

## INFORMATION NEEDS OF FARMERS: A CASE STUDY OF ESAN WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (EWLGA) OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study assesses the information needs of farmers in Edo State using Esan West Local Government Area as a case study. 150 farmers were originally sampled for this study using the simple random sampling technique, but 132 farmers correctly responded to the questionnaires which were then analyzed using the simple descriptive statistics. The results showed that all the farmers (76.5% male and 23.5% female) in the study area needed information on various issues. Comparatively, 12.9% of farmers needed information on agriculture (e.g. on pesticides, fertilizers, what to plant and how to plant, fund- raising and government assistance), unlike the others (87.1%) who have had access to such information from fellow farmers (37.1%), mass media (23.5%), public enlightenment campaigns (18.2%), and community development services (8.3%). On the other hand, 52.3% of the farmers needed information on health related issues like family planning and the use of contraceptives, while 19.7%, 9.1%, 8.3%, and 6.8%, needed information on economy politics, educational matters, as well as community services. Generally therefore, the findings of this study suggest that adequate information should be made available to farmers in Edo State and the importance of library in this regard, cannot be over emphasized.

**Keywords: Information needs, Farmer, Agriculture, Ekpoma.**

Received: 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2012

Accepted: 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2012

Published: 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2013

### INTRODUCTION

Despite the growth in industries, oil explorations and commerce, the importance of agriculture in the economy of Nigeria remains the principal economic activity of the people. In fact, the Nigeria Millennium Development Report (2004) and the report by Okubanjo (1990), states that about 70% of the Nigerians are engaged in agriculture, of which more than 70% of this population are subsistence farmers. Moreover, the fact that rural dwellers in Nigeria constitutes 70% of the entire Nigerian population when compared to 30% in urban areas (Omopupa, 2006), suggests that there cannot be any meaningful national development without including the rural areas (Momodu, 2012).

Also, apart from its nutritional resources that are vital for a healthy and productive citizenry, Nigeria's rural sector has a number of strategic roles to play in the nation's march towards national development. By implication, Nigeria's economy is inseparably tied to the fortune, or misfortune of the Nigerian non-literate farmers who form the bulk of the rural populace (Issa, 1998).

Surely, Nigeria's need for an improved agricultural production sector, is increasingly becoming more

crucial in the face of a steadily increasing population, a dwindling external reserve, and a global uncertainty about the future of oil - the nation's major foreign exchange earner (Soola, 1988).

In this regards, the Food and Agriculture Organization (1993) suggested that in order to enhance agricultural development, new commodities and new methods of production must be developed. Hence, the obvious need for information to farmers about correct and current trends in an ever changing global society.

Although developing countries of the world may not have come to terms with the reality that information has become the prime commodity of the present age, it is however an established fact amongst developed nations (Issa, 1998). Most importantly, it is now a common-place observation that the material prosperity of a nation is linked almost directly to its information wealth and vice-versa.

Specifically, information has become one of the most important factors of production in the contemporary and emergent global village and it is the single most important factor of production. While Onu (2005) described information as the oil that greases the

wheel of governance, programmes/ activities of government, organizations and individuals, Berezi (1981) averred further that information has been recognized as the fifth factor of production.

In the same vein, Dervin (1995) asserted that information represents an ordered reality about nature of the world people live in, as Mudukuti and Miller (2002) suggested that in the information age, dissemination of information, and applying it in the process of agricultural production, will play a significant role in the development of farm settlements. Yet, it is sad to note that most African countries have not devoted adequate attention to providing their citizens with access to information especially in rural areas, where 70-80% of the African population reside (Youclewei et al., 1996).

Unfortunately, information need is construed in the sense of data or a set of data specially required by the user at any given time, to make appropriate decisions on problems facing him or her (Solomon, 2002). Accordingly several other reporters see information needs of farmers/rural society dwellers, to be classified according to the “agricultural cycle” (Mittal et al., 2010) or the “agricultural value chain” (de Silva and Ratnadiwakara 2008; Ali and Kumar 2011); both of which work through different phases of the farmer’s decision making, especially during a cropping season, acquisition of inputs, production planning, cultivation, harvesting, packing and storing, transportation, and selling.

In addition to production-oriented information, off-farm income-generation options and the implications of changing policies are also important information needs (Van den Ban 1998), as well as information on sustainable natural resource management (Swanson 2008). It is the aim of this study therefore, to assess the information needs of farmers in Edo State with a view to identify the various sources of information, information needs of farmers, and factors affecting their access to the information using Esan West Local Government Area as a case study.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Study area:** Esan West Local Government Area (EWLGA) is one of the 5 local government areas that make up the Esan speaking tribe of central Edo State, Nigeria, with Ekpoma as its administrative head quarters. Esan West Local Government Area lies between latitudes 6° 43' and 6° 45' North of the equator and longitudes 6° 6' and 6° 8' East of the Greenwich Meridian (Aziegbe, 2006). The area has a

population estimate of about 125,842 (63,785 males and 62,057 females) based on the 2006 National census (NPC 2006). The area experiences humid tropical climate characterized by wet and dry seasons.

**Sampling and Sample size:** Five clans known to be predominantly farmers in the LGA were selected for this study and they were Agoro-namede, Agoro-Naoka, Emuhi, Farm settlement, and Urohi.

A simple random sampling technique was then used to select thirty respondents within each of the five selected clans. On the whole, 150 farmers were selected and this constituted the study population.

**Inclusion/Exclusion criteria:** A farmer must possess a farm land either as a private property or on rent and must have been farming for the past five years. He or she must have inhabited in the study area for a period of not less than 5 years. Any farmer who does not meet these conditions is excluded.

**Ethical consideration:** The principle of the declaration on the right of the subject was employed for this study after approval by the Local Government Council. Before enrolment for the study, the participants were informed on the significance of the study and their consents were sought for and obtained.

**Data collection and analysis:** The survey involves the use of both oral interview and questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises four sections: socio-demographic, source of information, information needs, and factors limiting access to information. It was designed and used as instrument for data collection after pre-test. Esan speaking interpreters and translators were employed in the administration of the questionnaires.

During the oral interview (face to face chat), the respondent is cleared to be included in the study and given a questionnaire. A research assistant, who is Esan by tribe, and speaks the language, is then designated to assist the respondents to complete the questionnaire. At the end of the data collection (3 weeks), only data from 132 respondents (88%) out of the 150 selected respondents completed the questionnaires which were documented for data analysis.

**Statistical analysis:** Data were analysed using SPSS package (Version 17). The simple descriptive statistics were used for the analysis and presented in suitable tables and figures.

## RESULTS

Table 1 is a representation of the demographic characteristics of the sampled population. Out of the 150 farmers sampled, 132 farmers completed the questionnaires given a response rate of 88.0%. There were 103 (78.03%) males and 29 (21.97%) females distributed within the age groups of 35 to 39 years (23.5%), 50 to 69 years (58.3%) and 70 years and above (18.2%).

In terms of the highest educational level attained, the sampled farmers had mainly primary education (50.8%), followed by tertiary education (22.7%) and non-formal education (16.7%). While 45.5% reported that their major occupation was farming, others stated that in addition to farming, they were self employed (31.1%) or civil servants (23.5%). Interestingly, they all have children but those with 4 to 6 children formed the majority (66.7%). However, only 5.3% of them claimed to be single while others were currently married (72.0%), divorced (10.6%), widowed (9.8%) and widower (2.3%) (See table 1).

Generally, all the farmers were unanimous on the need for information as tables 2, 3 and 4 shows tabular representations of the distribution of farmer's

source of information, need for information, and limiting factors to information respectively. Although this study served as a source of information on agriculture for 12.9% of farmers, others claimed to have had such information from fellow farmers (37.1%), mass media (23.5%), public enlightenment campaigns (18.2%) and community development services (8.3%).

Specifically, 98.5% and 81.1% of farmers claimed they needed information on areas of fertilizers and pesticides respectively in order to improve farm production. However, 92.4%, 76.5% and 73.5% need information on the crop to plant, how to plant and who to sell to respectively. In addition, 98.5% reported they required information concerning fund raising and government assistance (see table 2).

In terms of health, only 52.3% of the sampled farmers reported the need for health information. This was distributed into family planning (9.8%), wife and children health (34.1%), contraceptive (16.7%), and hygiene (14.4%). In addition, 8.3%, 9.1%, 6.8% and 19.7% reported they require information concerning education, politics, community development and economic respectively (see table 3).

**Section 1: Table of socio demographic characteristic**

Demographic characteristic	Variables	Frequency (%) N= 132
<b>Age (years)</b>	35 – 49 years	31 (23.5%)
	50 – 69 years	77 (58.3%)
	70 and above	24 (18.2%)
<b>Sex</b>	Male	101 (76.5%)
	Female	31 (23.5%)
<b>Educational level</b>	0 <sup>0</sup>	22 (16.7%)
	1 <sup>0</sup>	67 (50.8%)
	2 <sup>0</sup>	13 (9.8%)
	3 <sup>0</sup>	30 (22.7%)
<b>Major occupation</b>	Self employed	41 (31.1%)
	Civil servants	31 (23.5%)
	Farmer	60 (45.5%)
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	95 (72.0%)
	Single	7 (5.3%)
	Divorce	14 (10.6%)
	Widow	13 (9.8%)
	Widower	3 (2.3%)
<b>Family size (number of living children)</b>	1 – 3	14 (10.6%)
	4 – 6	88 (66.7%)
	7 and above	30 (22.7%)

Key: 0<sup>0</sup> = No formal education, 1<sup>0</sup> = Primary education, 2<sup>0</sup> = Secondary education, 3<sup>0</sup> = tertiary education.

On factors limiting farmers in the sampled areas, all the farmers stated that the lack of adequate and efficient information delivery mechanism was the major limiting factor. Others included poor government management/ policies (90.2%), unavailability of the information (80.1%), inability to

access formal channels of information (81.1%), ignorance/ inexperience/ unawareness of the information (37.1%) and attitude of extensive workers toward effective information services (20.5%).

**Section 2: Table for source of information**

Source of information	Variables	Frequency (%) N=132
<b>What is your first source of information concerning farmer's information?</b>	This study	17 (12.9%)
	Mass media	31 (23.5%)
	Fellow farmers	49 (37.1%)
	During school days	24 (18.2)
	Community development services	11 (8.3)

**Section 3: Table for information needs**

Areas of information need	Variables	Frequency (%) N=132
<b>Agriculture (N=132; 100.0%)</b>	Fertilizer	130 (98.5%)
	Pesticides	107 (81.1%)
	Crops to plant	122 (92.4%)
	How to plant	101 (76.5%)
	Where/how to sell	97 (73.5%)
	Fund/Govt assistance	130 (98.5%)
<b>Health (N=69; 52.3%)</b>	Family planning	13 (9.8%)
	Hygiene	19 (14.4%)
	Contraceptives	22 (16.7%)
	Wife/Children's health	45 (34.1%)
<b>Others</b>	Education	11 (8.3%)
	Political	12 (9.1%)
	Economic	9 (6.8%)
	Community development	26 (19.1%)

**Section 4: Factors limiting access to information**

What are the factors that affect your access to information	Frequency (%) N=132
Unavailability of the information	111 (84.1%)
Inability to access formal channels for information	107 (81.1%)
Lack of adequate and efficient information delivery mechanism	132 (100.0)
Ignorance /inexperience and unawareness of respondent	49 (37.1%)
Attitude of extensive workers toward effective information services	27 (20.5%)
Poor government management/ policies	119 (90.2)

**DISCUSSION**

The observation on the demographic characteristics of the farmers under study, indicates that farmers in the study area were predominantly males, the aged, and/or with a lower educational status. Judging therefore, by the age distributions in the present

study, it can be avowed that the active young men and women (less than 30 years), who should have formed the bulk of the work force, may have deserted the rural communities and moved to the cities in search of government employments or opportunities; perhaps, due to unavoidable circumstances (Adebayo, 1999). Moreover, locating the state owned University

in the area undoubtedly may have giving the youth, reasons to abandoned agriculture for higher education and employment opportunities. Consequently, agricultural productivity in the study area is now in the hands of the aged men/women, the illiterate, and very few energetic young men.

As regards sex, the observations contradicts the assertions made by Minyua (2000), that female farmers constitutes 70% of the agricultural workforce in Delta state, but agrees with the findings of Obidike (2011) that majority of the Nsukka rural farmers' are males. This is not surprising as farming activity is more or less a tedious work that requires enormous strength and energy. In fact, the reports by Nweke (1980) and King (1992), reveals that men perform more difficult farming operations like land preparation -clearing bushes, and digging mounds and ridges), while women and children perform lighter operations, like planting, fertilizer application, weeding etc.

Recognizing agriculture and rural development as invaluable triggers for rapid socio-economic changes, it is therefore appropriate to state that information dissemination remains an essential catalyst. However, it is sad to note that most African countries have not devoted adequate attention to providing their citizens with access to information especially in the rural areas, where 70-80% of the population reside (Youcleowei et al., 1996). According to the farmers under study, some of them in the past unlike now, have benefited from a wide range of agricultural information sources, which unfortunately, query our culture of lack of sustainability as well the generalized but progressive system failures.

In addition, the findings on farmers' health-information needs, evidently indicates that there exist an information lacuna in the rural areas as earlier identified by Momodu (2002) and Munyua, (2000b). This observation on the general quest for information is in accordance with that of Unomah (1998) who posits that rural people need information on how to apply fertilizers on their farms, preserve their harvested crops, and market their farm products.

Also, the result of this study as presented in Table 4 highlights a number of factors hindering the farmers from accessing agricultural information. These factors affirms the opinion of Ozowa (1995) who reported that farmers in Nigeria seldom feel the impact of agricultural innovation either because they have no access to such vital information, or because it is poorly disseminated. In highlighting the hindrances facing farmers, Aina (2007) included

inadequate financial power, illiteracy, lack of basic infrastructure (such as telephone, electricity, good road network, and pipe-borne water), few numbers of extension workers, and poor radio and television reception signals.

Indeed, the findings of this study justify the limiting factors raised by Aina (2007), especially the comment by 20.5% of farmers, that they were not impressed by the attitude of some extension workers. Moreover, Obidike (2011) had previously reported that some of the extension workers demand money as inducements before they can give out vital agricultural information. Of course, such attitude only worsens the plight of farmers as they struggle to achieve optimal farm yield.

On the other hand, one would expect that with the good nature of soil in Nigeria, the country's economy should have been better than what it is today. Unfortunately, the country is still grappling with lack of basic amenities especially in the rural areas; prompting recurrent mass exodus of youths from the rural to urban areas. According to the free Encyclopedia (Wikipedia, 2010), the acronym "vision 20/20/20" captures Nigeria government's drive to make the country, one of the 20 largest economies in the world by the year 2020. To fast track this vision through economic revival, sustenance, and growth, a 7-point Agenda emerged with focus on power and energy, food security and agriculture, wealth creation and employment, mass transportation, land reforms, security, and qualitative/functional education (Aluko, 2007). Amongst all, Nwanze (2010) identified agriculture and nutrition as vital appendages of food security and the influence of both, on the three 'monstrous wedges' in the wheel of societal emancipation; that is, poverty, development, and wealth creation.

From the foregoing therefore, it is obvious that there is an urgent need to enhance information access to farmers. Most importantly, achieving vision 2020 with the 7- point agenda requires the establishment of rural libraries to bridge information gaps. In addition, resident librarians should be commissioned for libraries in rural areas by providing the necessary incentives.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I wish to acknowledge every member of my family for their support all these years; mostly my beloved mother of blessed memory who was always on her knees praying for her children. Also, the assistance

offered by the research assistants is greatly acknowledged.

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#### **AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION**

Momodu O.M. was involved in the literatures searched, preparation and presentation of this article.