

ACCESSIBILITY OF WOMEN FARMERS TO AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION IN SOUTH WESTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study ascertained the access of women farmers to agricultural information in South Western Nigeria. A total of 347 women farmers were randomly selected from Ondo, Delta, Ogun and Oyo States. Data were analyzed using means, standard deviation, chi – square and person product moment correlation. Findings reveal that 43.3% of the respondents are between 41 – 50 years of age and their needs for agricultural information were met by extension agents (90.5%). Furthermore, the women farmers were accessible to technical information on improved seeds ($\bar{x} = 2.59$), storage methods ($\bar{x} = 2.44$), but poor access to operating farm machinery ($\bar{x} = 0.49$) and weather forecast ($\bar{x} = 0.68$). With regard to economic information they were accessible to market locations ($\bar{x} = 2.40$), but had low access to information on exporting procedure ($\bar{x} = 0.22$). A significant relationship exists between women farmers' age and access to agricultural information. Therefore, pertinent information bothering on increasing the economic base of women farmers such as exporting procedures should be incorporated into extension packages directed at women farmers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The roles being played by women farmers in food production which enhances the level of food security of households in many developing countries is quite enormous and significant. This may be considered true because women have been noted to constitute the majority of subsistent farmers that are actually responsible for producing a large percentage of food crops for consumption in these countries. The Food

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and Agricultural Organization, FAO (1996:58), Mehra & Esim (1998:62) and Oladele (2003:1) all asserted that women farmers provides between 60 to 80 percent of the food for household consumption and labour in food production. Moreover, they are 100 percent responsible for the processing of basic nutritive materials and about 80 percent responsible for storaged food and transportation thereof.

In order to boost agricultural production, it becomes imperative to provide women farmers with resources that would enhance their productivity. This assertion was subscribed to by Olawoye (1989:77) who expressed the opinion that, due to the important roles that women farmers play in the supply of labour for production, processing and distribution of food crops, they must have greater access to those resources necessary for agricultural production.

It is imperative to note that productive resources in modern times goes beyond factors such as land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship but include a factor such as information. This is because information is regarded as a vital resource in the production process and becomes intuitively plausible in this age of global information and communication flow (Buckland, 1991:51).

Agricultural information dissemination certainly becomes crucial to the agricultural productivity of farmers, learning about those production and other aspects that they were not aware of, which can possibly lead to improved production. It is on this premise that the assumptions that access to agricultural information by women farmers at the right time would enable them to carry out the production activities in a better way. This would lead to a better and efficient management of other resources which would lead to increased agricultural productivity.

Based on the foregoing, this study would specifically:

- Determine the personal characteristics (age and educational qualification) of the women farmers.
- Ascertain the sources of agricultural information that have met their needs.
- Investigate women farmers' access to agricultural information.

2. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- Determine any relationship between the personal characteristics of the respondents and their access to agricultural information.
- Determine the relationship between sources of agricultural information and accessibility to agricultural information by the women farmers.

3. PROCEDURE

The study was conducted in the Southern part of Nigeria, with Ondo, Delta, Ogun and Oyo States being randomly selected from eight states. A total of 347 women farmers were randomly selected from the sampling frame of women farmers, duly registered with the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP) in each of the chosen states. A well – structured interview schedule was used to elicit response from the women farmers after it was content and face validated. Also, a reliability test using the split – half reliability test was conducted and a coefficient of $r = 0.75$ obtained. An item analysis was also conducted with items having a low correlation coefficient ($r < 0.48$) being discarded. Accessibility to agricultural information was ascertained using a 4 – point rating scale of always = 3, sometimes = 2, rarely = 1 and never = 0. A list of agricultural information categorized into technical, economic and legal information was used. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means, chi square and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Personal characteristics of women farmers

Information with regard to two personal characteristics (independent variables) namely age and educational qualification has been determined. Table 1 indicates that 43.3% of the women farmers are between the ages of 41 and 50 years, while 26.4% are between 31 and 40 years. This finding is similar to an earlier finding by Yahaya (2002:20) who reported that active women farmers are mostly below the age of 50 years. Table 1 further indicates that 47.8% of the women farmers do not

have formal education, while 28.0% have up to primary level education. This indicates a low level of education among the respondents.

Table 1: Distribution of Women Farmers Personal Characteristics

Personal Variables	Frequencies	Percentages
Age (years)		
Categories:		
Below 30	11	3.1
31 – 40	92	26.4
41 – 50	150	43.3
51 -60	90	26.0
Above 60	4	1.2
Total	347	100.0
Educational qualification		
Categories:		
No formal education	166	47.8
Primary	97	28.0
Secondary	62	17.9
OND/NCE	19	5.5
B.Sc/HND	3	0.9
Total	347	100.0

4.2 Sources of agricultural information

The sources of information that the women farmers consider to have met their needs for agricultural information are being indicated on Table 2. The results reveal that women farmers' agricultural information needs are mainly met by extension agents (90.5%), fellow women farmers (73.8%) neighbours/ friends (70.9%) and radio (63.8%). This finding confirms previous findings by Obeta and Nwagbo (1991:231) that these sources are the major sources of information to farmers.

4.3 Access to technical agricultural information

Table 3 reveals women farmers accessibility to technical agricultural information. According to Table 3, the following technical information were readily accessible: improved seeds/seedlings ($\bar{x} = 2.59$), storage

Table 2: Sources of information that have met women farmers information needs

Sources	Yes	No
Fellow women	256 (73.8)	91 (26.2)
Extension agents	314 (90.5)	33 (9.5)
Neighbours/Friends	246 (70.9)	101 (29.1)
Radio	219 (63.1)	128 (36.9)
Television	87 (25.1)	260 (74.9)
Newspapers	34 (9.8)	313 (90.2)
Posters/Bulletins	32 (9.2)	315 (90.8)
Commercial agents	25 (7.2)	322 (92.8)
Others	5 (1.4)	342 (98.6)

Table 3: Women farmers' access to technical information

Technical information	Means	Standard deviation	Rank order
Improved seeds/seedlings	2.59	0.87	1
Storage methods	2.44	0.96	2
Disease and pest control	2.42	0.93	3
Processing agric. Produce	2.42	0.99	3
Crop combination	2.36	1.05	5
Fertilizer application	2.21	0.98	6
Harvesting techniques	2.09	1.06	7
Soil management	1.88	1.09	8
Disease and pest control in livestock	1.81	1.27	9
Livestock breeding	1.61	1.20	10
Housing of livestock	1.58	1.23	11
Agro forestry	1.15	1.24	12
Processing of animal products and by-products	1.81	1.11	13
Handicraft making	0.77	1.09	14
Weather forecast	0.68	0.95	15
Operating farm machinery	0.49	0.91	16

Scale: Always=3, Sometimes=2, Rarely=1, Never=0.

methods (\bar{x} 2.44), processing of agricultural produce and disease and pest control (\bar{x} = 2.42), crop combination (\bar{x} = 2.36) and fertilizer

application ($\bar{x} = 2.21$) respectively. Findings further reveals that access to information on farm machinery ($\bar{x} = 0.46$), weather forecast ($\bar{x} = 0.68$) and handicraft ($\bar{x} = 0.77$) were very limited. Saidu (1992:82) had earlier posited that extension programmes in Nigeria are crop bias and this probably explains why the women farmers are mostly accessible to this type of information.

4.4 Access to agricultural economic information

Table 4 reveals women farmers accessibility to agricultural economic information namely market locations ($\bar{x} = 2.40$), current market prices ($\bar{x} = 2.38$) and cooperative associations ($\bar{x} = 2.06$). Olowu and Oyedokun (1999:109) had reported a similar pattern that farmers were accessible to information about marketing outlets and locations via listening to a particular radio programme.

Table 4: Women farmers' access to economic information

Economic information	Means	Standard deviation	Rank order
Market locations	2.40	1.03	1
Current market prices	2.38	1.05	2
Cooperative association	2.06	1.81	3
Labour availability	1.93	1.11	4
Procedure for profit maximization	1.84	1.16	5
Income generating activities	1.83	1.21	6
Advs of selling beyond farm gate	1.76	1.17	7
Future market prices	1.57	1.29	8
Stock record keeping	1.48	1.21	9
Credit sources	1.46	1.09	10
Procedure for credit procurement	1.29	1.18	11
Adult literacy	1.21	1.22	12
Credit management	1.06	1.16	13
Risk management in agric.	1.05	1.13	14
Budgeting methods	0.94	1.23	15
Agric. insurance	0.54	0.94	16
Pricing export produce	0.34	0.86	17
Exporting procedure	0.22	0.68	18

Scale: Always=3, Sometimes=2, Rarely=1, Never=0.

Findings further reveal that many of the women farmers had low access to information on exporting procedure ($\bar{x} = 0.22$), pricing export produce ($\bar{x} = 0.34$) and agricultural insurance ($\bar{x} = 0.54$). This finding may be linked to assertions made by Olawoye (1989:79) that women farmers are mainly subsistence farmers and that they are not mainly involved in cash crop production. This could be an explanation why they are not accessible to information on the exporting of farm product.

4.5 Relationship between personal characteristics of women farmers and access to agricultural information.

Table 5 reveals that there is a significant relationship between the age of women farmers and their access to agricultural information ($\chi^2 = 12.71$; $p < 0.05$). This is an inverse relationship because younger women farmers indicated higher access to agricultural information when compared to the older women farmers. Obeta and Nwagbo (1991:235) reported a similar trend in the adoption of improved cassava technology among crop farmers in Anambra State. Furthermore, Table 5 shows that there is no significant relationship between the educational status of women farmers and access to agricultural information ($\chi^2 = 0.77$; $p > 0.05$). It was envisaged that there would be a significant relationship between educational status and access to agricultural information, but the findings of this study indicates the contrary. The fact is that 90.5% of women farmers (Table 2) consider extension agents as their main source of agricultural information and that educational status did not pose a barrier between these farmers and their contact with extension agents. It should however be mentioned that fellow women and neighbours/friends also played important roles as sources of information where educational status would not really matter.

Table 5: Relationship between women farmers' personal characteristics and access to agricultural information

Variables	χ^2	df	P	Contingency coefficient	Decision
Age	12.71	1	0.00	0.194	Significant
Educational status	0.77	1	0.37	0.065	Not significant

4.6 Relationship between sources of information and access to agricultural information

According to Table 6, there is a significant relationship between the sources of information that the women farmers were exposed to and their accessibility to agricultural information ($r = 0.25$; $p < 0.05$). This finding is expected because the source of information would certainly affect the type of information reaching the respondents.

Table 6: Correlation analysis of sources of information and access to agricultural information

Variables	R	P level	Decision
Sources of information and access to agricultural information	0.25	0.05	Significant

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study reveals that the main sources of information to women farmers are extension agents, fellow farmers, neighbours/friends and radio. Furthermore, women farmers were more accessible to the following technical information: improved seeds, storage methods, diseases and pest control, processing agricultural produce, crop combination and fertilizer application, but were less accessible to information on farm machinery and weather forecast. As regards access to economic information, women farmers were more accessible to the following information: market locations, current market prices and cooperative association, but had limited access to information on exporting procedure, pricing export produce and agricultural insurance. A positive relationship exists between the sources of information and accessibility by women farmers. It is therefore recommended that a combination of these sources is always used in agricultural information dissemination to women farmers. Also, information that may improve the economic base of women farmers such as agricultural insurance, exporting procedures and government regulations should be incorporated into extension packages directed at women farmers.

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