

Factors Militating against Information Seeking Behaviour of Benue Farmers for Sustainable Agricultural Development

Lughlugh, Joseph

University Library and Information Services Benue State University, Makurdi-Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The study investigated factors militating against Information Seeking behaviour of Benue farmers for sustainable agricultural development. Two purposes with corresponding research questions guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised of 4200 registered farmers with Benue State Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (BNARDA). The sample size for the study was 365 farmers who were selected using multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument employed for data collection was a self-developed questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Factors Militating against Information Seeking Behaviour of Benue Farmers" (QFMAISBBF) which was validated by three experts. The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach Alpha method and a reliability coefficient of 0.72 was obtained which showed that the instrument was highly reliable. Data collected for the study were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that there are several constraints facing farmers in search of agricultural information for Sustainable Agriculture Development in Benue State. It also revealed several strategies for surmounting these challenges face by farmers among others to include provision of agricultural education, radio and television broadcast in local dialect. Recommendations were made that there should be provision of Radio / Television broadcast in local dialect in order to enhance accurate and timely dissemination of needed information to the farmers at the grass roots

Keywords: Information need, information seeking behavior, Benue farmers, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays a critical role in providing food and raw materials for human use which contributes immensely to the economy of Nigeria; despite the growth of industries, oil and commerce, it had continued to be the principal economic activity carried out by most Nigerians. According to the recent report of the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, in 2016 agriculture Contributed (26 %) to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) followed by industries (20 %) [1]. The contribution of Agriculture to the overall GDP in real term was 25.49 % in the 4th quarter of 2016, which in contrast to the economy as a whole for full year 2016 grew by 4.11 % [1]. These analogies suggest that agriculture occupies a very prominent position in the growth and development of Nigerian economy.

Agricultural practices such as farming of crops and rearing of animals leads to production of food, raw materials, and serve various economic purposes which contribute to national growth and development. [2] suggested that in order to enhance agricultural development, new commodities and new methods of production must be developed. Progress in Agriculture is clearly linked to several key and often interrelated factors such as research, extension; farm inputs, rural credit facility; price policy and marketing [3] as well as agricultural information provision for modern scientific ways of farming for farmer's accessibility. The provision of these services should lead to self-sufficiency in food and economic development. Agricultural development promotes the proper conditions for farming so that planting, harvesting and processing of crops can be done effectively, which ultimately can reduce poverty and save lives.

Sustainable agricultural development According to [4] is agricultural development that contributes to improving resource efficiency, strengthening resilience and securing social equity/responsibility of agriculture and food systems in order to ensure food security and nutrition for all, now and in the future. Sustainable Agricultural development cannot occur without modern knowledge, skills and technologies. This modern ways of agricultural practices are only possible with adequate information about improved farming practices, this is in line with [5] who opined that for consistent growth in agricultural production, it is essential to equip rural farmers with need-based, accurate, reliable, and timely information. The dream of advancement in agricultural production cannot come true until timely access to the information required by the farmers is assured.

Information is a vital resource in human activities and also in agriculture. The need and use of information has contributed immensely to the growth and development of the world in all spheres. Research results are frequently communicated to the end-users through various channels for easy accessibility and various need-based uses by the farmers. Agricultural information, according to [6] is all published knowledge in all aspects of agriculture, and that the quality of such information depends on three attributes which are accuracy, timeliness and relevance. Therefore, consideration of farmers' information seeking is very vital in the provision of need-based and relevant information [7]. Agricultural information is found in agricultural research institutes libraries as well as academic libraries where agriculture is also studies. These libraries support agricultural research by enhancing access to information through effective management of its resources and provision of wide range of information services to researchers, scientists and policy maker in agriculture sector as well as farmers [8].

It is very difficult, if not impossible to identify common information seeking behaviour for all people most especially in the developing regions of the world [3]. This implies that Information acquisition depends on needs of individuals involved in special activities such as rural farming and home management. However, it is worrisome the behavior of farmers in seeking this information. Information seeking plays a key role in farmers' efforts to cope with the day to day concerns associated with farming activities.

Generally, farmers have differences in getting important information in timely and appropriate format such as current market price, news on modern methods of pests' control. Majority of Nigerian agricultural farmers live in rural areas. Most information disseminated especially to farmers is in written form, which makes it difficult to access by those with low or no literacy skills especially to those in rural communities. Moreover, rural communities and organizations have difficulties in sharing information and experience among themselves beyond face to face contact. Farmers in rural areas are not an exception. For rural farmers, it is expected that agriculture extension workers will serve as information link between researchers and farmers for information provision.

Factors Militating against Information Seeking Behaviour of Benue Farmers for Sustainable Agricultural Development

However, according to [9] agricultural extension agents in Nigeria have little access to information about the population they are to serve and little or no access to current information from research findings, while researchers have poor access to up-to date information from the extension agents. It is based on this fact that, this paper intends to find out factors militating against information seeking behaviour of Benue farmers for sustainable agricultural development. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Find out the constraints faced by farmers as they go about seeking for their agricultural information needs.
2. Suggest strategies for surmounting the challenges faced by farmers as they go about seeking for their agricultural information needs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the constraints faced by Benue farmers as they go about seeking for their agricultural information need?
2. What are the strategies for surmounting the challenges faced by Benue farmers as they go about seeking for their agricultural information needs?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study comprised of 4200 registered farmers with Benue state Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (BNARDA). The sample size for the study was 365 farmers who were selected using multi-stage sampling procedure where different sampling techniques were employed to arrive at the final sample. The instrument employed for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled ‘Questionnaire on Information Need and Information Seeking Behaviour of Farmers in Benue State’ (QINISBFBS) which was validated by three experts. The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach Alpha method and a reliability coefficient of 0.72 was obtained which showed that the instrument was highly reliable. Data collected for the study was analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions raised.

RESULTS

The results are presented and analyzed based on the research questions raised to guide the study.

Research Question One

What are the constraints faced by Benue farmers as they go about seeking for their agricultural information need?

The answer to this research question is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Score of Respondents on Constraints faced by Benue Farmers in search of Agricultural Information in Benue State

S/N	Constraints faced by Benue farmers	Mean	SD	Decision
1	High rate of illiteracy	2.63	1.04	
2	Absence of radio and television broadcast in local dialect	2.57	.95	

3	Cultural dependence	3.03	.91	
4	Lack of professional orientation	3.08	.08	
5	Lack of motivation	3.19	.69	
6	inadequate extension worker	3.22	.64	
7	Inadequate funds	3.19	.76	
8	Lack of good access roads	3.17	.64	
9	Inadequate agricultural education programs	3.16	.54	
10	Inadequate libraries /information centers	3.24	.68	
	Grand Mean	3.04	0.69	Agree

Table 1 revealed that all the 10 items had mean ratings range from 2.57-3.24 with a standard deviation (SD) from 0.08-1.04. A grand mean of 3.04 and standard deviation of 0.69 is an indication that the items in table 1 represents the constraints faced by Benue farmers as they go about seeking for agricultural information in the study area.

Research Question Two

What are the strategies for surmounting the challenges faced by Benue farmers as they go about seeking for their agricultural information needs?

The answer to this research question is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Score of Respondents on Strategies for Surmounting the Challenges faced by Benue Famers as they go about Seeking for their Agricultural Information Needs in Benue State

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Provision of agricultural education programs	3.20	.68	
2	Radio / Television broadcast in local dialect	2.81	.86	
3	Cultural dependence	3.30	.67	
4	Farmers should be given professional orientation	3.13	.65	
5	Provision of incentive	3.35	.63	
6	Employment of extension Agents	3.38	.57	
7	Provision of funds	3.33	.60	
8	Provision of good access road	3.28	.54	
9	Provide Agricultural education program	3.26	.63	
10	Well-equipped libraries/information centers should be made available	3.19	.76	
	Grand Mean	3.47	.53	Agree

Table 2 revealed that all the strategies suggested were all agreed by the farmers with a grand mean of 3.47 and standard deviation of 0.53.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study in Table 1 revealed some of the constraints faced by farmers in search of agricultural information in Benue State to include; high rate of illiteracy, absence of radio and television broadcast in local dialect, lack of good access roads, inadequate funds and inadequate extension worker. This finding is in agreement with [10] who maintained that the problems encountered by farmers seemed to have been related mainly to lack of cooperation from fellow farmers, high transport costs, or lack of understanding the language in which information was disseminated. Other problems included high cost of animal drugs, concealing of information by some veterinary staff, or lack of knowledge about existing information. The finding is so because, from the result which revealed the constraints faced by farmers, they all agree with the items that indicate their problem when searching for agricultural information for sustainable agricultural development.

Furthermore, the findings of the study in Table 2 revealed some strategies for surmounting the challenges faced by farmers as they go about seeking for their agricultural information needs to include; provision of agricultural education programs, Radio / Television broadcast in local dialect, provision of funds and well-equipped libraries/information centers should be made available. This finding was in line with [10] who also reviewed some suggestions to overcome challenges faced by farmers to include; if farmers formed groups and elected a representative, it would improve their access to agricultural information, exchanging visits with other farmer groups and having an office for extension workers in the community, sensitizing farmers through media like the radio, television and printing documents written in local languages. The result is so because the respondents agreed with the options that surmount their problems when they go about search of their agricultural information.

CONCLUSIONS

It could be concluded based on the finding of the study that Benue farmers are faced with different factors militating against their search for agricultural information needs which leads to sustainable agricultural development in Benue State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Well-equipped libraries/information centers should be made available and accessible to farmers.
2. There should be provision of Radio / Television broadcast in local dialect in order to enhance accurate and timely dissemination of needed information to the farmers at the grass roots.

REFERENCES

- [1] National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2017). Retrieved from (<http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/518>) on October 28, 2017.
- [2] W. Mtega, and R. Benard, "The state of rural information and communication services in Tanzania: a meta-analysis", *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Research*, vol. 3, issue 2, pp.64 – 73, 2013.
- [3] I.I. Ekoja, "Personal variables affecting the adoption of Agricultural Innovations by Nigeria Farmers," *Africa Journal of Agricultural extension*, vol.2, pp. 9-17. 2010.

[4] High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE, 2016). Sustainable agricultural development for food security and nutrition: what roles for livestock. A Report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1071> on 27/10/2017

[5] A. N. Muhammad, M.A. Anwar, and B. Surraya, "Information seeking by Pakistani farmers: A review of published research". Pakistan Journal of Library & Information Science, vol.13, issue 2, 2012.

[6] G.N. Ofuoku, "Information Utilization among Rural Fish Farmers in central, Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria". In H. Emmanuel, "Information needs and information seeking behaviour of rural Farmers in okpokwu local government area of Benue state of Nigeria". Unpublished.

[7] M. A. Anwar, "Research on information seeking and use: An assessment", Pakistan Journal of Library and Information Science, vol.8, pp. 15–32. (2007).

[8] V. Rhoe, V. Oboh, and P. Shelton, "The Role of Libraries in Supporting Agricultural Policy Research- Evidence from Selected University and Research Institute Libraries in Nigeria". Nigeria Strategy Support Program (NSSP). Paper No 0014. Retrieved from <http://iasir.net/AIJRHASSpapers/AIJRHASS14-523.pdf> on October 31, 2017.

[9] P. U. Otolu, "Challenges of Information Dissemination to Rural Communities: A Case of Niger-Delta Communities, Nigeria", Journal of Emerging Trends in Computing and Information Sciences. Vol.6, issue 7, pp. 350-354. (2015).

[10] H.M. Byamugisha, R. Ikoja-Odongo, G.W. Nasinyama, and S. Lwasa, "Information Seeking and Use among Urban Farmers in Kampala District, Uganda". World Conference on Agricultural Information and IT. Pp. 571-582.