

Farmers' and traders' sources of market information in Lira district

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Abstract

A baseline study was one of the first activities of a research project on 'Decentralised Market Information Services in Lira District, Uganda'. Using the Sustainable Livelihoods approach as an entry point, data collection included both PRA techniques and questionnaire surveys. About 70% of farmer households in Lira District own a radio and in most cases it is working. Women generally said that they listen to the radio when their husbands are listening, a fact that limits the potential for programmes specifically targeting women. Good reception and good programmes are the main reasons why certain radio stations are preferred. News, announcements, educational / development programmes, and early morning / gospel programmes are the radio programmes favoured in rural communities. Family/neighbours/friends, Radio Lira (RL) market news, and traders are the main sources of market information for farmers. Suggestions concerning improvements of the RL Market News programme include the following: better coverage of community markets, broadcasting the programme more often (i.e. repetition), involvement of villagers / communities in the programme, more information on crop production, group formation, and crop storage. Information requirements expressed by traders during the survey are mainly related to market prices, and demand and supply. Other categories indicated include information on availability and conditions of credit, processing equipment (cost and availability), crop production forecasts, taxation matters, and other local government issues. When asked for their main sources of general information, traders indicated radio, other traders, family/neighbours/friends, newspapers, extension officers, and local government representatives as the main sources. The results of the baseline survey were used for the development of a series of 'radio spots' on collective marketing by farmer groups, and a related manual for extension and NGO staff. Both means of communication are being tested in rural communities.

Key words: Group marketing, rural radio, livelihood Uganda

Introduction

Lack of market information has been identified as one of the key constraints to farmers' access to marketing opportunities in Uganda (Kleih et al, 1999; Foodnet and NRI, 2002). This paper is based on information which has been collected for the baseline study of the research project 'Decentralised Market Information Services in Lira District, Uganda' (Janowski et al, 2003). The latter is a two-year project (2003/04) funded by the DFID Crop Post-Harvest Research Programme, which tries to test a model of improved access to market information in rural communities.

The objective of the study was to gain a better understanding of farmers' and traders' livelihoods, and their needs and sources of information, in both general terms and related to marketing. In particular, the assessment was expected to shed light on the impact of the Radio Lira market news programme and provide guidance on how the programme could be strengthened in terms of contents and presentation. A manual and radio programme on farmer group marketing was subsequently produced with the intention of testing it in Lira District prior to wider dissemination.

Methodology

The survey took place in February and March 2003 in five sub-counties of Lira District, namely Adwari, Aloi, Ogur, Bata, and Namasale. These sub-counties were chosen at a project inception workshop in January 2003, based on selection criteria such as crops grown, the presence or absence of NAADS, and varying distance to markets of different sizes.

The methodology used the Sustainable Livelihoods approach as an entry point, focusing on human capital in the context of information requirements, and social capital in the context of farmer group formation. Data collection tools included a combination of common PRA techniques (e.g. semi-structured interviews and participatory mapping in a group context and on individual basis), and questionnaire surveys with 175 farmers and 56 traders. The computer programmes used for data processing and analysis included MS Access, SPSS, and MS Excel.

Results

Farmers' and Traders' Livelihoods

Only selected livelihoods issues that are directly related to the topic will be presented here. As far as education is concerned, two points can be made: men have a significantly higher level of education and functional literacy than women; and very few farmers, either men or women, know enough English to listen to radio broadcasts in English. For example, according to the PRA groups in Bata, 40% of women and 60% of men have primary education, and functional literacy is at 10% of women and 40% of men. Only 5% of women and 25% of men have enough English to listen to radio programmes in English. In Namasale, 30% of women and 40% of men have primary education, and functional literacy is 10% of women and 30% of men. 5% of women and 20% of men have enough English to listen to radio programmes in English.

Figure 1 shows the results of the questionnaire survey as far as farmers' education levels are concerned. 55.4% of the household heads interviewed have primary education, followed by secondary education (27.7%), no education (12.2%) and tertiary education (4.7%).

Lira is a predominantly rural district, and livelihoods reflect the Lango farming system, which is based on crop production and livestock rearing. The area planted by farmers is considerably less than the actual farm size. The latter is on average between six to eight acres (with the exception of Ogur where it is about 4.2 acres), whilst the area cultivated is of the order of two to three acres for both first and second rainy season respectively.

Approximately 60% of households owned cattle, 70% owned goats, and 70% owned poultry at the time of the survey (March 2003). Livestock numbers in the District have been seriously depleted in recent times due to cattle raiders and insurgents, which in turn has negatively affected household savings.

In all sub-counties, subsistence agriculture plays an important part in people's livelihoods, with little reliance on activities other than farming. Intercropping is very common and a wide variety of crops is grown, including maize, millet, sorghum, beans, peas, cotton, sunflower, sim-sim (sesame), groundnut, soyabeans, rice, cassava, and sweet potato. Fish has been included amongst the commodities analysed due to the importance of fish catching on Lake Kyoga.

According to PRA group discussions there are no crops which are grown purely by men or women. However, men tend to have more interest in crops which can be sold easily while women are interested in crops which can be consumed at home. In light of this, most of the food crops are produced for both home consumption and cash. Sunflower, maize, cotton, sim-sim and beans are the dominant cash crops in the District. The quantities sold by households are relatively small, i.e. mostly below 800kg per crop per annum.

The main locations for selling agricultural produce include community markets, the farm-gate, and trading centres. Local village traders, local consumers, and agents of private companies are the main buyers of farm produce in the villages. Selling to non-local traders is less common. Relatively few farmers go to Lira town to sell their produce there, mostly due to lack of transport but also because of market fees that are perceived as high. The main means of transport of crops for sale is on foot or by bicycle, which limits the distance that individuals can go.

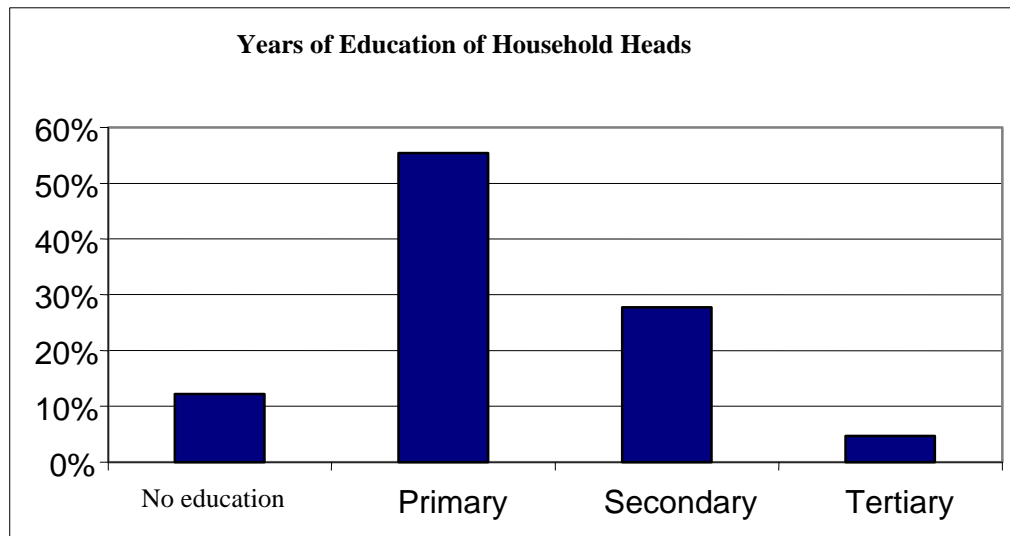
In addition to the farmer household survey a separate questionnaire survey was carried out with 56 traders in the same sub-counties. The majority of the traders interviewed are small-scale operators that can fulfil different roles in the marketing chain depending on the season and circumstances (i.e. middlemen, small-scale wholesalers, retailers). Two interviewees are involved in grain milling or processing of oilseeds. About two thirds of the traders interviewed (i.e. 63%) were owners of the enterprise whilst the others were employees. 84% of the interviewees were male. A large proportion (i.e. 40%) of the trading enterprises are relatively young (i.e. founded after 2000), whilst 36% were founded between 1996 and 2000, 10% between 1990 and 1995, and only 14% were older than that.

Reflecting their small scale of operation (i.e. mostly below 10 tonnes per annum), the majority of traders interviewed sell most of their produce within Lira District (i.e. 93%) or in other Districts (29%). Only few of the traders sell in Kampala or in neighbouring countries (i.e. 7% each). 38% of traders belong to associations such as Lira Produce Buyers and General Traders (LPBGT) Ltd, Uganda Oilseed Producers and Processors Association (UOSPA), or Agweng Development Association.

Farmers' Information Needs

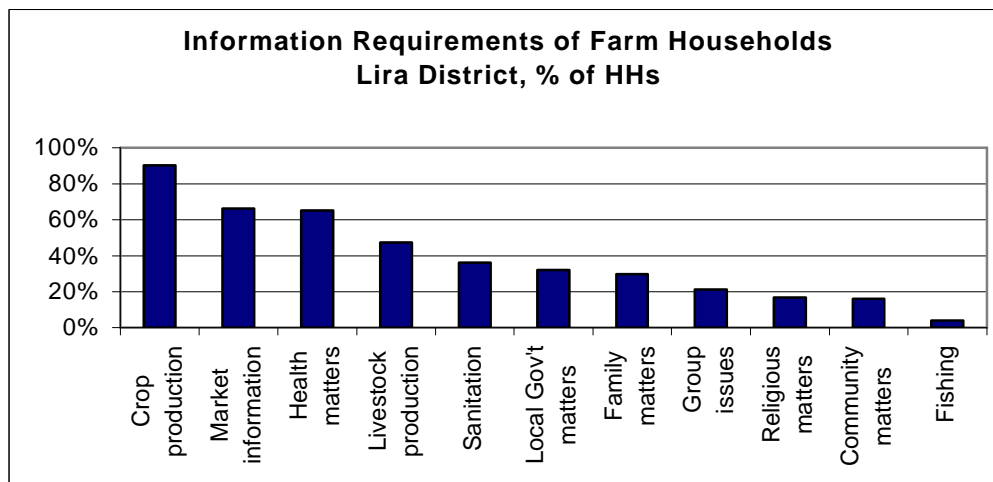
Crop production (90.3%), market information (66.3%), health matters (65.1%) and livestock production (47.4%) are the main topics on which farmers requested information during the questionnaire survey (Figure 2). Other topics indicated include, sanitation (36.0%), Local Government matters (32%), family matters (29.7%), group issues (21.1%), religious matters (16.6%), community matters (16.0%), and fishing (4%).

While, according to the PRA, in some areas men and women expressed similar information needs, in others there were differences. For example, in Ogur, men expressed interest in farming, markets and prices, community matters, children rights, and post-harvest control. On the other hand, women of that sub-county stated information on farming practices, health and sanitation, family planning, immunisation, child nutrition, and post-harvest control as their priorities.



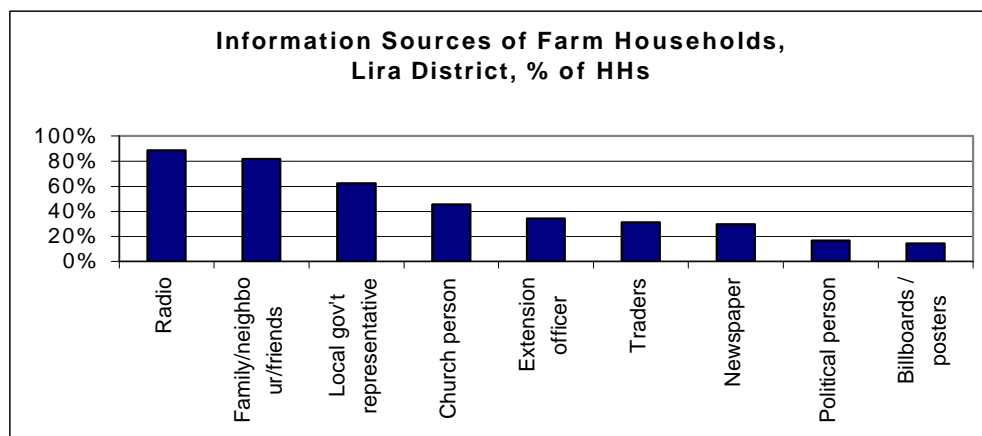
Source: Farmer household questionnaire survey, Lira District

Figure 1

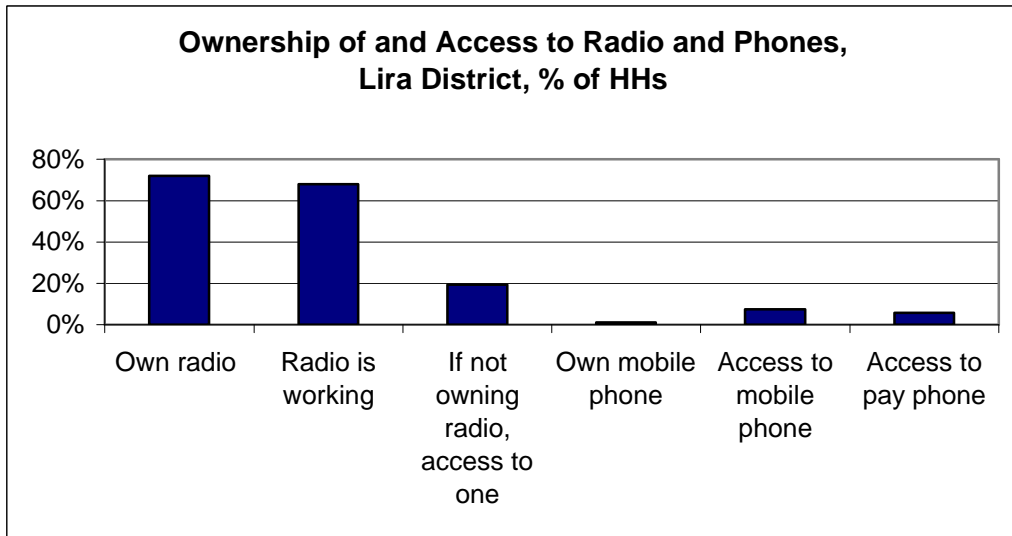


Source: Farmer Household Questionnaire Survey, Lira District

Figure 2

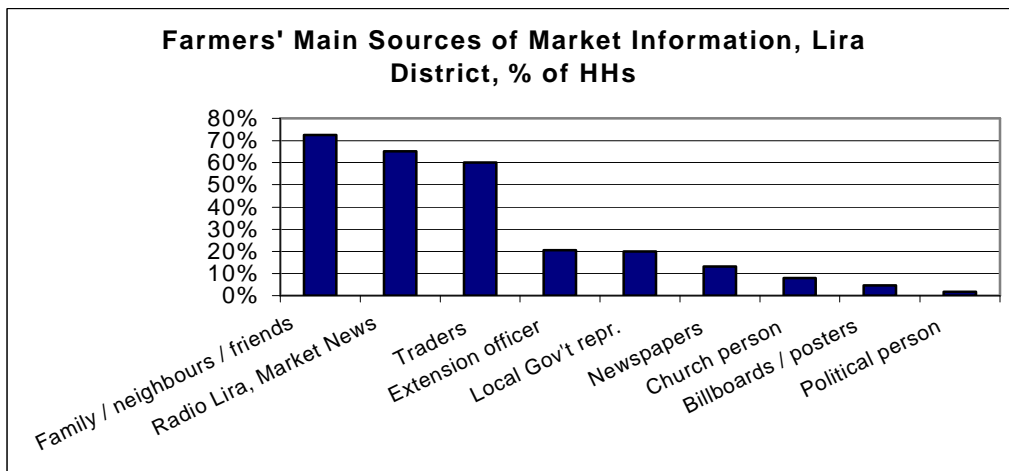


Source: Farmer Questionnaire Survey, Lira District



Source: Farmer Questionnaire Survey, Lira District

Figure 4



Source: Farmer Questionnaire Survey

Figure 5

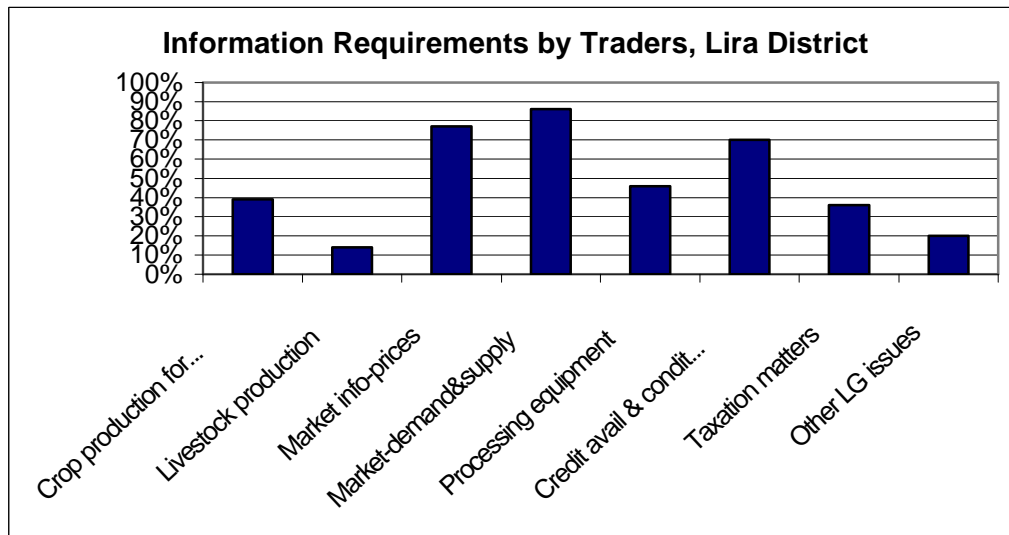
Farmers' Information Sources

The sources used for general information reported through the PRA included family, neighbours and friends; radio; local officials and leaders, including church leaders; traders; political gatherings and group meetings; and to some extent newspapers. Mobile phones are insignificant as a source of information, since there is nil or almost nil ownership or access to them on the part of PRA participants.

According to the questionnaire survey (Figure 3), radio (88.6%) is the most important source of information for the farmers followed by family / friends / neighbours (81.7%), local Gov't representative (62.3%), and church

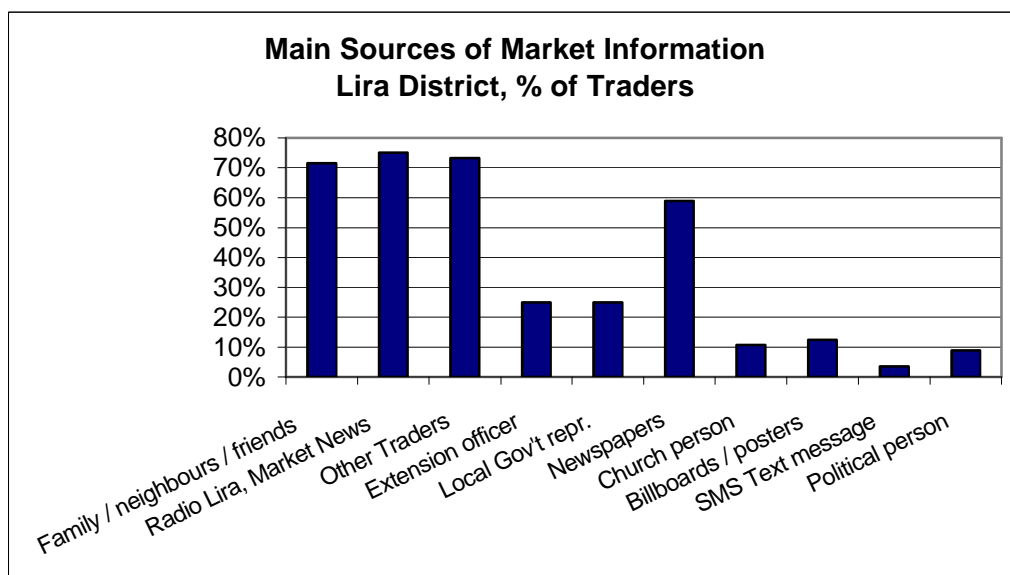
person (45.7%). Extension officers (34.3%), traders (31.4%), newspapers (29.7%), political persons (16.6%), and billboards / posters (14.3%) are relatively less important for farmers as a source of general information.

Radio was found to be an important medium of information flow in all of the sub-counties. The view was that a popular radio programme was a good way of transmitting new information on agriculture, complemented by an effective extension service. During the course of the PRAs, it was found that radios are usually owned by men, and they listen to it more than women. Women generally said that they listen to the radio when their husbands are



Source: Trader Questionnaire Survey

Figure 6



Source: Trader Questionnaire Survey

Figure 7

listening. This limits the potential for programmes which specifically target women, since their husbands may not want to listen to these.

In their survey of farmers' sources of information, Campbell and Garforth (2001) found that listening to radio was by far the most frequently mentioned communication channel (i.e., 89% of respondents from subsistence farming households and 98% of semi-commercial and commercial farmers, respectively).

According to Turrall *et al* (2002), radio is adequate for raising awareness but has limitations when used for education and training purposes due to low ownership,

language problems, and the nature of the interface. The same source (Turrall *et al*, *ibid*) suggests that written materials, visual dissemination, and radio all have limited effectiveness for up-taking research technologies, and that a multi-media approach to dissemination reinforces lessons learnt.

Figure 4 indicates that about 70% of farmer households in Lira District own a radio and in most cases it is working. 20% of households indicated that they do not own a radio but had access to one if required. As already indicated, access to mobile or pay phones is very low.

Rural households prefer early evening (6 – 8pm), early morning (5-9am), and noon (12 – 2 pm) as the preferred times for listening to the radio (all 55% to 60%; multiple answers were possible). ‘Good reception’ (48.0%) and ‘good programmes’ (37.7%) are the main reasons why certain stations are preferred. Other aspects such as ‘good presenters’ (2.9%) were given less importance.

At the time of the survey (i.e. March 2003), Radio Lira was the radio station preferred by the majority of the rural population in Lira (83%), followed by Radio Rhino (63%), Radio Uganda (35%), Radio Unity (17%), and several stations for which less than 10% of the interviewees opted (i.e. multiple answers were possible). It ought to be mentioned that Radio Wa was defunct at the time of the survey.

Newspaper coverage is very low throughout the district. In Bata, for example, the PRA found that the supply of newspapers is unreliable and newspapers were said to be bought only by teachers and local leaders. The local newspaper, *Rupiny*, comes into the villages late, while *New Vision* and other papers are only ever to be seen at the trading centre and the primary schools. Women were rarely reported to read newspapers, their low level of functional literacy being a likely contributory factor.

Field studies carried out by Bagnall-Oakeley and Ocilaje (2002) in Lira and Soroti districts, “*revealed considerable differences in the number and quality of information sources between differing wealth groups, but not much difference between farmers in the ‘poor men’ and ‘poor women’ groupings: The poorest groups obtained most of their agricultural information from farmer-farmer sources (other farmers and neighbours, family, friends and ‘contact farmers’), whilst the middle and wealthy groups obtained more information from local government sources, public extension, agri-business sources and NGOs. The more wealthy groups tend to discount farmer-farmer information sources as not always reliable.*”

Asked for their preferred type of radio programme, farmers indicated news, announcements, educational / development programmes, and early morning shows/ gospel programmes. This was followed by talk-shows, greetings, music and drama.

Farmers’ Sources of Market Information

Figure 5 shows the principal sources of market information for farmers in Lira according to the questionnaire survey, i.e. mainly family / neighbours / friends (72.6%), Radio Lira Market News (65.1%), and traders (60.0). Extension officers (20.6%), Local Government representatives (20.0%), newspapers (13.1%), church persons (8.0%), billboards / posters (4.6%), and political persons (1.7%) are comparatively less important.

About a third of Lira’s rural population listen to Radio Lira (RL) Market News more than once per week, and a quarter once per week. A few farmers (i.e. about 5%) listen to it once every two weeks or once every month.

Approximately 37% either never listen to it or did not give an answer.

Since 2000, Radio Lira’s Market News programme is supported by Foodnet, which forms part of the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (Okoboi and Ferris, 2000; Ferris and Robbins 1999). On the one hand, the presenter of the Market News programme collects local market information and sends it to Foodnet in Kampala for processing and analysis. On the other hand, Foodnet supply him with country-wide market information for dissemination through twice-weekly 30-minute radio slots.

Out of the total population sampled for the questionnaire survey, about half found the Radio Lira (RL) Market News programme useful (i.e. more or less equally split between very useful and moderately useful) whilst the remainder either did not find it useful (12%) or did not give a response, most probably because they do not listen to the programme owing to the reasons explained above. Regarding the reliability of the RL market news programme, similar proportions were obtained.

When asked about the impact of the RL Market News programme, 12% of the total sample said that it had “a lot of impact”, 29% said “some impact”, 16% indicated “no impact at all”, and 43% gave no response. As for the type of impact of this programme, about 25% of households said that it has allowed them to negotiate a higher price in the local market, 24% indicated that they went to another market to obtain a higher price, 17% said that they stored the produce until the price went up and then sold it. 13% of farmers planted a different crop which fetched a better price, and 14% grew a crop which produced a higher yield, as a result of the programme. It is worthwhile noting that multiple answers were possible to this question.

Traders’ Information Needs

Unsurprisingly, traders’ information requirements as expressed during the survey are mainly related to market prices, and demand & supply. Other categories indicated include information on availability and conditions of credit, processing equipment (cost and availability), crop production forecasts, taxation matters, and other local government issues. Traders in Lira complain about high local council taxes.

When asked for their main sources of general information, traders indicated radio, other traders, family/ neighbours/friends, newspaper, neighbours, extension officers, and local government representatives as the main sources. Over 80% of traders reported owning a radio receiver that is in working condition. 20% of interviewees own a mobile phone, and 21% indicated having access to a mobile phone whilst not owning one. 27% have access to a pay phone.

Traders interviewed (most of whom are male) stated that early evening is their preferred time to listen to the radio, followed by noon, early morning, and late evening.

As for their preferred radio stations they stated Radio Lira, followed by Radio Rhino, Radio Uganda, and Radio Unity. As already mentioned, Radio Wa was not functioning when the survey was conducted (i.e. March 2003).

According to traders, their preferred radio programmes include news, announcements, educational / development programmes, and early morning shows / gospel. Talk shows, greetings, music, and drama were given less importance.

Traders' Sources of Market Information

Traders' main sources of market information include Radio Lira's Market News Programme (75%), other traders, family / neighbours / friends, and newspapers.

The local language weekly, Rupiny, is the newspaper mostly read by traders (41%), followed by New Vision, and the Monitor. Interestingly, the use of the Market Focus and Weekly AD is negligible as a source of market information for traders. It is important to bear in mind that not all traders read newspapers (i.e. slightly less than 60%), and quite a few of those who do read more than one. The majority of the traders stated that they read the papers on a weekly basis (i.e. once or twice a week), rather than on a daily or monthly basis.

When asked about the frequency of listening to Radio Lira Market News, the majority of traders stated that they either listen to the programme once a week, or more than once a week. In this context, it is important to recall that it is currently broadcast twice per week. As for the usefulness of the programme, most of the traders stated that it was either moderately useful (43%), or very useful (27%). The remainder of the sample (i.e. 30%) either said that it was not useful or did not give an answer.

Concerning the reliability of the Radio Lira Market News programme, 38% stated that it was moderately reliable, while 27% considered it to be very reliable (Chart 46). Compared to this, 43% of traders said the programme had some impact, and 11% said it had a lot of impact on their business.

Those traders who said the programme had an impact on their business were also asked about the type of impact it had (Chart 48). 41% of the traders said it had helped them to negotiate a better price, 29% stated they went to another market and obtained a higher price, and 23% indicated they stored the produce until the price went up and then sold it.

Discussion

The findings of the PRA and questionnaire survey clearly demonstrate the importance of rural radio as a communication tool in the context of agricultural production and marketing in Northern Uganda. Both, farmers and traders in Lira District use it on a regular basis to access general and marketing related information.

Nevertheless, there are also limiting factors that need to be taken into account when promoting rural radio as a means to improve rural livelihoods. On the one hand, not all farmers are able to make use of information - marketing related or otherwise. On the other hand, radio is only one means of communication – albeit an important one – amongst several others. As a result, a multi media approach should be considered whereby targeted radio programmes are combined with other extension tools.

At the same time, during the course of the baseline survey and subsequent meetings by local project partners a series of suggestions were made as to how rural radio broadcasting and the Radio Lira Market News programmes could be improved. The following provides an overview of the suggestions and recommendations made:

1. It was recommended to advertise the times and days of broadcast.
2. Most farmers suggested changing the time of broadcast to between 7 and 9 p.m., which is when farmers are home and can listen to the radio. However in some sub-counties 1-2 p.m. and 5-9 p.m. were suggested.
3. The programme should be longer (e.g. 45-60 minutes) and broadcast more often (e.g. three times per week).
4. There should be more involvement of people in the sub-counties and programmes should be tailored to community needs. For example, it was suggested that farmers should participate themselves in the programmes through talk shows, phone-ins and through sending in questions about matters which affect them, with answers being provided by specialists. It was also suggested that local radio agents could be appointed to link communities to the station.
5. Linkages with the District Production Department and sub-counties should be improved in order to get detailed market and production estimates for each commodity
6. The programme should be presented in both English and Luo, and presentation could be improved
7. The programme could be broadcast on other radio stations as well, in particular if it cannot be received in all parts of the District.
8. Price quotations should be for markets in rural areas and for local produce
9. Information and advice on the formation of farmer groups could be included
10. In addition to addition to market information, the programme should provide information on other agricultural matters such as crop production, storage, transport, livestock production, credit schemes, and business skills.

Figure 7 provides the results from the questionnaire survey as far as suggestions are concerned regarding improvements to the RL Market News programme. The main points include, coverage of community markets, broadcasting the programme more often (i.e. repetition), involvement of villagers / communities in the programme, more information on crop production, group formation, and crop storage.

Suggestions made by traders for improvements of Radio Lira's Market News programme include:

- a). more information on cost and availability of transport,
 - b). more information on cost and availability of processing equipment,
 - c). more reliable and precise information,
 - d). coverage of more markets, and
 - e). more involvement of business people in the programme.
- Other suggestions made by traders include, more repetitions of the programme, better timing of the broadcasts, more information on crop production and storage, and more information on the formation of farmer groups.

The results of the baseline survey and the recommendations by farmers and traders were used to improve the Radio Lira Market News programme and produce a manual for extension and NGO staff on collective marketing. The latter was subsequently used for the development of a series of 'radio spots' on collective marketing by farmer groups, and a related manual for extension and NGO staff. Both means of communication are being tested in rural communities.

Conclusion

Livelihoods in Lira District are predominantly agriculture based, and quantities of agricultural produce marketed by farmers are relatively small. Men have a significantly higher level of education and functional literacy than women; and very few farmers, either men or women, know enough English to listen to radio broadcasts in English.

Rural radio has been identified as an important source of information in terms of both general information and marketing related matters. Nevertheless, despite the relatively high listenership of farmer households and traders alike, there are a number of areas where improvements can be made. Also, rural radio should be seen as one source of information amongst several others, and further research is required into the effectiveness of combining rural radio with other communication tools.

For example, the usefulness of combining the broadcasting of radio spots on farmer group marketing and training in rural communities will be tested as part of the research project 'Decentralised Market Information Services in Lira District'. Also, the benefits of combining rural radio with other ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) such as internet and mobile telephony (e.g. SMS) merit further investigation.

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