



UDC 331

## THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WORKERS: A CASE STUDY IN ACEH JAYA DISTRICT, INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

The performance of agricultural extension workers is a crucial factor in the development of the agricultural sector in Indonesia. In the context of an evolving agricultural landscape, the performance of extension workers becomes a key element in enhancing productivity and the welfare of farmers. This study aims to analyze strategies for improving the performance of agricultural extension workers from a psychosocial perspective in Aceh Jaya District. The research method employed is descriptive with a qualitative approach and SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observations involving 30 respondents consisting of 15 agricultural extension workers and 15 members of farmer groups. The data analysis method used is a psychosocial approach emphasizing the importance of the relationship between internal and external factors influencing the performance of extension workers. The results indicate that communication, trust, social capital, and resilience play significant roles in enhancing the performance of agricultural extension workers. Strong interpersonal communication and high levels of trust between extension workers and farmers significantly improve performance. Additionally, social capital, including networks and relationships, enhances collaborative efforts while resilience helps extension workers adapt to and overcome challenges. These findings suggest that a holistic approach considering psychosocial factors at both individual and community levels are essential for improving the performance of agricultural extension workers.

### KEY WORDS

Agricultural extension workers, performance, psychosocial, case study, SWOT.

The performance of agricultural extension workers is a significant factor in the development of the agricultural sector in Indonesia. Aceh Jaya District faces various challenges in improving the performance of extension workers, including psychosocial aspects such as communication and trust. Extension workers are not only responsible for transferring technology and information but also play a role as facilitators in building farmers' capacities. However, the lack of effective communication and low levels of trust between extension workers and farmers hinders the effectiveness of extension services. Psychosocial factors such as social capital and resilience also affect the performance of extension workers.

The performance of agricultural extension workers is influenced by various factors, including competence, motivation, and working conditions (Wibowo, 2007). Extension workers with high competence tend to be more successful in carrying out their duties. Psychosocial aspects such as communication, trust, social capital, and resilience also play crucial roles in the performance of extension workers. Effective communication between extension workers and farmers is vital for the success of extension services (Adnyana & Kariyasa, 2003). Good communication can enhance farmers' understanding and trust in extension workers. Trust is the foundation of the relationship between extension workers and farmers (Bahua, 2010). Without trust, the extension process will not run optimally. Social capital contributes to good cooperation within the farming community (Marliati, 2008). Social capital includes networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for



mutual benefit. Resilience helps extension workers overcome various challenges in their work. Resilient extension workers can endure and adapt to changing conditions (Nuriyah, 2022).

This study aims to identify psychosocial factors affecting the performance of agricultural extension workers in Aceh Jaya District and analyze strategies for improving their performance from a psychosocial perspective. This study is expected to provide practical recommendations for improving the performance of agricultural extension workers in Aceh Jaya District and other areas and serve as a reference for future research on similar topics.

## **METHODS OF RESEARCH**

This study uses a qualitative approach involving 30 respondents, consisting of 15 agricultural extension workers and 15 members of farmer groups selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and direct observations at three Agricultural Extension Centers in Indra Jaya, Setia Bakti, and Krueng Sabee sub-districts. Extension workers selected had at least five years of work experience. Meanwhile, the farmer samples were selected from the farmer groups under the guidance of the three Agricultural Extension Centers in Indra Jaya, Setia Bakti, and Krueng Sabee sub-districts.

The qualitative approach and SWOT analysis were conducted using a psychosocial approach that emphasizes the relationship between internal and external factors affecting the performance of agricultural extension workers. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the psychosocial factors affecting the performance of agricultural extension workers and to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats they face. The focus of this study is on psychosocial factors influencing the performance of agricultural extension workers, including communication, trust, social capital, and resilience.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Agriculture is one of the main economic sectors in Aceh Jaya District. This sector contributes around 40% of the district's total Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) and is the primary source of livelihood for most of the population. Various types of agricultural commodities produced include rice, corn, soybeans, oil palm, and various vegetables and fruits.

Previous studies have revealed that psychosocial factors such as communication, trust, commitment, and resilience have significant effects on the performance of agricultural extension workers. Extension workers with trust, commitment, and resilience supported by a conducive organizational climate tend to perform better in carrying out their duties.

Psychosocial problems experienced by agricultural extension workers certainly impact the quality of extension services provided to farmers. Extension workers who lack strong motivation and commitment and work in less conducive organizational climates tend to be less responsive to farmers' needs and less effective in transferring agricultural knowledge and technology.

Effective communication patterns between field agricultural extension workers (PPL) and farmers is a key to the success of transferring agricultural knowledge, technology, and innovation.

The frequency of communication between PPL and farmers is an important aspect in supporting the success of agricultural extension activities in an area. This frequency refers to how often PPL interact and meet with farmers in their guided areas.

The place of communication refers to the location or space where PPL and farmers interact and exchange information. In the context of agricultural extension in Aceh Jaya District, common places of communication include; Agricultural Extension Center offices, Farmers' fields or gardens, and Farmers' homes or residences.

The duration of communication refers to the length of time spent by PPL interacting and communicating with farmers. Based on observations, the duration of communication between PPL and farmers in Aceh Jaya District varies but is generally relatively short.



Longer communication duration provides opportunities for PPL to delve deeper into farmers' problems and needs and offer more comprehensive solutions and guidance.

Trust between extension workers and farmers – crucial issue in agricultural extension activities in Aceh Jaya District. Many extension programs stall or fail at the introduction stage due to a lack of trust from farmers towards extension workers and vice versa.

Based on the results of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with various stakeholders in the agricultural field in Aceh Jaya District, several strategic steps need to be taken to foster mutual trust between extension workers and farmers in agricultural extension activities. First, close and familiar relationships between extension workers and farmers must be built through routine interactions and intensive two-way communication. This can be done by holding regular meetings at the farmer group level, scheduled home visits to farmers, and facilitating informal discussions to share experiences and problems.

Components of farmers' social capital include:

- Trust: This trust becomes the foundation for effective cooperation and the achievement of common goals between extension workers and farmers;
- Social norms: Social norms refer to the values and rules agreed upon within farmer groups or between extension workers and farmers and play a significant role in facilitating effective interaction and cooperation among farmer group members;
- Social networks: Social networks built between extension workers and farmers and among farmers will significantly help in agricultural extension activities in the area.

Resilience is the human capacity to face, overcome, and become stronger from the difficulties experienced (Grotberg in Dipayanti, 2012). Related to farmers, resilience involves their endurance when facing agricultural disasters that lead to crop failures or the risks of pest attacks causing crop damage. Resilience functions can be applied in areas such as overcoming (overcoming), bouncing back from traumatic events that cause high stress requiring self-control, reaching out by accurately predicting risks, knowing themselves well, and finding meaning and purpose in their lives.

Table 1 – SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Effective Communication	Low Frequency of Communication
Agricultural extension workers have good communication skills with farmers.	The interaction between extension workers and farmers is still limited in frequency.
High Trust	Short Duration of Communication
There is a high level of trust between extension workers and farmers.	The time spent communicating with farmers is still inadequate.
Strong Social Capital	Lack of Continuous Training
There are strong networks and good cooperation between extension workers and the farming community.	Training programs are not well-structured or continuous.
Resilience of Extension Workers	Unsupportive Organizational Climate
Extension workers have good adaptability and stress management skills.	There is a lack of organizational support for extension activities.
Opportunities	Threats
Structured Training Programs	Changes in Agricultural Policy
There is an opportunity to develop more structured training programs.	Policy changes that can affect extension activities.
Routine Field Supervision	Climate Instability
The implementation of more routine and systematic field supervision.	Challenges from climate changes that can affect the agricultural sector.
Strengthening Social Networks	Resource Limitations
The development of stronger social networks between extension workers and farmers.	Limited resources available for extension activities.
Agricultural Technology Innovation	Resistance from Farmers
The adoption of new technologies that can support agricultural extension.	Resistance from farmers to changes and innovations introduced.

Source: Primary Data, 2024.

The resilience of agricultural extension workers is also a determining factor in enhancing their performance. Extension workers with high resilience can overcome various challenges and pressures faced in their daily work. Resilience can be strengthened through



training focusing on developing adaptation abilities, stress management, and creative problem-solving.

The study results indicate that factors such as communication, trust, social capital, and resilience have significant impacts on the performance of agricultural extension workers. Good communication between extension workers and farmers improves understanding and cooperation. High trust allows extension workers to provide more effective guidance. Strong social capital supports cooperation within the farming community, while resilience helps extension workers face challenges.

The results of the strategic analysis for improving agricultural extension in Aceh Jaya District using SWOT Analysis are shown in Table 1.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that psychosocial factors such as communication, trust, social capital, and resilience play significant roles in improving the performance of agricultural extension workers. To enhance their performance, it is crucial to consider these factors at both individual and community levels. Recommendations include developing training programs focused on psychosocial aspects and providing support from the government and related institutions to create a conducive working environment for extension workers.

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