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SOURCES INFORMATION ON IMPROVED FARM PRACTICES: A STUDY OF FARMERS IN UMUAHIA ZONE OF ABIA STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies various sources of information used by farmers in Umuahia Zone in Abia State of Nigeria, and the extent to which they use the information sources. It also looks at the relationship between some selected socio economic characteristics of these farmers and their use of the most common sources. A major finding of the study is that the radio is the most frequent source of farm information. Significant associations were shown between the use of radio and factors such as age, length of farming experience and net annual farm income. It was also found that there was no significant association between the use of extension agents as a source of information and factors such as age, level of education, size of plots owned and number of years of farming. It is concluded that the use of radio as a medium of reaching farmers be intensified by the extension agencies.

KEY WORDS; Improved Farm Practices, Farm Information Adoption

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of modern agricultural technology is one step in the process of modernizing the whole society (Van & Hawking, 1990). Agricultural development is often seen as an increase in agricultural production and/or the productivity, many more people would have died from hanger if there had not been such an increase in productivity. Economist often use a somewhat more precise definition, stating that there is agricultural development if more production is achieved with the same inputs of land, labor and capital.

The process of increasing the efficiency of agricultural production through agricultural modernization depends mainly on the extent to which farmers can incorporate into their farming operations improved agricultural practices. In order to adopt those agricultural practices, the farmers must first become aware of the existence of such practices, develop interest in then, evaluate, try and become convinced of their relevance and usefulness before finally adopting the practices. Since the adoption process involves a series of stages, farmers rely on variety of sources of information to lead them from the awareness stage to the adoption stage.

Many extension researchers agree that wide-spread acceptance of improved

farm practices requires adequate information which has to be effectively disseminated so that the clients receive the information, understand it and regard it as a valid basis for action (Osuji, 1983; Exatollah & McCormic, 1982 and Patel, 1989). Various communication channels which are the links between the sender and the recipient of message in communication act, are in use in Nigeria. This is warranted by the persistent urge to develop Nigerians agriculture vis-a-vis the level of technological advancement in agricultural system.

Many studies point out the relationship between socio-economic characteristics of farmers and their use of source of information. A variety of information sources are needed in dissemination farm information (voh, 1979). There is also an association between farmers socio-economic characteristics as well as their social status and the use of various sources of farm information (Patel and Ekpere, 1978).

Effective means of communication is a function of many complex and interacting variables, some of which include the educational level of the farmers involved, the type of media that the farmers are exposed to and consistency of communication.

If dissemination of information is a highly recognized factor which aids adoption of farm practices, we need to identify those source of information that farmers use most, considering their socio-economics situations. This is particularly important when viewed on the background that previous studies had done a similar thing, and it is necessary considering the level of agricultural development for sometime now, to determine whether this still holds or if certain changes have been recorded in this direction. It is hoped that such an analysis may help us determine the sources of information which are currently used in disseminating farm practice information to farmers. For instance, if a farmer's socio-economic characteristics had made him rely on one source of information, the adoption of the farm practices could not be as fast as we are expecting.

The objectives in this paper therefore are:

1. To identify the information sources and determine the extent to which farmers in Umuahia Zone use such sources.
2. To ascertain the relationship between selected socio-economic characteristics of farmers and their use of identified sources of farm information and
3. To establish the implications of the findings for improved agricultural production

METHODOLOGY

Four local government areas (LGAs) from a list of six LGAs that make up Umuahia Zone were purposely chosen for this

study. This was based on the fact that these LGAs were the major growers of rice, maize, yam and cassava and were familiar with fertilizers use on crops. The LGAs used for this study were Bende, Ikwuano, Ohaofia and Umuahia.

From each LGA, fifty (50) farmers were selected using simple random sampling technique. In all, data were collected from a total of 200 farmers through personal interview with structure questionnaire.

Chi-square analysis was used to check if associations exist between selected socio-economic factors and sources of information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sources of farm information.

The data in table 1 show the sources of information used by the respondents. The results clearly demonstrate that most farmers received farm information through radio programmes. The finding that radio was the most popular source of farm information is in agreement with earlier studies of farmers in the Northern States of Nigeria (Yazidu 1973 and Voh, 1979). But the finding is opposed to Ikejima et al (1990) report that only 26 per cent of 70 work groups obtained their farm information through radio. This goes to point out the fact that the most popular source of farm information could vary with time and place. The table further shows that farmers' organizations and demonstrations by extension workers play insignificant role as source of information among farmers in the area of study.

Relationship Between Selected Socio-economic Characteristics of Farmers and use of extension **Officers as Source of Farm** Information.

Due to the emphasis usually given to the role of field extension workers, an attempt was made to identify if there was any association between farmer's socio-economic characteristics and the use of extension officers as source of farm information.

Table 2 shows that all the farmers' socio-economic characteristics under consideration, were not statistically related to farmers' use of extension agents as a source of farm information. This finding agrees with the study of Williams and Williams (1971) in which they found that age, number of years of farming, size of plot were not statistically associated with the use of extension agents as a source of farm information. In any case, it is generally believed that different communication sources perform different functions in the transmission of information on farm practices depending on the stage in adoption process, the characteristic of the innovation, the socio-economic and personal characteristics of the audience (Njoku, 1990).

Relationship between selected Socio-economic Characteristics of Farmers and Use of Radio as a Source of Information for Farm Practices.

Effort was made to establish if there was an association between farmers' socio-economic characteristics and the use of radio as a source of farm information. The data in table 3 show significant association between farmer's age, number of years of farming, and net annual farm income and the use of radio as a source of farm information. However, there was no significant association between level of education,size of plot owned and cultivated. This was determined at 5 per cent level of significance.

The relationship between farmer's age and the use of radio as a source of farm information is consistent with findings of Williams and Williams (1971) where the use of radio as a source of farm information was statistically associated with younger farmers who had fifteen or less years of farming experience. In this study 91.2 per cent of the farmers who were 30 years or less used radio as source of farm information. The corresponding percentage for the middle aged farmers is 84 per cent and for elderly (above 50 years), 71 per cent.

The data also show that 89.8 per cent of the farmers who had 15 years or less farming experience used radio as a source of information. However, 84.6 per cent of farmers who had between 16-30 years of farming experience used radio while 70.2 per cent of those farmers who had 30 years and above farming experience used radio as a source of information. The probability here is that farmers with little experience are likely to pay more attention to the radio program, than those farmers with many years of farming experience. In other words, the older farmers are more likely to rely on experience as a source of information than younger farmers, who are likely to depend on radio for most of the information needed

The association between net annual income from farming and the use of radio as a source of farm information may be explained in terms of an individual farmer's access to radio and to listening to program, Here, whether or not an individual has enough money to buy a radio is not the important issue. Radio is no longer looked upon as a luxury but a necessity. The common use of radio is also enhanced by the fact that a transistor radio could be afforded by many. Also, a radio set could be easily and reasonably maintained. It is quite portable and one can listen to news, sports music as well as other programs that are of interest.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The data have shown that radio is the most frequently used source of information on

farm practices by farmers in the study area.

Personal contact by extension agents which is traditionally believed to be the basic means of communicating innovations on farm practices was found not be an important source of farm information.

It was also found that socio-economic characteristics such as farmers' age, level of education, number of years of farming, size of plots owned, plots cultivated and net annual farm income were not statistically associated with the use of extension agents as a source of farm information. This means that the extension agents' contact with farmers does not in any way depends on the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers, but could depends on some other factors such as logistics support, accessibility to the farmers, improved conditions of service of the agents and other related
factors

However, in the use of radio as a source of information, farmer's socio-economic characteristics such as age, number of years of farming, and net annual income were statistically associated.

Radio, as a source of farm information needs to be encouraged more to effectively communicate useful information on farm practices. Radio is relatively available, cheap and can be reasonably maintained. Its portability enables the farmers listen to programmes while resting at home, while in the field, while riding a bicycle, and while alone or in a group. The operation of radio does not require special skills. Radio has the advantages of reaching a wide range of farmers instantly, creating awareness that leads to interest and eventual adoption among farmers. However, the audience cannot have direct interaction with the experts. This anomaly should be tackled by ensuring that enough time and conducive timing is created when farm issues are discussed on radio. This must be backed up with ready accessibility of experts to farmers requiring further assistance.

Most of the respondents did not obtain information about farm matter from extension agents. This indicates that extension agents are not the popular source of farm information in the study area. In many cases, the unpopularity of extension agents could probably be due to the few number of extension agents serving large numbers of farmers. For instance in Borno State the ratio of extension to farmer is 1:1,200 (BOSADP 1996). Though, this ratio varies from one state to another but none of the states has the World Bank recommendation of extension agents- farmers ratio of 1:500. Therefore, Agricultural Development Project (ADP) should aim at increasing the ratio of extension agent to farmers, so as to enable the extension agents to cope with the demands of agricultural development which the country

is currently grappling with. However, based on the findings of this study effective use of radio could complement the effort of extension agents.

It could thus be concluded that the choice of the source of information on improved agricultural practices and how the information is disseminated to the targeted users should be of great concern to both agricultural development practitioners and agricultural extension specialists. While it is essential that more effective use should be made of the popular media (radio), policy-maker need to give proper attention to how extension agents will be more accessible to farmers if an increased agricultural production would be attained and sustained

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Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to use of Sources of Farm Information.

Sources of Information	% Yes	% No	Total %
Agric. Ext. Agents	3.5	96.5	100
Radio	82.5	17.5	100
Fellow farmers	5.0	95.0	100
Family or Relations	4.0	96.0	100
Farmers' Organizations	0.0	100.0	100
Demonstrations Level	0.0	100.0	10

Table 2. Relationship Between Selected Socio-economic Characteristics of Farmers and use of Extension Agents as a source of farm information.

Socio-economic characteristics		No of farmers	% Yes	% No	X2	Level of Signif.
Age	30 yrs - less	57	1.8	98.2		
	31-50 yrs	92	4.3	95.7	0.735	NS
	Above 50 yrs	51	3.9	96.1		
Level of Education	Attended School	170	3.5	96.5		
	Did not Attend School	30	3.3	96.7	0.235	NS
No of Years of Farming	10 yrs - less	47	2.0	98.0		
	11-20 yrs	104	2.9	97.1	1.58	NS
	Above 20 yrs	49	6.4	93.6		
Plots owned	3 acres - less	104	2.9	97.1		
	4-6 acres	80	2.5	97.5	4.19	NS
	Above 6 acres	116	12.0	87.5		
Plots farmed	2 acres - less	56	3.6	96.4		
	3-5 acres	119	3.4	96.6	1.03	NS
	Above 5 acres	22	4.0	96.0		
Net annual income from farming	N500 or less	76	1.3	98.7		
	N501 - N1000	53	7.5	92.5		
	N1001 - N1500	26	0.0	100	8.31	NS
	N1501 - N2000	26	0.0	100		
	N2000 and above	19	10.0	89.5		

NS Not Significant at 0.05% Level
S Significant at 0.05% Level

Table 3. Relationship Between Selected Socio-economic Characteristics of Farmers and use of Radio as a Source of Information for Farm Practices.

Socio-economic characteristics		No of farmers	% Yes	% No	X2	Level of Signif.
Age	30 yrs - less	57	91.2	8.8		
	31-50 yrs	92	83.7	16.3	8.11	S
	Above 50 yrs	51	70.6	29.4		
Level of Education	Attended School	170	82.4	17.6		
	Did not Attend School	30	83.3	16.7	0.02	NS
No of Years of Farming	10 yrs - less	49	89.8	10.2		
	11-20 yrs	104	84.6	15.4	7.04	S
	Above 20 yrs	47	70.2	29.8		
Plots owned	3 acres - less	104	81.7	18.3		
	4-6 acres	80	86.2	13.7	2.92	NS
	Above 6 acres	116	68.8	31.3		
Plots farmed	2 acres - less	59	76.8	23.2		
	3-5 acres	119	86.6	13.4	3.35	NS
	Above 5 acres	22	76.0	24.0		
Net annual income from farming	N500 or less	76	88.2	11.8		
	N501 - N1000	53	68.8	30.2		
	N1001 - N1500	26	92.3	7.7	9.57	S
	N1501 - N2000	26	84.6	15.4		
	N2000 and above	19	78.9	21.1		

NS Not Significant at 0.05% Level
S Significant at 0.05% Level