

INFORMATION NEEDS OF FARMERS IN SONG LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ADAMAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Information plays a vital role in agricultural development; for the agricultural sector to be fully developed and for the agricultural innovation to reach the rural farming households, appropriately and timely information need to be comprehensively deployed to the farmers. The study sought to explore the information needs of farmers in Song Local Government Area. Specifically, the study identified respondents' socio economic characteristics, information needs, sources of information and the challenges experienced in accessing the needed information. The sampling technique used was multistage, the sample size is 150, primary and secondary source of data collection was employed. Descriptive statistic was used. Result reveals that majority (64%) of the respondents were within the age of 28-37years and were in their active age range. Almost one third (30.7%) of the respondents had no formal education, (48.7%) had primary education. Majority (60.7%) of the respondents were male, 56.7% were married, 26.0% were widows/widowers and 17.3% were single. All the respondents (150) reported that they need information on agricultural input regularly, 125 said they need information on agricultural credit regularly, 130 said they needed information on health regularly while 93 reported that they need information on agricultural marketing regularly. Information to be disseminated to rural farmers should be timely and those that will be relevant and pertinent to their agricultural activities. Also, the development of environmental messages to create public awareness campaigns through the use of radio messages and posters should be enhanced.

Key Words: Information Needs, Song Local Government Area, Rural Farming Household

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is a sector that relies heavily on timely and appropriate information dissimulation in order to thrive; the sector depends on continuous flow of innovative information on improved practices. Aina (1991) and Kaniki (1995) opined that each agricultural information user usually have specific information needs based on their peculiarity. Some farmers need information such as sources of credit facilities, issues on land-ownership and marketing of agricultural produce.

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2001), reported that in most developing countries, the wide adaptations of research results by majority of the farmers are limited and this is attributed to inadequate flow of information to the farmers especially those living in the rural areas. The role of information in improving agricultural development cannot be over emphasized because information is vital for increasing food production, improving marketing and distribution (Oladele, 2006). In this present information age, it is knowledge that has been accumulated and applied that will drive development and create unique prospects for economic growth and for poverty decline.

Information is viewed as a tool for individual or societal development. Iwe (2003) is of the view that information as an important input in rural development programmes. The performance of the agricultural sector in Nigeria is unsatisfactory, and one of the reasons is the low level of information among agricultural scientists in the country, lack of free access to electronic technology and ineffective use of libraries. According to Saleh and Lasisi (2011), information is classified into agricultural, educational economics, health, political, among other classifications. They also said that the information need of the farmers are not the same but varies base on the environment, sex, educational level, and most importantly, it is based on the agricultural activities of the farmers.

In the study of macro level of the role played by the mass media in promoting social change and development, it was found out that in most respects, mass communication was a far less important source of information and influence than interpersonal communication in the adoption of new agricultural and health practices. Also in stressing the importance of interpersonal traditional media in rural development, Ugboajah (1986) points out that radio are more appropriate and important for the oral and communalistic cultures of rural dwellers in Africa, sources of political information among rural community in Nigeria, Okigbo (1990) found that radio was the highest source of information, when compared with other sources as relatives, traditional rulers, political candidates and other means of communication. It is worthy to note that the findings also showed that radio was closely followed in importance by relatives as a source of information. Okigbo's findings are similar to those of Sobowale and Sogbanmu (1984) in their study of innovation adoption among rural fishermen in Nigeria. The findings also showed the importance of interpersonal communication sources, which are extension workers and relatives. This complementarily between mass media and interpersonal channels as sources of information for rural population was also demonstrated in Fisher's (1990) study of community radio as a tool for development.

Statement of Problem

Even though agriculture is the main stead of the Nigeria economic, information that is needed to improve the sector and bring about increase in food productions is in most cases not made available to those that need it in order to improve production, research result that are to be make available to the rural farmers do not get to them and even when it does, it gets to them late and distorted, also the extension agents who are saddle with the responsibility of taking information to the rural farmers are found wanting, though it is said that information is power, it is worthless and cannot solve problems if it is not used or

applied effectively. So the question here is how will the farmers use information that is not available to them? It is against this background that the study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What were the socio economic characteristics of the famers in the study area?
2. What was the information needs of the respondents?
3. What were respondents' sources of agricultural information?
4. What challenges did the respondents experienced in accessing information they needed?

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study was to assess the information needs of farmers in Song Local Government Area. Specifically:

- i. identify the socio economic characteristics of the respondents ;
- ii. identify respondents' information needs;
- iii. assess respondents' sources of agricultural information; and
- iv. identify the challenges respondents experienced in accessing agricultural information they needed

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Song Local Government is located on longitude 12° 35' E to 12° 41'E and latitude 9 44' to 10 ° 12' N of the equator. It shares boundaries with Gombi to the East, Maiha Local Government Area to the South-east, Girei and Fofure local government to the West and Shelleng to the North, (Adebayo, 1999).

The vegetative cover of the area is characterized with Guinea Savannah which consists of mainly trees, shrubs and grasses. The area has a warm climatic condition throughout the year with an annual average temperature of 28⁰ C, the hottest month is April with maximum temperature of 40⁰ C as observed by Adebayo, (1999). Song has two distinct seasons which are the dry and the rainy seasons. The rainy seasons is associated with heavy rains and it starts from March to

October while the dry season starts from November to March, during which the harmattan (N.E winds) prevails. The rainfall of 1100mm annually is recorded. The relative humidity varies from 20-30% (low) around January to march and becomes high 80% in August (Adebayo and Tukur, 1999).

The target populations for the study were rural farmers in Adamawa State. Multistage sampling technique was used to draw sample for the study, the following stages was used:

Stage 1: The study area was stratified in to the 11 wards

Stage 2: Random selection of one village from each of the 11 wards

Stage 3: Three unit were selected from each of the selected 11 villages

Stage 4: Some of the farmers were purposefully selected to make up the 150 respondents for the study from the selected unit.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Socio Economic Characteristics

Table 1 shows that majority (64%), of the respondents were within the age range of 28-37 years, this is an indication that majority of the respondents were in their active age with strength and ability to work if the necessary information are made available. The table also shows that almost a third (30.7%) of the respondents has no any formal education, 48.7% attained primary level of education and are mostly illiterates, this means that about 79.4% cannot read and write well. The implication of this is that use of printed media as sources of agricultural information to the respondents are limited and negligible. For this group of farmers the best source of information may be the use of demonstration plots which by design supposed to be carried out by the agricultural extension workers but unfortunately, in recent times, extension workers are not sent to the rural areas. Majority (60.7%) of the respondents were male.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents' Socio-economic Characteristics

Age group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18- 27	22	14.7
28 - 37	96	64.0
38- 47	17	11.3
48-60	15	10.0
Total	150	100
Educational Attainment		
Non formal education	46	30.7
Primary	73	48.7
Sec. School	22	14.6
Tertiary	09	6.0
Total	150	100
Sex		
Male	91	60.7
female	59	39.3
Total	150	100
Marital Status		
Married	85	56.7
Widow/Widower	39	26.0
Single	26	17.3
Total	150	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Respondents' Information Needs,

The results in Table 2, shows that all of the respondents have need for information on how, where and when agricultural inputs (such as improved seeds, fertilizer, herbicide, insecticide) can be available to them. Eighty three percent (83.3%) of the respondents opined they will be informed on where and how they can access agricultural loan to boost their production with little or no interest rate, such respondents will access it and use it to improve on their agricultural production. Also, 9.3% said that, it is not all the time they needed information on credit because it is not always that they needed credit while 7.3% of the respondents did not need any information on credit because even when they get such information, they hardly meet the conditions for getting the loan even if they are interested. On information on agricultural marketing, 62% of the respondents said they needed information on the transport system, daily market price trend which will enable them to know when to sell their farm produce

in order to maximize profit. This is also the view of Olaniyi and Adewale (2014), “having timely and relevant information, especially marketing information on transport availability, new marketing opportunities and the market prices of farm input and output is fundamental to an efficient and productive agricultural economy”.

Majority (86.7%) of the respondents indicated that, they needed information on health and available health service facilities (Table 2). For farmers to be able to produce maximally, they need to be healthy, and hence, there is need for the farmers to be informed on their health status and about health services close to them, because health is wealth.

Table 2 Distribution of Respondents' Information Needs

Type of information needed	Regularly	Sometimes	Not needed
Information on input	150	-	-
Agricultural credit	125	14	11
Agricultural marketing	93	11	46
Health information	130	20	-

Source: field survey 2016

Respondents' Sources of Information

Radio was the channel of information dissemination to most (88.6%) of the respondents (Table 3). This may be for the fact that radio is the major source through which the respondents accessed information. This is also the view of Okigbo (1990) who reported that radio is ranked as the highest source of information, when compared with other sources among rural dwellers in south eastern part of Nigeria. Anifowose (2013) asserted that radio remains a medium of communication usually employed by the development officers or experts for the dissemination of relevant agricultural messages, especially for rural audience. The second major source of information to the rural farmers is friends and family members (72.7%), GSM (49.3%) and Television (35.3%). Information from the newspapers (8.0%) was very low because majority of the rural farmers cannot read very well, this was made clear from the findings of Akeweta, *et al.*, (2018) who

opined that there is a shortcomings of traditional print and library methods in providing such agricultural information to rural farmers who are generally illiterate and relatively remote from sources of information. While only very few (4.0%) accessed information from extension services due to the fact that the extension agents were not readily available.

Majority of the respondents (78%) had low level of information. This results show that most of the farmers were not well informed on ways through which they can improve their agricultural production that explained why their output was low. Even among those that said they had access to information. According to Ugboajah (1986), mass communication was a far less important source of information and influence in the adoption of new agricultural and health practices.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents' sources of information

Channels	F(%) of users
Radio	133 (88.7%)
Extension	6 (0.04%)
Friends & Family	109 (72.7%)
TV	53 (35.3%)
News papers	12 (8.0%)
GSM	74 (49.3%)
Total	387*

Source: field survey 2016

*Multiple responses

Distribution of respondents' challenges experienced in accessing information

Channel through which respondents accessed the needed information were scaled, and messages sent through wrong channels was the major constraint. Some of the information disseminated to the rural communities is in written form, which makes it difficult to access by those with low or no literacy skills. Also, even though radio was the most common source of information available to the respondents, it was not a sufficient source of information because farmers learnt better through demonstration, though radio was easily accessible, it was not considered too good a channel. This finding corroborates Oreglia (2013) who posited that radio was a passive channel for agricultural information

dissemination and was found to be a weak source for agricultural information (Mings *et al.*, 2014). Wrong timing was the second most serious (92.7%) challenge the respondents faced in accessing agricultural information. Most (88%) of the respondents reported that the cost of accessing information through some channels were too high, especially information accessed through radio, Television, phone calls and print materials. Akinola, *et al.*, (2010), concur that the cost of purchasing a radio and television sets, cost of purchasing printed media such as newspapers, magazines, bulletins are factors militating against the effectiveness of mass media communication channels. Electricity poses as the fourth most serious (73.3%) problem of accessing information among the respondents. According to Khan (2010) "Many developing countries also lack sufficient electricity supplies, especially in rural and remote areas. Lack of infrastructural facilities especially electricity is one of the factors militating against the effectiveness of mass media communication channels (Akinola, *et al.*, 2010). The implications of this result is that the needed information do not reach the end users at the right time and in the right form, this will in turn affect the productivity of the farmers.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents challenges faced in accessing information

Challenges	F (%)
Expensive	132 (88%)
Electricity	110 (73.3%)
Wrong timing	139 (92.7%)
Wrong channel	150 (100%)
Accessibility	49 (32.7%)
Total	580*

Source: Field Survey, 2016.

*Multiple responses

Summary and Conclusion

The study shows that majority (64%) of the respondents were in their active age of 38-47 years. Most (30.7%) of the respondents have non-formal education and less than half (48.7%) attained primary school level of education. This result rules out the use of print media as a source of information among the respondents. This finding

appropriates the use of demonstration farms as a viable option information dissemination among the respondents. Information in the rural area is not available due to the fact that extension workers are rarely available especially in recent time, extension workers are not sent to the rural area to educate the farmers. Majority (60.7%) of the respondents were male and 56.7% married.

Challenges faced by respondents include: The cost of purchasing radio and television sets, cost of purchasing print materials such as newspapers, magazines, bulletins as well as insufficient and unstable electricity supply. Also, wrong timing of agricultural programs and low levels of literacy among the farmers were the major factors that affected the respondents' information accessibility.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Since most of the respondents can hardly read, demonstration methods should be used to disseminate information on new agricultural technology to the respondents.
2. The information that will be aired or disseminated to rural farmers should be released on time and be based on their information needs.
3. The extension workers should be trained and re trained, they should also be encouraged to accept posting to rural areas

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