

November 2012

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Ibrahim, Yusuf El-Ladan and Sani, Lawal Iro, "The Role of Information Dissemination in Attaining Food Security in Katsina State, Nigeria" (2012). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 826.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/826>

The Role of Information Dissemination in Attaining Food Security in Katsina State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper explores the values and usefulness of information dissemination as it affects food security in Nigeria, particularly in Katsina state. Information has been and would continue to play a vital role in any national development and growth. Agricultural information provision and dissemination is a must for every responsible government because it is only when farmer were informed, that they will be able to take a rational decision and produce enough to feed the state and the nation in general, consequently meeting the goal set by the MDG. Food security has been identified as the inability of a nation to feed itself year round. This paper identified some of the problems hindering food security in Nigeria, with reference to Katsina State. They include lack of proper and timely information to the farming populace, lack of infrastructural facilities, poor capital base, inadequate storage and processing facilities among others. The paper proffers some inputs as to how the problems can be tackled. Among them, provision of effective and efficient linkage with research institutes, improved storage management and increased agricultural budgetary allocations.

Introduction

Nigeria is the tenth largest country and the fourth largest economy in Africa, with a wide range of favorable climate, vegetation and soil conditions coupled with potentials for profitable agricultural production. It is blessed with a vibrant estimated population of 170 million people, abundant mineral resources, forest reserves and water resources. It has diversity of species of plants and animals useful for internal consumption and for export (Makama, 2007 and Olaye, 2010). However, in spite of all these natural blessings the dreams of Nigerian governments, just like those of governments of other developing countries are struggling to meet-up with the following challenges affecting the generality of the populace based on the Millennium Development Goals of 2010:

- Provide enough access to safe drinking water to 1.3 billion people.
- Provide enough food to about 1.8 billion people.
- Provide enough health care facilities to 1.5 billion people.
- Provide education/literacy services to over 800 million children and adults.
- Provide favorable atmosphere to 1.2 billion people living in absolute poverty and an opportunity of livelihood activities to sustain themselves.

Nigeria and other developing countries are struggling to do away with the menaces of poverty, malnutrition, diseases and lack of basic education which create a vicious circle in which nearly 1 billion people are trapped. The country, and other poor nations of the world, is called poor countries because it is lacking basic essential services and measure low achievements in the indices of development including food security.

A household, country or region is said to be food secured if “it has year-round access to the quality and quantity of foods its members need to live active and healthy lives.” Thus, it is rather unfortunate that these countries, with all their potentials are under the deadly threat of food insecurity. Poverty remains predominantly a rural phenomenon in Nigeria and other under-developed nations.

Focus on Food Security in Katsina State

Katsina State was created on 23rd September, 1987 out of the former Kaduna State. It is bordered to the South by Kaduna State, to the North by Niger Republic, to the West by Zamfara State and to the East by Jigawa and Kano States. It lies between Latitude 11^o 07' 49" to 13^o 22' 57"N and Longitude between 06^o 52' 03" and 09^o 02' 40"E and covers an area of about 23,983 square kilometers with total population of about 5, 8015 million based on the 2006 census figures (Makama, 2007). Katsina, an agrarian state with more than 800,000 farming families and cultivating more than 1.5 million hectares of farmlands is among the largest producers of cotton and maize in the country. Other major crops grown in the state include beans, guinea corn, millet, groundnut, sugarcane and vegetables. Potentials for the development of exportable agricultural products in which the state has comparative advantage include value addition in products like cotton, hides and skin, gum Arabic, sesame seeds and neem seeds. Government supports to agricultural sector include the provision of subsidized farm inputs, fertilizer, improved seeds, pesticides, extension services as well as micro-credits.

The state has three large dams at Zobe, Jibia and Sabke with a combine water capacity of 350,000,000m³ and a combine irrigable land of 15,450ha. In addition, the state government has developed 24 small dams with a combine water capacity of 45,000 metric tons of assorted produce and this is beside a number of seasonal streams that have about 300 reservoirs, dikes and dams with a water surface of 21,000 ha and nearly 600 road-side burrows pits with a surface area of 250 ha that are adequate for fishing. For livestock sub-sector, the state currently has developed an effective veterinary services providing preventive and curative health care to an estimated population of 2 million cattle, 2.2 million sheep, 4.3 million goats, 5000 camels and about 6 million poultry (SRBDA, 2006; KSDS, 2006 and Amina,2011).

However, in spite of all these, the state is far from being “food secured,” largely because of the attitude of its people, government’s in ability to provide the necessary basics and socio-cultural trends, poor capital, poor system of farming, inadequate processing and storage facilities and lack of adequate dissemination of information among others.

Information Dissemination and Food Security

Information is an indispensable factor for promoting the development of any society. The so-called developed nations are where they are today, by virtue of information generation and dissemination to their people. Stone-cash, (1981) defined information as a symbol (data, text, images, voice etc) that conveys meaning to the intended audience. It is the raw material for making decisions, for creating knowledge and fuelling the modern organization. Information is the key to innovations and self-sustaining development, it is also a vehicle that conveys and promotes all developmental efforts at all levels of human endeavor, be it economic, social, political, environmental, religious etc.

Information dissemination has been described as a need comparable with other basic human needs. Free flow of information is a right of the people which enable them to participate effectively in the process of economic, social and political activities in the society and enhance education, knowledge and learning (Echezona, 2007). The current information overload in the world, (availability of information in different varieties, formats and sources) require people to validate and assess information as well as ascertain its reliability. There are thousands of information packages, example, journals, magazines and newspapers. The electronic media also produces vast volumes of information which can be disseminated and retrieved by people in a variety of medium such as Radio, Television, Internet, CDs, Projectors, and Podcasts.

Quality of information matters in disseminating it to the community and to policy makers. The parameters of quality information include relevance, accuracy, sufficiency, and timeliness. Lack of current, accurate, sufficient, relevant and timely information could hinder its reliability and acceptance (William and Trywell, 2010). Thus, in order to disseminate quality information for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of food sufficiency in Nigeria and Katsina State in particular, the target population needs to be identified via environmental scanning. In this case, the population that would benefits immensely is the farmers, government policy makers and implementers. Farmers need to have access to quality information for their productivity potentials to be realized and if food security and self sufficiency are to be achieved.

Williams and Trywell (2010) quoting Adomi *et al*, (2003) recognized that, farmers need to have access to quality agricultural information in order to improve their production. Therefore, access to and utilization of appropriate information services by all members of the society is a duty of all tiers of government. Irivweiri (2007) opined that rural people, who are mainly illiterates, require access to appropriate and relevant information for them to be able to make decisions and participate fully in the national developmental processes, including those of agricultural self-sufficiency and food security. In order to achieve food security, farmers must be provided with current, accurate, sufficient, relevant and timely information in a coherent form.

Some of the ways by which governments can intensify information dissemination to the farming populace could be through:

Intensive Radio and Television Programmes: Radio, being very cheap can be used by governments to inform people about its programmes and new findings which affect agriculture. Programmes such as *Kartau Sarkin-noma* (The Tiller, King of farmers), *Bawan Damina Tajirin Rani* (Servant of rainy season, the rich man of the dry season) have been used to inform farmers on new agricultural innovations. Similarly, community television viewing centers can go a long way in sensitizing and increasing farmers' awareness about modern and more profitable ways of production.

Posters, Handbills and Pamphlets: These, especially where they carry pictures together with the intended message and in the appropriate language, can be used by governments to enlighten farmers. For the fact that most of the rural populace can neither read, write nor understand English (or other foreign languages), but can read Arabic and *Ajami* (Arabic Vernacular), it is hereby suggested that, posters and handbills be developed in that form in order to inform farmers about new farming techniques. This will no doubt increase their production.

Solutions for Attaining Food Security

Apart for the provision of adequate, timely and relevant information towards attaining food security in Katsina state, there are other measures which need urgent attention from the stakeholders in the state and at the Federal level. Some of these include among others:

- **Establishment of effective and efficient linkage with modern agricultural research stations.** The establishment, mobilization and re-orientation of appropriate independent agricultural research stations or in liaison with our tertiary educational institutions with their pool of agricultural experts will go a long way in turning the current situation round.
- **Reinforcing and reinvigorating the current agricultural extension services.** This may come through additional staffing, staff motivation, training and re-training as well as the provision of incentives and other appropriate modern basic tools. No agricultural enterprise succeeds anywhere in the world without the advice of a trained extension specialist.

- **Intensification of production through the establishment of small-scale irrigation schemes.** Because of their low investment cost, ease of maintenance, end user being able to have more control of the water they need, the possibility of remote areas gaining access to controlled waters, little requirements in terms of skills or management capabilities and potentially less negative environmental impacts, this is the surest option of increasing the supply of farm produce on a sustainable scale and at affordable cost.
- **Improved storage management.** Increased food production will have impact on food prices only if there are efficient storage facilities and marketing systems, including processing techniques especially in rural areas where it is produced, otherwise surpluses become waste.
- **Attention to women farmers.** Experience has shown that everywhere in the world, support the stand that, the proportion of women farmers is substantial and therefore any major constraints facing them faces the whole population and therefore need to be addressed.
- **Increased budgetary allocation to agriculture.** Agriculture is often referred to as a priority sector, but current investments by governments and the organized private sector in the state does not justify this assertion. Thus, justifiable budgetary provisions for the sector must be ensured in order for the state to boost its agricultural production.
- **Improved rural infrastructure.** There is need to open-up rural areas and rehabilitate dilapidated roads. This is important because it has direct impact on employment, agricultural enterprises and rural welfare and rural areas are synonymous to agricultural production areas.
- **Organic fertilizer development.** Because of the associated costs and insufficiency of chemical fertilizers, its attendant consequences on the soil and the abundant resources for the development of organic fertilizer, the adoption of this option need to be exploited.
- **Opening up more lands for farming.** The increasing threats of food shortage, prevailing unemployment and the rapid multiplication in the population of the citizenry call for the expansion of agricultural lands by the state through the clearing of vast lands and their allocation to interested productive young adult for agricultural purposes as this might be the best alternative to agricultural intensification because of the corresponding cost and skills requirements.
- **Encouraging livestock production (including poultry production, aquaculture and apiculture).** These systems are not as demanding as crop production in terms of requirements. For example, land or labor and their net returns in terms of finance and final products are high.

Conclusion

The current state of insecurity in the state and the country at large, poverty status of majority of the populace and the prevalence of corruption at all levels are not un-connected with the food insecurity situation nationwide. Food security we all know is a major concern in developing countries and it requires urgent attention and collaborative efforts from all stakeholders. Thus, the only way we can possibly attain peace, security, stability as well as good governance is by ensuring food security to the citizenry and this must be actualized immediately through the financing of modern agricultural researches and the adoption of their findings, improve rural infrastructures, improved processing and storage management, dissemination of relevant and timely information as well as intensification of production through small scale irrigation schemes and organic fertilizer provision and usage.

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