

Utilization of Agricultural Information Among Literate Women in Ihiagwa Autonomous Community Owerri, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The study x-rayed the utilization of agricultural information among women in Ihiagwa Autonomous Community (IHC), Owerri West Local Government Area, Imo State, Nigeria. The study population comprised of literate women in the communities studied and data was collected using questionnaire. A total of 160 women were purposively selected from the eight (8) communities of which 79.4 per cent representing 127 literate women returned their filled questionnaire. The findings revealed that literate women in Ihiagwa autonomous community have need for agricultural information. More so, the type of agricultural information required by literate women in rural areas are the prices of goods and services, wholesale and retail spots for agricultural goods. The sources of agricultural information that literate women accessed include word-of-mouth, friends and radio. The benefits derived from utilizing agricultural information include having access to current and timely agricultural information, adequate and accuracy of information and access to varied agricultural materials. It was also revealed that the rural women studied are satisfied with the sources of agricultural information. Challenges affecting effective utilization of agricultural information as revealed in the study includes lack of awareness of agricultural extension services, irregular power supply that prevent people from listening to news, lack of access to computers and other ICTs facilities as well as non-existence of community library services. Provision of agricultural extension services, provision of relevant materials bearing agricultural information, re-orientation of rural women as well as training / retraining of rural literate women on ICTs utilization were the recommendations made.

Keywords: Utilization; Agricultural Information; Women; Ihiagwa Autonomous Community, Nigeria.

Introduction

Agriculture is a major source of livelihood in Nigeria. Agricultural productivity can be doubtlessly augmented by relevant, reliable and useful information and knowledge. Indeed, information and knowledge are crucial to farmers, who need both for their development (Hassan et al, 2012). Agriculture sector thrives on the basis of availability of relevant agricultural information that is associated with the needs of those in the agricultural sector. The dissemination of agricultural Information is very crucial to agricultural productivity of farmers because it is only through this means that they can learn innovations which can improve their productivity (Sanusi, Peti-Ibikunle & Mshelia, 2010). Agricultural information is operationally defined as the various sets of information and messages that are relevant to agricultural production activities of farmers such as crop production and protection, animal production and management and natural resources production and conservation.

Women are the most topical issue in International developmental programmes, (Jekayinfa, 1999). Women are the heart of development as they control most of the non monetary economy (subsistence agriculture, bearing children, domestic labour) and also play important role in the monetary economy (trading, wage labour, employment and so on). In Nigeria, women are seen as significant wage earner in the family, are involved in farming, fishing, herding, and commerce such as, pottery, cloth making and craft work.

Rural women are among those major groups of society who previously

were considered less by planners, due to specific reasons in the past. And this problem is more observable at developing countries. While, looking at women's history of economic and social life, we can find that this great group, continuously have played basic role in forming economic condition of country. Women empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in decision making process and access to power, land, bank loan, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, peace and societal development (Ekesionye, & Okolo, 2012).

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are as follows:-

- i). To establish if the rural women in Ihiagwa Autonomous community have need for agricultural information.
- ii). To identify the specific form of agricultural information mostly sought by rural women in Ihiagwa autonomous community.
- iii). To determine the sources of agricultural information utilized by rural women in Ihiagwa autonomous community.
- iv). To identify the barriers to accessing agricultural information among rural women.
- v). To identify the constraints hindering effective utilization of agricultural information among rural women in Ihiagwa autonomous community.

vi). To suggest/recommend possible ways of improving accessibility of agricultural information among rural women in Ihiagwa autonomous community.

Literature Review

Siyao (2012) citing Masuki et al (2010) sees agricultural information as a key component in improving small-scale agricultural production and linking increased production to remunerative markets, thus leading to improved livelihoods, food security and national economics. Conceptually, Okwoche, Asogwa and Obinne (2012) citing Agbamu (2006) defined agricultural information as published or unpublished knowledge in all aspects of agriculture. The major sources of information identified by Olaniyi, Adebayo & Akintola (2011) shows that interpersonal interaction in the rural area are still of relevance to the dissemination of agricultural information and were not exposed to modern information and communication technology (ICT). However, Ofuoku, Emah and Itedjere (2008) in their study identify extension agents, other farmers, fish farmers groups, university, research institute and NGOs as sources of information.

In a separate study by Dauda Chado and Igbashal (2009), their study on agricultural information sources utilized by farmers in Benue State, Nigeria reveals that most of the farmers depend on extension agents for agricultural information and this was attributed to the cosmopolitan nature of the study area where tertiary institutions are located and the potential application of technology by farmers to improve agriculture. Okwoche, Asogwa and

Obinne (2012) in their study on agricultural information utilization among rural sorghum farmers in Benue State of Nigeria revealed that information sources and information utilization are not independent of one another among the respondents. It is therefore, inferred that information sources and information utilization among the sorghum farmers have significant relationship.

The barriers to accessing information according to Siyao (2012) can be linked to the poor attendance at meetings and the inability to ask others and to not listening to radio. The greatest constraints to access to information as revealed by Ofuoku, Emah and Itedjere (2008) in their study includes extension contact, ineffective communication, distance from other farmers and illiteracy. Again, Dauda, Chado and Igbashal (2009) in their study revealed that majority of farmers suffered from financial difficulty and this probably affected the sourcing of information from sources.

Hassan, Yassin, Shaffril, Othman, Samah, Samali and Ramili (2011) based on their resources, pointed out that rural community are receiving more agricultural information from the interpersonal sources compared to the mass media sources. This he attributes to the frequency and the quality of interpersonal communication that occur between rural community and interpersonal sources such as friends, family members and village leader. While Siyao (2012) in his study observed that free access to the relevant, accurate and timely agricultural information through the proper channels will enable farmers to make timely decisions that

will again lead into agricultural development.

Rehman, Muhammad, Ashrat and Hassan (2011) concluded that the print media were the major sources of agricultural information, followed by Fellow Farmers and T.V., Thus they posit that focus should be on quality of information in term of its relevance to farmers. According to Hassan et al (2012) in their study, it was found that farmers view television as a credible source for disseminating clear and understandable agricultural information. Television is considered less credible in terms of delivery agricultural information at the right time, and it is seen as being unable to provide all of the agricultural information needed. Nevertheless, Ofuoku, Emah and Itedjere (2008) recommended that extension agents should intensify their efforts in teaching farmers how to utilize the complex information among others. According to Chaachhar et al (2012), there is need to produce more agricultural related programs on television and telecast on appropriate time where farmer can get benefit from television programmes.

Siyao (2012) recommends that government should employ enough competent and motivated, rural-based agricultural extension officers, who should aim at meeting the requirements of both male and female rural farmers. This to him will facilitate the accessibility and availability of extension services in rural areas. Olaniyi, Adebayo and Akintola (2011) in their study concluded that in solving the menace of food insecurity in Nigeria, the utilization of agricultural information among rural youth is of paramount importance as they

are the future farmer and the onus of agricultural development depends on them.

Methodology

The study uses a survey that covered eight (8) villages in Ihiagwa autonomous community in Owerri West Local Government Area, Imo State, Nigeria namely: Mboke Village, Umuchima Village, Umuelem Village, Ibuzo Village, Umuokwu Village, Umuezeawula Village, Iriamaogu and Nkaramuoche Village. The main instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. The population for the study consists of all literate women in the eight (8) communities. Twenty literate women each were purposively selected from the eight communities to participate in the survey, making a total of 160 women and 79.4 per cent representing 127 literate women returned the filled questionnaire. The questionnaire was hand-delivered to respondents and collected on the same day with the help of four (4) research assistants that were used to administer and collect the filled questionnaire back.

Findings and Discussions

Out of a total 160 respondents, 127 filled and returned the questionnaire. This represents a response rate of 79.4% which is statistically significant.

Table 1: Need for Agricultural Information

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	127	100
No	-	-
undecided	-	-
Total	127	127

Table 1 shows that the literate women studied have felt need for agricultural information.

Table 2: Type of Agricultural Information Needed

	Frequency	%
Prices for agricultural goods / services	119	93.7
Cost of transportation	-	-
Location for special agricultural goods	103	86.6
Wholesale / Retail spots for agricultural goods	120	94.5
Government policies on agriculture	-	-
Information on pest control measures	3	2.4
Information on fertilizer sale point	15	11.8
Sources of funding of agricultural activities	13	10.2

N.B: Multiple Options

When asked the type of agricultural information they have need for, 119 (93.7%) of the respondents indicated prices for agricultural goods / services, 103 (86.6%) indicated location for special agricultural goods, 120(94.5%) said they have need for information on wholesale / Retail spots for agricultural goods, 3(2.4%) indicates information on pest control measures, 15(11.8%) indicates information on fertilizer sale point while 13(10.2%) indicates sources of funding of agricultural activities.

Table 3: Sources of Agricultural Information Utilized

	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	96	75.6
Internet	3	2.4
Friends	114	89.8
Libraries	-	-
Extension agents	13	10.2
Newspapers	-	-
Word of month	118	93
Television	27	21.3
Traditional ruler/town union president	-	-
Town union speaker	-	-

N.B: Multiple Options

When asked the sources of agricultural information they utilize, the followings were revealed: 96(75.6%) indicated radio as their source of agricultural information, 3(2.4%) use internet, 114(89.8%) utilizes friends as source of agricultural information, 13(10.2%) indicated extension agents, 118(93%) gets their agricultural information through word of mouth while 27(21.3%) do have access to agricultural information through television. Findings therefore show that word of mouth (93%), friends (89.8%) and radio (75.6%) are the major sources of agricultural information.

Table 4: Benefits derived from utilizing agricultural information

	Frequency	%
Access to current/timely agricultural information	106	83.5
Adequate/accuracy of information	89	70.1
Access to varied agricultural materials	101	79.5
Improved funding (Ease access to credit facilities)	-	-
Improved storage	-	-
Access to training opportunities	-	-

From table 4, 106(83.5%) confirmed the sources of agricultural information they utilizes gives them access to current / timely agricultural information, 89(70.1%) derived the benefits associated with adequate and accuracy of information while 101 (79.5%) indicates that they have varied access to agricultural materials (resources). Therefore, it is evident from the analysis that the respondents derive the benefit of having access to current / timely agricultural information, adequate / accuracy of information as well as access to varied agricultural materials.

Table 5: levels of satisfaction with sources of agricultural information.

	Frequency	Percentage
Very satisfied	10	7.8
Satisfied	91	71.7
Undecided	-	-
Not very satisfied	15	11.8
Not satisfied	11	8.7
Total	17	100

very satisfied with sources of agricultural information while 11(8.7%) are not satisfied. Findings therefore show that the respondents are satisfied with the sources of agricultural information they have accessed to.

From table 5, 10(7.8%) of the respondents are not very satisfied with sources of agricultural information, 91(71.7%) of the respondents are satisfied with sources of agricultural information, 15(11.8%) are not

Table 6: Challenges to Effective utilization of agricultural information

	Frequency	%
Inadequate fund to procure radio / television	-	-
Inadequacy of relevant materials	89	70.1
Improper awareness of agricultural extension services	116	91.3
Language barrier	-	-
Lack of access to computers and other ICTs	77	60.6
Non-existence of community library services	81	63.8
Poor road network	15	11.8
High cost of Internet services	6	4.7
Irregular power supply that prevent people from listening to news	93	73.2

From table 6, 89(70.1%) of the respondents indicates inadequacy of relevant information materials as a challenge to effective utilization of agricultural extension services, 77(60.6%) views lack of access to

computers and other ICTs as a challenge, 81(63.8%) indicated non-existence of community library service, 15(11.8%) indicated poor road network, 06(4.7%) say it is high cost of internet services, while

93(73.2%) see irregular power supply as the challenge.

From the findings, it is obvious that improper awareness of agricultural extension services, irregular power supply that prevent people from listening to news, inadequacy of relevant information materials, lack of access to computers and other ICTs as well as non-existence of community library services are the major challenges to effective utilization of agricultural information among literate women in Ihiagwa autonomous community.

Summary of Findings

The type of agricultural information mostly needed by literate women in Ihiagwa autonomous community is the prices for agricultural goods / services; this is followed by wholesale / retail spots for agricultural goods and then location for special agricultural goods. This finding may not be unconnected with the fact that the area being studied has been influenced by the proximity of the two federal institutions surrounding it, which invariably has turned the area to a business dominated area. Sources of agricultural information utilized are predominantly through word-of-mouth, followed by friends and the radio. The literate women hardly accessed information through the internet, nor do extension agents play any role in their accessibility to agricultural information among literate women in Ihiagwa community.

The benefits derived from utilizing agricultural information include having access to current and timely agricultural information, adequate and accuracy of information and access to varied agricultural materials. It was also revealed that they are

satisfied with the sources of agricultural information.

Challenges affecting effective utilization of agricultural information as revealed in the study includes improper awareness of agricultural extension services, irregular power supply that prevent people from listening to news via video, inadequacy or relevant materials bearing agricultural information, lack of access to computers and other ICTs facilities as well as non-existence of community library services.

Conclusion

Rural literate women have a lot to benefit from having access to timely and accurate agricultural information. Though they all have need for agricultural information, it is obvious that most of the literate women are not farmers hence they have no need for government policies on agriculture, nor do they have need for information on pest control or fertilizer sale points. Their agricultural information needs are centred on cost of goods and services as well as information on where they can get agricultural goods on wholesale.

Recommendations

- i. ***Provision of Agricultural Extension Services:*** Agricultural extension services should be provided to the rural people to enable them have access to pertinent agricultural information which will also serve as a strategic agricultural empowerment for rural farmers, this will reduce the constraints of travelling far to look for agricultural goods and services.
- ii. ***Provision of Relevant Materials Bearing Agricultural Information:*** There is need to provide relevant information sources bearing

agricultural information that will be of interest to the rural women. This can be achieved through the establishment of Community Library Services (CBS) or alternatively, the agricultural extension service agents can liaise with the traditional rulers / town speaker to distribute such information services.

iii. **Re-Orientation of Rural Women:** The rural women should be given proper orientation on how they can cultivate little gardens or have mini-farms where most of these goods they go scouting for can be produced personally. Perhaps, rural women farmers association can be formed, whereby agricultural extension agents can be invited to give them talks on the current agricultural information that will be of immense benefits to them.

iv. **Training / Retraining of Rural Women on ICTs Utilization:** The rural women should be trained on how to use ICTs facilities to access agricultural information. No doubt, newspaper can be accessed through the mobile phones; all it requires is just training and re-training the rural women on how they can utilize their mobile phones in accessing agricultural information.

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