Types and Sources of Agricultural Information Published in Newspapers

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Abstract

This study examined the types of agricultural information published in Tanzanian newspapers between 2009 and 2013. It also identified sources from which such agricultural news was obtained. Four newspapers namely Mwananchi, Habari Leo, The Guardian and Daily News with a total of 840 newspapers editions were selected for the study in all five years. Data were collected using a checklist and analysed by using Microsoft excel. The findings show that of the 63,609 news articles, only 836 (1.3%) articles were on agriculture-related topics. The findings also indicate that apart from the "other" category of agricultural information that constituted 42.5% of agricultural articles, 14.6% of the articles were on markets and prices of agricultural produce followed by agricultural innovations (12.6%) and agricultural inputs (11.2%). The lowest coverage (0.7%) was given to floods and disasters. With respect to the sources of agricultural articles, daily event was the most utilized source (42.2%) followed by politicians and government officials (22.0%). The study calls for the newspapers' owners and publishers to increase the coverage of relevant agricultural information for agricultural development. Journalists should be empowered by enhancing their skills on how to report developmental issues such as agriculture.

Keywords: Agricultural information, newspapers, Tanzania

Introduction

Agricultural information is an essential element of agricultural development. Access to reliable and timely agricultural information enhance the performance of farmers and other agricultural actors through increased awareness and understanding of various farming practices (Mahapatra, 2012). The types of agricultural information needed by farmers and other actors tend to vary according to geographical location, types of crops grown, time of the year and many other factors. For example, a study conducted in Nigeria to assess information needs of cassava farmers showed that there was high demand for information on the use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers (Omoregbee and Banmeke, 2014). In Uganda, Masuki *et al*. (2010) reported that rural farmers require agricultural information that links them with aspects such as good markets. In Pakistani, Naveed and Anwar (2013) reported that farmers need agricultural information on soil testing and its treatment in order to understand what types of seeds, fertilizers and agricultural machineries and equipment they require. They also required information on post-harvest processes, storage, markets, prices, climate and weather.

The traditional approach of delivering agricultural information through extension services has experienced several shortcomings in many developing countries. There have been weak linkages between researchers, extension workers and farmers. In some cases, there are few agricultural extension workers who cannot serve many farmers. There are also inadequate operating resources such as vehicles and funds. Other agricultural actors such as researchers, policy makers and the business community also lack access to the necessary agricultural information that would enhance their decision making. This calls for the use of other communication channels such as mass media to enhance the dissemination and sharing of agricultural

information. Oladele and Boago (2011) acknowledge that the use of mass media in agriculture is effective in reaching many farmers and others actors. Mass media are channels that disseminate information to a wide audience and they can create awareness to the public within a short period of time. Majority of people in developing countries still rely on "traditional mass media" such as newspapers, radio, and television. This means that these three mass media sources continue to be effective sources of information for the majority of farmers and other agricultural actors. Although radio and television are the quickest ways of reaching a wide audience at a very fast pace, newspapers have additional advantages of being in permanent form by carrying more information and often being more authoritative (Aiyesimoju and Awoniyi, 2012). Newspapers are periodical publications containing current events, informative articles, diverse features, editorial articles, analysis articles, advertisements, special reports, pictures and cartoons. Newspapers therefore have a noteworthy role of disseminating developmental messages including agricultural information. They are very important for the public to change attitudes as well as increasing knowledge and skills.

The effectiveness of a newspaper in disseminating information depends on, among other factors, its practitioners such as journalists who collect information from different sources and then repackage for the public. Information source is an institution or individual that creates or brings messages. There are various sources from which journalists are supposed to obtain agricultural information including research institutions, researchers, extension workers, farmers, libraries, internet, policy makers and other agricultural actors. Characteristics of a good information source include relevance, timelessness, accuracy, reliability, usability, exhaustiveness and aggregation level (Statrasts, 2004). In Tanzania, the number of

registered newspapers has increased tremendously in the past few years. By 2014, there were over 800 registered newspapers in the country with different publishing frequencies (MCT, 2015). Some of these newspapers were government-owned while others were being owned by private organizations and they were either published in Kiswahili or English. However, little is known on various types of agricultural information covered by the newspapers and the sources where journalists obtain such information. While studies on the newspaper portrayal of agriculture have been carried out in other countries such as Nigeria (Awojobi and Adeokun, 2012), Botswana (Oladele and Boago, 2011b) and India (Narayana and Kumar, 2009), no similar study has been carried out in Tanzania. Related studies conducted in Tanzania have focused mainly on the identification of information needed by farmers and their sources (Bernard *et al.*, 2014). The present study therefore examined the types of agricultural information reported in the Tanzanian newspapers and the sources to which such information is obtained. This aimed at providing insights on the emphasis given by newspapers and where such agricultural news is being obtained.

Methodology

A content analysis was carried out in November 2014 to examine the types of agricultural information reported in newspapers and identify the sources to which such information is obtained. The analysed newspaper content includes news articles, feature articles, editorial articles, reports, letters to editors and pictures. Data were collected from newspapers published between 2009 and 2013 obtained from the Sokoine National Agricultural Library, Morogoro Regional Library, Mzumbe University Library, and VETA library in Morogoro. These five years were covered because Tanzania introduced a five-year programme known as *Kilimo Kwanza (*literally

Agriculture First) in 2009 extending to 2013. It was therefore expected that the media would have equally made serious coverage on agricultural information to support the programme. A sample of four daily newspapers namely *Mwananchi, Habari Leo,* the Guardian and the Daily News was purposively selected based on magnitude of their circulation and readership (All you can read, 2014; TMF, 2012). Of the four newspapers, two (i.e. *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo*) are being published in Kiswahili and the other two (i.e. Guardian and Daily News) are published in English. *Mwananchi* and the Guardian are privately-owned whereas *Habari Leo* and the Daily News are state-owned newspapers. Newspaper editions for the study were selected in stages. Initially, six months were systematically selected in each year of the study followed by random selection of one week in each month. This means a total of 42 days in each year were selected for the study, making total of 210 days in all five years for each newspaper. In total, 840 newspaper editions were covered in all five years. Data were analysed using MS Excel.

Results and Discussion

The study findings indicate that there were 63,609 news articles published in the four newspapers between 2009 and 2013. Out of these, only 836 (1.3%) articles were on agriculture-related topics. The findings reveal further that of the 836 agricultural articles, *Habari Leo* had a relatively better (307; 36.4%) coverage followed by *Mwananchi* (197; 23.5%) (Table1). This is possibly because *Habari Leo* is a government owned newspaper and it is somehow service oriented. In addition, *Habari Leo* is published in *Kiswahili* which is the *lingua franca* in Tanzania. Generally, the study findings indicate that agricultural information was given little attention in the Tanzanian newspapers. In other words, the newspapers failed to play an

effective role of educating and informing the public on issues related to agriculture. These findings agree with those of Abbas *et al.* (2011) who found that newspapers constituted only one percent of the sources of information to farmers in Pakistan. Likewise, Ifeanyi and Agumagu (2008) reported that agricultural news was not considered important enough to be published frequently in Nigeria.

Table 1: Agricultural information covered in newspapers

Year	No. of agricultural articles				Total
	Mwananchi	*Habari Leo*	The Guardian	Daily News	
2009	24 (19.5)	64 (52.0)	14 (11.3)	21(17.0)	123 (14.7)
2010	24 (23.7)	37 (36.6)	14 (13.8)	26 (25.7)	101 (12.0)
2011	35 (20.0)	53 (30.2)	53 (30.2)	34 (19.4)	175 (20.9)
2012	71 (29.9)	69 (29.1)	42 (17.7)	55 (23.2)	237 (28.3)
2013	43 (21.5)	84 (42)	40 (20)	33 (16.5)	200 (23.9)
Total	**197 (23.5)**	**307 (36.7)**	**163 (19.4)**	**169 (20.2)**	**836** (1.3)

Figure in brackets represents percentage

For the purpose of this study, types of agricultural information were grouped into 11 categories namely agricultural innovations, agricultural inputs, climate change, floods and disasters, pests and diseases, markets and prices, land and land-related conflicts, preservation and storage of crops, crop processing, transportation of crops, and "other" information such as beekeeping, tree planting, and fishing. The findings in Table 2 indicate that apart from the "other" category of agricultural information that constituted 42.5% of agricultural articles, there was very little coverage of various types of agricultural information. About 15% of news articles were on markets and prices of agricultural produce followed by agricultural innovations (12.6%) and agricultural inputs (11.2%). Floods and

disasters had the lowest coverage (0.7%) despite the prevailing challenge of unreliable climate and weather. The types of agricultural information that were given a relatively better coverage somehow match those identified in Kilombero District in Tanzania by Bernard *et al.* (2014) who showed that that majority of the farmers needed information on marketing, agricultural credit or loans, new seed varieties, storage methods, diseases and pest control as well as pesticide availability and its application.

Table 2: Types of Agricultural Information Published in Newspapers

Types of agricultural information	*Mwananchi* (n = 197)	*Habari Leo* (n = 307)	Guardian (n = 163)	Daily News (n = 169)	Total News (n = 836)
Agricultural innovations	18 (9.1)	34 (11.0)	20 (12.2)	33 (19.5)	105 (12.6)
Agricultural inputs	21 (10.6)	44 (14.3)	17 (10.4)	12 (7.1)	94 (11.2)
Climate change	7 (3.5)	10 (3.2)	8 (4.9)	2 (1.1)	27 (3.2)
Floods and disasters	1 (0.5)	5 (1.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0 .0)	6 (0.7)
Pests and diseases	2 (1.0)	2 (0.6)	6 (3.6)	9 (3.3)	19 (2.2)
Markets and prices	23 (11.6)	49 (15.9)	24 (14.7)	26 (15.3)	122 (14.6)
Land and conflicts	9 (4.5)	29 (9.4)	5 (3.0)	4 (2.3)	47 (5.6)
Preservation and storage	4 (2.0)	8 (2.6)	6 (3.6)	2 (1.1)	20 (2.3)
Processing of crops	6 (3.0)	9 (2.9)	2 (1.2)	5 (2.9)	22 (2.6)

Transportation of crops	1 (0.5)	14 (4.5)	1(0.6)	3 (1.7)	19 (2.2)
Others	117 (89.8)	77 (25.0)	68 (41.7)	93 (55.0)	355 (42.5)

Numbers in brackets represent percentages. The study also identified sources from which agricultural information published in newspapers was obtained. These sources were categorized as library and documented literature, daily events, researchers, farmers, extension workers as well as politicians and government officials. The study findings in Table 3 indicate that despite the importance of libraries and other literature sources such as the web, very few (4.3%) agricultural news articles were collected from these sources. Similarly, very few (4.7%) newspaper articles on agriculture were collected from researchers.

The more utilized sources for agricultural information were daily events (42.2%) followed by politicians and government officials (22%). These findings suggest that journalists depend largely on events such as meetings and workshops as well as politicians and government actors as their major sources of agricultural information. This means that information on best practices, new innovations and processes which can be obtained from researchers, libraries and institutional websites is less covered. It also implies that newspaper practitioners have little understanding on relevant sources of agricultural information. This is possible because most journalists in the country do not undergo training on specializations such as agriculture.

Table 3: Sources of Agricultural Information Published in Newspapers

Sources	*Mwananchi* (n = 197)	*Habari Leo* (n = 307)	Guardian (n = 163)	Daily News (n = 169)	Total (n= 836)
Library and documented literature	13 (6.5)	22 (7.1)	1 (0.6)	0 (0.0)	36 (4.3)
Daily events	101 (51.2)	99 (32.2)	92 (56.4)	61(36.0)	353 (42.2)
Researchers	8 (4.0)	20 (6.5)	3 (1.8)	9 (5.3)	40 (4.7)
Farmers	25(12.6)	50 16.2)	15 (9.2)	14 (8.2)	104 (12.4)
Extension workers	15 (7.6)	90 (29.3)	5 (3.0)	9 (5.3)	119 (14.2)
Politicians and government officials	23 (11.6)	63 (20.5)	35 (21.4)	63 (37.2)	184 (22.0)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the study findings, it is concluded that Tanzanian newspapers provide very little coverage on agriculture despite its importance to the country's economy. Consequently, different types of agricultural information are given very little coverage in the newspapers. Newspapers rely largely on daily events and government officials to obtain agricultural information for publishing whereas relevant sources such as libraries and documented literature are hardly consulted. This study, therefore, calls for the newspapers' owners and publishers to increase the coverage of relevant agricultural information for agricultural

development in the country. The government and private sector should support and build the capacity of journalists in reporting agricultural issues especially in rural areas.

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