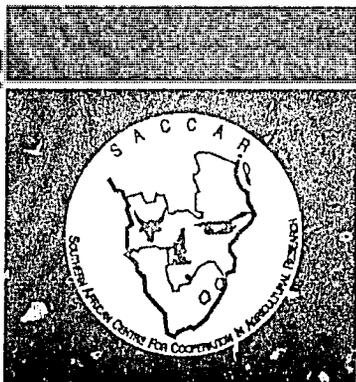
Human Resource Management No. 9

TRAINING SERIES

Country Report:

Zambia

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October 1990



Southern African Centre For Cooperation In Agricultural Research

ISNAR

International Service for National Agricultural Research

Authors:

I. Kallangile

Chief Agricultural Research Officer
Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives
Mt. Makulu Research Station
Chilanga, Zambia

I. C. Nkhungulu

Assistant Director, Extension Branch
Department of Agriculture
Lusaka, Zambia

P. J. Lungu

Chief Extension Training Officer
Department of Agriculture
Lusaka, Zambia

G. S. Pandey

Assistant Dean
School of Veterinary Medicine
University of Zambia
Lusaka, Zambia

W. N. M. Mwenya

Dean
School of Agricultural Sciences
University of Zambia
Lusaka, Zambia

Citation:

Kallangile, I., P. J. Lungu, W. N. M. Mwenya, I. C. Nkhungulu, and G. S. Pandey. 1990. Country Report: Zambia. ISNAR Training Series — Human Resource Management No. 9. The Hague: ISNAR.

CABI Descriptors:

Agricultural Research; Management; Managers; Personnel Management; Research Workers; Scientists; Zambia

AGROVOC Descriptors:

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COUNTRY REPORT ZAMBIA

I. Kaliangile, P. J. Lungu, W. N. M. Mwenya,
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Summary

This paper looks at human resource management in the Department of Agriculture in Zambia. It addresses the issues of planning, staffing, staff development, socialization, and assessment.

The department, through its three branches of research, extension, and irrigation and land husbandry, plans and recruits staff centrally. Employees are recruited mainly from local institutions and are deployed in the section of their choice. Due to this policy, an imbalance has developed resulting in some sections being understaffed. Donor support has also contributed to this situation. Efforts are now being taken to redress this imbalance.

Staff development is through long- and short-term training and on-the-job training in cases where experienced local and expatriate staff are available. Most formal post-employment training is done outside the country at universities that offer courses relevant to the Zambian situation. This has been done for some time through ad hoc arrangements. In an effort to improve the training of staff, a training unit has been set up in the department to oversee the training of technical and administrative staff.

Socialization and performance assessment are not adequately addressed by the present system of remuneration, monitoring, and evaluation.

Introduction

Manpower development and training (MDT) is programmed, coordinated and monitored by the directorate of MDT, which is under the cabinet office. Each ministry has some staff seconded from MDT to coordinate MDT activities. The Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives (MACO) has four MDT officers who deal with all manpower development matters in the Ministry's six departments (agriculture, veterinary medicine and tsetse control service,

planning, fisheries, cooperatives, and the national agricultural information services).

The directorate of MDT deals with all aspects of short- and long-term training for civil servants. The Department of Agriculture Training Unit (DATU) serves the department's three branches (research, extension, and irrigation and land husbandry) and complements the services of the directorate. Other aspects of human resource management (recruitment, performance assessment, conditions of service, promotions) are the responsibility of the personnel division, which is also under the cabinet office. Each department in the civil service has personnel officers seconded from the personnel division.

Therefore, two organizations deal with human resource management. In addition to the government manpower development program, the sole national party, the United National Independence Party (UNIP), also carries out a similar program. People trained under UNIP automatically expect to be employed in the civil service despite the fact that their training was not planned by the government.

Problems of human resource management in the Department of Agriculture can be appreciated after looking at different aspects of human resource management in detail.

Strategic Planning

Until 1989 there was no strategic plan in the civil service that included the Department of Agriculture. All planning and projections focused on patterns and trends in formal pre-employment education and training (i.e., the supply of manpower from universities and colleges). There were no plans regarding those already working. Since the country had an acute shortage of qualified and trained manpower at independence, the main priority was to train as many people as possible as quickly as possible. Very little of this planning was done by the Department of Agriculture,

which was responsible only for plans involving the colleges under its control.

The effect of this arrangement was lack of coordination between human resource development and the user agencies. Their efforts were fragmented and ended up being implemented in an isolated manner without overall policy guidelines.

Future Plans

At the national level, a national manpower council has been proposed to set policy on manpower planning and also to coordinate the implementation of programs for staffing development and utilization. The Department of Agriculture has made projections for:

- the number of extra posts to be created in order to cope with the increasing work load – for both professional and technical staff;
- the number of officers to receive long-term training for advanced degrees (MSc, PhD);
- the number and types of short courses (seminars, workshops, refresher courses, etc.) to be held;
- the financial resources required.

The plan is for five years, 1989 through 1993, and was prepared by Department of Agriculture staff. It is available, in an abbreviated version, as part of the Fourth National Development Plan.

Recruitment and Selection

Vacant Posts

The Department of Agriculture has an establishment register that shows authorized posts in each specialty and at each career level (professional, diploma, or certificate). The head of each branch identifies vacant posts. Posts are vacant either because they have never been filled or they have been vacated because of resignations, retirement, promotions, dismissals, death, etc. When there is no vacant post but a new one must be opened up, special authority must be obtained from the personnel division. Also, not all vacant posts are advertised.

The employment of graduates, until 1987, was automatic. However, due to restrictions on civil service expansion, this policy has been changed. Now, because of the economic situation, vacant posts are identified before any new graduate is employed. The present establishment register has 67 posts per branch, this being the number of established posts since 1968; however, the requirements of the department are much higher than that.¹

Recruiting

All candidates apply to the director of agriculture, providing a copy of their curriculum vita and stating their field of interest. A committee of senior staff from the three branches considers the applications. Particulars of selected candidates are forwarded to MACO and the personnel division for final approval. New employees are subject to evaluation over a probationary period before they are put into permanent staff positions.

The department recruits candidates at three levels of degree (BSc or higher, diploma, and certificate). Most recruits have been trained in Zambia, with a minority trained outside the country. All certificate holders are trained locally.²

Selection

When candidates apply for employment, they fill in forms that give detailed information about themselves. They also supply a copy of their certificate and transcripts of their course work. Based on this information, selections are made according to the type and level of training the candidate has received, the candidate's interests, and academic achievements, as well as the department's available facilities, etc. Generally candidates are put in the area of their choice, although it is expected that some adjustments will be made later. In some cases, candidates call in person at the branch they intend to join and are interviewed there. These interviews are very useful to both the candidate and the branch.

Socialization

This aspect of human resource management is progressively receiving less attention now than in the past, probably for two reasons: 1) there is a general shortage of funds for this important exercise since there are more recruits now than there used to be, when only a few joined each year.³ 2) also, many of the professional staff responsible for taking care of the socialization of new recruits are themselves not trained in human resource management, since this was considered to be an administrative matter.

When recruited, new officers are given a letter of temporary employment that outlines the conditions of service of temporary employment.⁴ They then report to the head of the section or research team where their final placement and posting are decided, and their supervising officer gives them the department's terms of reference. Orientation regarding other aspects of the department (channels of communication, operating procedures, organizational support, evaluation procedures, etc.) are acquired by assimilation. Many of the officers who are supposed to orient recruits are not familiar with the procedures. Some are expatriates who are not familiar with the Zambian system.

Each research station and province also has administrative staff who are supposed to orient recruits on all personnel matters, but this has been unsatisfactory.

Training

Long- and short-term training of staff was given high priority after independence because the country had very few trained people. Long-term training is done at the certificate, diploma, undergraduate, and graduate levels. Staff who deserve training are recommended for appropriate training after serving for at least two years.

Until recently, all graduate training was done outside the country with financial support from donor aid, which is usually tied to particular projects. Although many people have been trained in this way, it has created its own problems, the main ones being more training in certain fields than others and no training for administrative support staff. And in many cases staff were assigned thesis projects that were not relevant to the environment in which they would ultimately be working. This happened because there was no training plan, which resulted in ad hoc staff training.

Lately efforts have been made for staff to undertake broader-based studies in order to have the professional flexibility to face the many diverse problems that can arise in the normal research environment. To allow staff to be in touch with local conditions, some universities and sponsors have allowed trainees to do the data collection for their theses in Zambia.

Training of staff is done both on the job and formally. Intensive on-the-job training is done in cases where the trainee is working with experienced local and/or expatriate staff. The aim is to enable inexperienced staff to acquire skills and knowledge relevant to the programs in which they are working. This period varies depending on the availability of facilities and commitment of experienced staff.

Short-term training is accomplished in the form of seminars, workshops, professional meetings, study tours, etc. This is for both professional and technical staff.

The department of agriculture training unit has been formed to:

- draw up comprehensive training plans for all staff at all levels;
- select staff for training, in conjunction with senior staff, in all branches;
- solicit funds for training;
- supervise and coordinate training.

Career Development

One of the biggest staff problems in the Department of Agriculture is the extremely limited potential for advancement. This is mainly due to three factors: 1) very low salaries, 2) lack of promotion because of a limited number of senior posts, and 3) lack of career development within professional ranks. Because of this, it is difficult to retain qualified employees. This is the same at all levels. In fact so many people resign that the department is now regarded as merely a training ground for staff.

Staff in the department have the same conditions of service as all other civil servants. Individuals cannot advance in their own scientific discipline because there is no provision for that. In order to advance, they have to practically abandon their profession and take up administrative duties. Another problem is the shortage of administrative/managerial posts to which deserving officers can be promoted. Quite frequently new recruits are on the same salary scale with an officer with, say, 10 years of experience and, in some cases, a PhD. Seniority counts more than merit when it comes to promotions, and sometimes staff who are out on training miss out on promotions. These problems, coupled with the shortage of funds, have lowered staff morale considerably. To try to address the issue of low incomes, some experienced professional staff are allowed to take on consultancies. However, as a rule, staff are not permitted to engage in regular, part-time, income-generating activities outside their normal employment.

These problems have been discussed many times without a solution. Some suggested improvements include creation of separate salary scales for agricultural staff, equating salaries with those in parastatals, and bringing all research scientists from all ministries under one parastatal organization.

It should be pointed out that civil servants benefit in some respects apart from advancement training. These include subsidized housing and transport, a pension scheme, and job security. Staff are also allowed to go on paid study leave.

Assessment

Officers are expected to assess the performance of those they supervise. This is done annually and begins when the officer to be assessed fills in an confidential annual report form. Because of the problems stated above, many officers do not do this because they do not see its usefulness. It is generally agreed that this type of assessment is not very good for several reasons. One main drawback is that the assessing officers may have to report on too many junior staff, some of whom they may not know. The contents of the report are not shown to the officer being assessed, so unfair reports may go to higher authorities unchallenged. Sometimes the assessment is done on the request of higher authorities, especially in connection with promotion. There

has been talk of introducing a different system of performance assessment.

Conclusion

Human resource management in Zambia is carried out by three government institutions as far as the Department of Agriculture is concerned: 1) the personnel division, 2) the directorate of manpower development and training in the cabinet office, and 3) the department's own training unit. Hopefully, with the streamlining of the training program, there will be a strategic approach to the development of manpower in the department.

Socialization and performance assessment are the most neglected, despite their importance regarding staff performance. Career development and poor conditions of service are the major problems. It is hoped that the new assessment procedures that have been proposed will be more effective than the old ones. The requirement of identifying vacant posts before employing new graduates has created a problem in filling existing and proposed positions.

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Notes

1. The present number of graduates is 115 in research, 104 in extension, and 70 in irrigation and land husbandry. However, the number required for minimum satisfactory performance has been estimated at about 140 each for research and extension and 100 for irrigation and land husbandry.
2. Four institutions train agricultural staff in Zambia: the University of Zambia, the Natural Resources Development College (for the diploma in agriculture), and the two colleges of agriculture (which grant certificates).
3. For example, in 1971 the research branch had only three Zambian graduates, while extension had none. By 1988 there were 115 professional staff in research and 104 in extension.
4. During the 1960s and early '70s, the personnel division conducted six-month induction courses in public administration for all new professional and technical staff. This has since been discontinued.